

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR FEDERAL PROPERTIES

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED JUN 15 1977

DATE ENTERED MAY 23 1978

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC Big Sable Light Station

AND/OR COMMON Au Sable Light Station (preferred)

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Grand Marais

NOT FOR PUBLICATION  
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

STATE

Michigan

VICINITY OF

CODE

26

COUNTY

Alger

CODE

003

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

**4 AGENCY**

REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS: (If applicable)  
National Park Service, Midwest Regional Office

STREET & NUMBER

1709 Jackson Street

CITY, TOWN

Omaha

VICINITY OF

STATE

Nebraska

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Alger County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Munising

STATE

Michigan 49862

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore

DATE

August 1968

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Park Headquarters

CITY, TOWN

Munising

STATE

Michigan 49862

## 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> _EXCELLENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> _DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> _UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> _ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> _GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> _RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> _ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> _MOVED    DATE_____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> _FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> _UNEXPOSED		

### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Construction of the Au Sable Light Station started in July 1873, by the Federal Lighthouse Service on 326 acres of land purchased in the previous year. It was finished by August 1874. There are five significant buildings: a light tower, two dwellings, a fog signal house, and a boat house. There are also four accessory buildings that constitute the total complex. All these buildings were built between 1873 and 1909. The light tower, 87 feet above the ground level and 107 feet above Lake Superior, is the focal point of the Light Station complex.

The Au Sable Light Station Complex is located on the southern shore of Lake Superior, twelve miles west of Grand Marais in Michigan's Upper peninsula. The buildings are scattered in an open area with the background of Lake Superior to the north and dense trees in the other three directions. There is evidence of erosion along the shore.

The tower (HS-10) built in 1873 is a truncated cone, has a cut stone base three feet, four inches above grade and has sills and lintels of cut stone. According to a Department of Commerce and Labor report of June 7, 1909, the rubble masonry goes to bedrock seventy-three feet down to support the brick tower. The base of the tower has a diameter of sixteen feet, six inches and tapers to twelve feet eight inches at the top. The tower was painted white with a black lantern. The original lantern in the tower was a third order, upper and lower catadioptrics, polygonal, with a fixed Fresnel lens. The lens was held in place by a cast iron pedestal. The fixed lens shone out as a steady stream of light in an arc of 270 degrees. Glass panels blacked out the remaining 90 degrees of the arc. The lamp in the lantern was first ignited on August 19, 1874, and shone seventeen and three-quarters miles out into Lake Superior.

A passageway to the east side of the tower leads to a two-dwelling building (HS-11). Originally this dwelling was a single dwelling. But in 1909 the dwelling was converted to a double dwelling by a change in partition and a porch across the east elevation. The two and a half story dwelling, built in 1873 is of red brick with stone sills and lintels. The original roofing material is unknown. Presently it is a metal shingle roof.

Fifty feet south of the dwelling and tower is the brick oil house (HS-13), also built in 1873. It has a concrete floor, hip roof, and a capacity to store 360 gallons of oil. A privy (HS-15) with a gabled roof, also built in 1873, is five feet northeast of the oil house. A cylindrical metal building (HS-12) with a metal cone type roof is west of the privy and was used for flammable material storage.

The keeper's dwelling (HS-9), built in 1909, is approximately fifty feet west of the tower. It is constructed of red brick, has a metal-slate roof, and stone sills and lintels. The house has a full basement and

(continued)

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CONTINUATION SHEET 1 ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 1

seven rooms with a room laid out for a bathroom. Since the bathroom has no fixtures, a privy (HS-14) was built and used, located fifty feet south of the dwelling. This privy is red brick and has a metal hipped roof.

The fog signal building (HS-16), built in 1897, is 800 feet east of the two-dwelling building. This red brick building has various fenestration sizes and a hip metal shingle roof with a chimney. The original steam driven apparatus was replaced by diesel mechanism in 1928. A partially exposed cistern (HS-68) once used for the water runoff from the steam fog signal is located east of the fog signal building. It is exposed because of erosion and further aggravated by the absence of a masonry seawall which was built in 1906 and was subsequently destroyed by wave action. The fog signal building is now vacant. The apparatus was removed by the Coast Guard in 1958.

The boat house (HS-17) is fifty feet east of the fog signal building. It is a wood framed structure with vertical wood siding and a gabled roof with wood shingles. The front doors are missing and vegetation has grown up around the building. The exact date of construction is unknown, but it was mentioned in a report of 1910 done by the Department of Commerce and Labor, Lighthouse Establishment. The dock and ramp that were once part of the boat house functions are no longer existing because of the erosion.

