

Lighthouse Glossary

Aids to Navigation — Any device external to a vessel or aircraft specifically intended to assist navigators in determining their position or safe course, or to warn them of dangers or obstructions to navigation.

Automated — To convert from manual to automatic operation.

Beacon — A lighted or unlighted fixed aid to navigation attached to the earth's surface.

Buoys — A floating object moored to the bottom to mark a channel or something (as a shoal or shipwreck) lying under the water.

Bullseye — A convex lens used to concentrate (refract) light, or a lantern or light having such lens

Caisson — A watertight structure within which construction work is carried out.

Candlepower — Luminous intensity (brightness) as measured in units called candles.

Davit — A small crane used to hoist boats and cargo.

Daymark — The unique color scheme, pattern, or architectural configuration of design used to identify a specific lighthouse during daylight hours.

Fog Bell — A mechanical bell used as an aid to navigation in dense fog.

Fresnel Lens — A type of lens developed in the mid-1800s by Augustin Fresnel (pronounced freNELL), a Frenchman who revolutionized the capability of the lighthouse to project its beam farther out to sea. It uses a series of prisms to concentrate the light beam.

Focal Plane — The point at which the lens refracts light for maximum brightness.

Fuel — A material such as wood or oil that is burned to produce heat and/or light. For lighthouses the fuel used included wood, lard, whale oil, tallow, kerosene, and electricity.

Gallery (in a lighthouse tower) — a platform or walkway located outside the watch room (main gallery) and/or lantern room (lantern gallery).

Horizon — The point at which the earth appears to meet the sky.

Inspector — A man in charge of rigorous government inspection of the lighthouse, quarters, and grounds.

Kerosene — Petroleum based fuel used in fuel burning lamps.

Lamp — Any device that generates light.

Landing - A platform or small room placed at intervals of the staircase.

Lantern — A case that has transparent sides for holding and protecting a light, i.e. the lantern room of a lighthouse.

Lard Oil — The white or semi-solid rendered fat of a hog.

Light List — a publication containing a list of lights, fog signals, buoys, day beacons, radar and radio beams used as a reference and navigational aid.

Log — A book for maintaining records, similar to a diary.

Mayday — A distress signal indicating that a ship is in imminent danger and requests immediate assistance.

Oil House — Re-enforced, double-bricked storage outbuilding used to store large quantities of flammable fuel away from the tower and house.

Pharos — First known lighthouse, Alexandria, Egypt. Circa 300 BC.

Prism — A crystal or plastic polyhedron, which is used in the lens to bend the light ray into a focused beam.

Shoal — A shallow area, such as a sandbar or rock formation.

Stairwell — Inner chamber of the lighthouse tower housing the spiral staircase.

Tower — Structure supporting the lantern room and containing a stairwell.

Watch room - The platform or room immediately below the lantern room of the lighthouse tower.

Wickie — A nickname given to lighthouse keepers referring to the constant trimmings of the lamp wicks to produce clean light.