The Au Sable Light Station was abandoned in 1958 by the U.S. Coast Guard. At that time an automatic bulb changer was placed on the outside of the tower and a bell buoy off shore near the shoal areas. The United States Coast Guard gave up all but thirty square feet of the land to the Department of the Interior, National Park Service, to be part of the Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore. The purpose for the thirty square feet was to keep the tower structure as a navigational aid and is still owned by the Coast Guard.

List of Structures keyed to sketch map:

1. Keeper's Dwelling, 1909 (HS-9)
2. Light Tower and Two Dwelling Structure, 1873 (HS-10,11)
3. Fog Signal Building, 1897 (HS-16)
4. Boat House (HS-17)
5. Brick Privy, 1909 (HS-14)
6. Cylindrical Metal Flammable Storage Building (HS-12)
7. Brick Privy, 1873 (HS-15)
8. Brick Oil House, 1873 (HS-13)

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1874, 1958

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Light Station at Au Sable built in 1873, began its operations on August 19, 1874. Originally the Light Station was called the Big Sable Light Station, then on June 10, 1910, it was changed to Au Sable Light Station. It was built on the south shore of Lake Superior to assist in the safety of shipping. This was an important site for vessels that followed the shore of Lake Superior. An increase in the volume of shipping on the southern shore of Lake Superior led to the building of the Au Sable Light Station. It was built to help meet the demand for safe navigation.

The discoveries of copper and iron ore in Michigan's Upper Peninsula in the 1840s made it economically feasible to build locks from Lake Superior to Lake Huron. In 1855, the Soo Canal opened at Sault Ste. Marie. As the Upper Peninsula prospered, a demand for another lock was created. The Weitzel Lock was built and opened in 1881. At the same time the State of Michigan gave up its control of the locks to the United States government. Traffic through the locks increased dramatically because the locks were then tariff free. Sault Ste. Marie had a total of four locks to serve the shipping interests. In 1915, the materials shipped on Lake Superior were shipped at one tenth the cost of railroad shipping. Shipping increased tremendously every year and, at one time, twice the tonnage was being shipped through from Lake Superior to Lake Huron than through the Suez Canal.

Lumber, coal, grain, copper, and iron ore were the principle goods shipped. Up to 1915, Michigan was the major state in the production of copper, iron ore, and lumber. With the decline of the lumbering industry lumbermen started leaving the Upper Peninsula around 1910. In 1948, more tonnage was being shipped through the locks from Lake Superior to Lake Huron than through the Suez and Panama canals combined. This is because of Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan and Canada all were being served by the locks at Sault Ste. Marie. The majority of this shipping had to pass the Au Sable Light Station.

The Au Sable Light Station was built at the beginning of the shipping boom. The first big iron and steel freighters were built and used on Lake Superior in the 1880s and before that, schooners and steam boats were used extensively. The area between Munising and Grand Marais was

(continued)

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Department of Commerce and Labor 9th District, Light-House Establishment, "Description of Buildings, Premises, Equipment, Etc., of Au Sable Light-Station", unpublished report; June 7, 1909.

Moore, Charles, History of Michigan, The Lewis Publishing Co., Chicago; 1915. (continued)

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY five

UTM REFERENCES

A 

1	6	56	5	85	0	5	1	6	8	9	4	0
ZONE		EASTING				NORTHING						

B 

ZONE		EASTING				NORTHING						

C 

ZONE		EASTING				NORTHING						

D 

ZONE		EASTING				NORTHING						

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

David Koenig, researcher

ORGANIZATION

Department of Art

DATE

10/21/76

STREET & NUMBER

Michigan State University

TELEPHONE

(517) 353-9045

CITY OR TOWN

East Lansing

STATE

Michigan 48824

# 12 CERTIFICATION OF NOMINATION

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER RECOMMENDATION

YES  NO  NONE

*Deputy*   
 Deputy STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

In compliance with Executive Order 11593, I hereby nominate this property to the National Register, certifying that the State Historic Preservation Officer has been allowed 90 days in which to present the nomination to the State Review Board and to evaluate its significance. The evaluated level of significance is National  State  Local

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE 

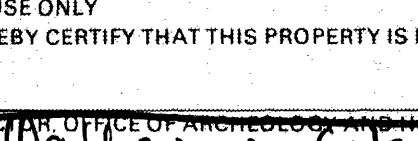
TITLE E.O. 11593 DOT FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE

DATE March 3, 1978

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

ATTEST:

  
 Katherine Cole  
 KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

5-23-78

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

5-5-78

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CONTINUATION SHEET 2                      ITEM NUMBER 8                      PAGE 1

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known as the "Graveyard Coast" because of the number of vessels that were stranded or sank there. The ships followed the southern lakeshore of Lake Superior and the steamer track was two and a quarter miles off the Light Station.

The Au Sable Light Station was built under great hardship in a wilderness area. As recently as 1905, the lighthouse could be reached only by boat or by wagon road to within three miles of the station and then by foot trail. The area was surrounded by a cedar swamp and no gardening was possible because of the sandy soil. It is remarkable that such substantial structures were built in a wilderness area and manned year round. The Light Station's quality of construction is quite remarkable considering the area and the time it was built. The complex is an excellent example of 19th century lighthouse architecture.

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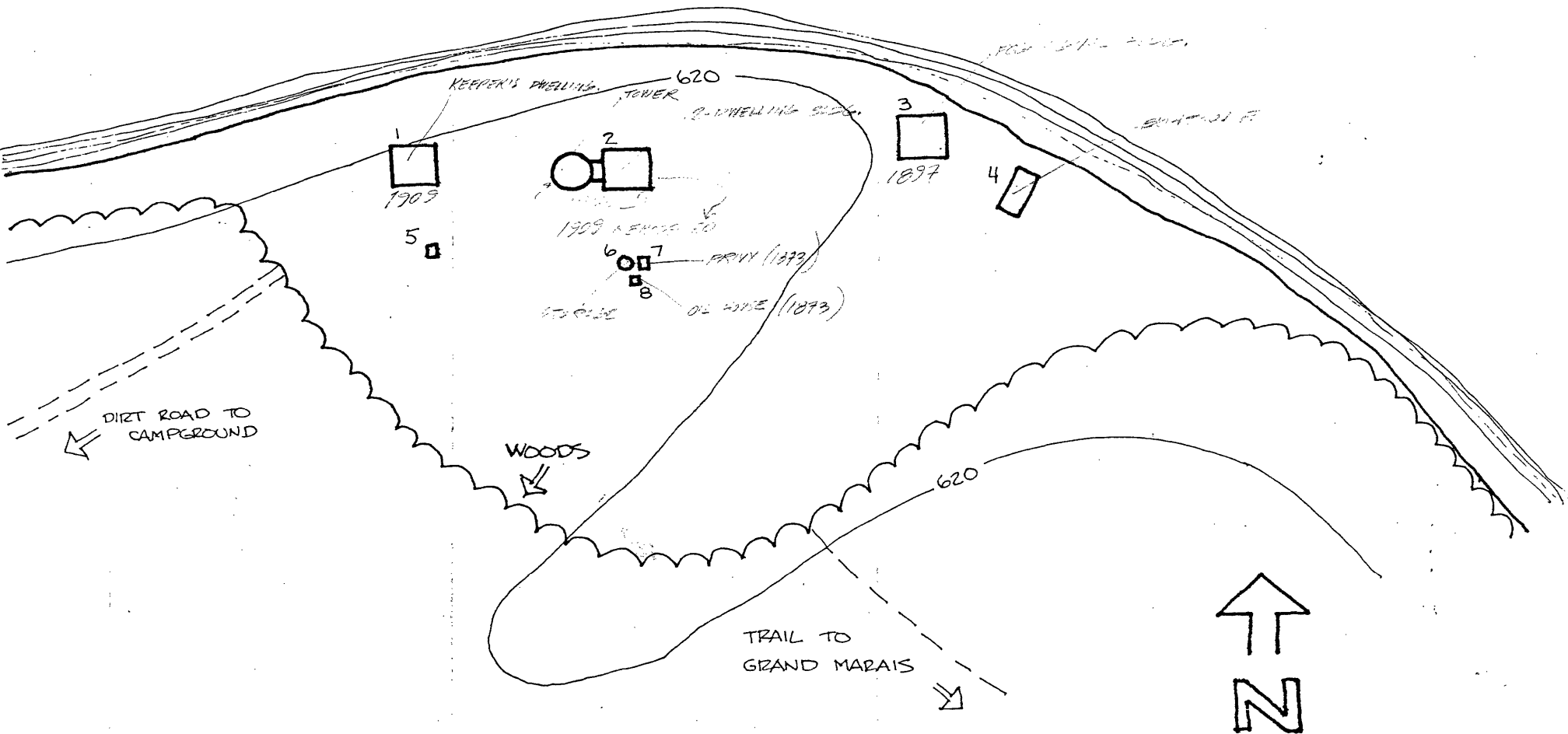
CONTINUATION SHEET 3                      ITEM NUMBER 9                      PAGE 1

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Federal Works Agency, Michigan's Upper Peninsula - It's Places and People, June, 1940.

Information from Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore's file on the Au Sable Lighthouse.

LAKE SUPERIOR



AU SABLE LIGHT STATION

NOT TO SCALE