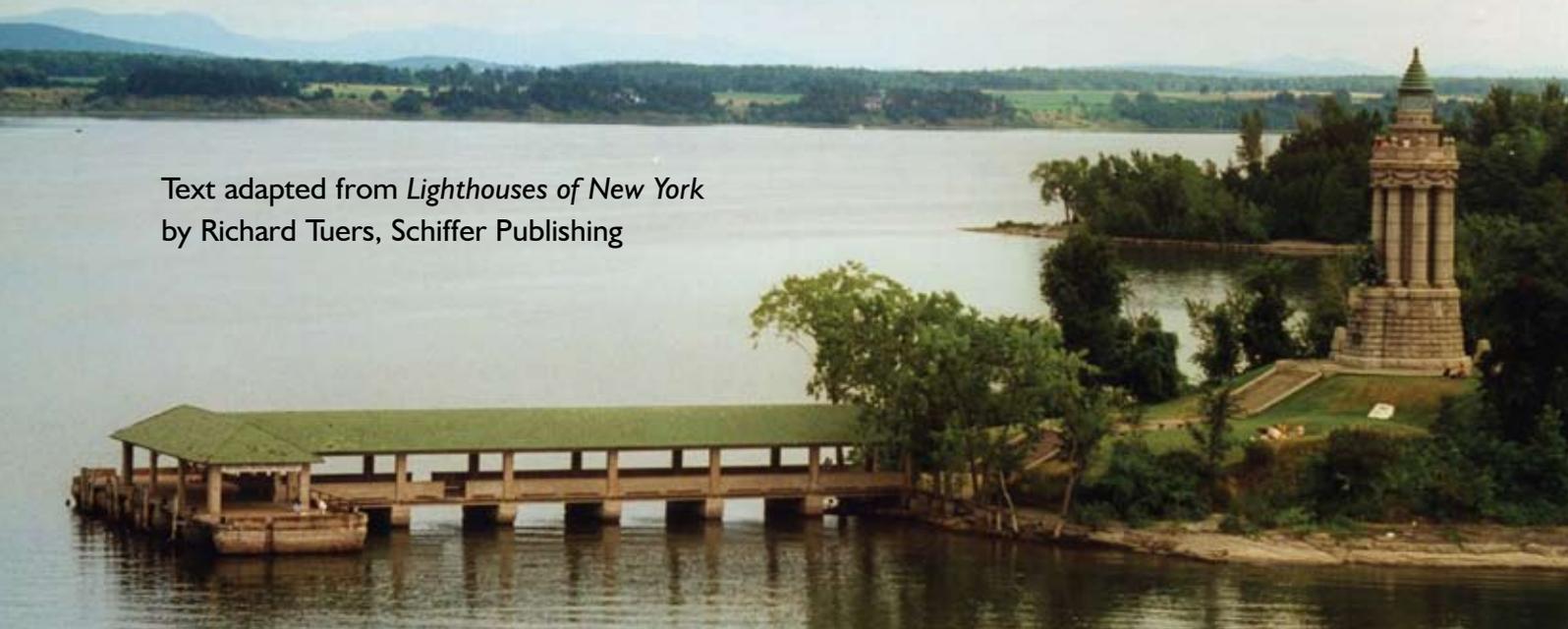


# Watchtowers on the Water

Text adapted from *Lighthouses of New York*  
by Richard Tuers, Schiffer Publishing



Richard Tuers

## New York's Lake Champlain Lighthouses

*Traveling south from the St. Lawrence and Richelieu Rivers on July 3, 1609, Samuel Champlain* first discovered the lake that would be named in his honor. He explored its shores and wrote of the surrounding beauty and interesting wildlife. Champlain's explorations led to the discovery of a new route between the St. Lawrence and Hudson Rivers, and ultimately to the settlement of the Champlain Valley by the French.

As settlements grew, more and more ships plied the lake's waters; lighthouses were needed to warn sailors of the dangers of sandy shoals, rocks and shallow waters. Lake Champlain's first lighthouse was built on Juniper Island, Vermont in 1826. By the end of the nineteenth century, there were nine more of these sentinels. The six described here are found in New York.



Crown Point

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## *Cumberland Head (1838, 1867)*

The Cumberland Head Light was constructed in 1838 by Peter Comstock at the locale of a very significant battle of the War of 1812. It was made of native rubble limestone and illuminated with eleven lamps with reflectors. The tower was torn down in 1867 and replaced with a new 75-foot tower that was more visible to mariners—its light could be seen for eleven miles.

For 33 years, a Civil War Veteran, William Teberah, was keeper of Cumberland Head Light. After he died, his wife was appointed keeper and served until 1919 with the assistance of her two daughters.

In 1948, Joseph Church, a World War II veteran, and his wife renovated the keeper's quarters. They maintained the lighthouse for the next fifty years until Mrs. Church sold the property in 1996. Today, the Cumberland Head Lighthouse is privately owned and is on the official seal for the Town of Plattsburgh. It is best viewed from Lake Champlain.

## *Split Rock (1838, 1867)*

The location Split Rock was used as a boundary for the territory between the Mohawk and Algonquin tribes. In 1832, Congress approved the construction of a lighthouse at Split Rock, making it Lake Champlain's second lighthouse.



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It was built by Peter Comstock, but in 1867, the structure was replaced with a 39-foot octagonal tower made of blue-stone. It had a focal plane of 100 feet above the lake, making the light visible for 12 miles. The keeper's quarters was replaced in 1874.

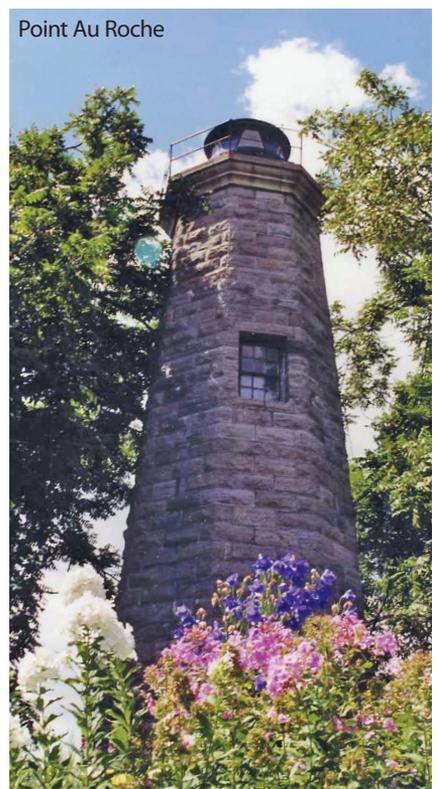
In the 1920s, however, the United States Lighthouse Service (an agency created in 1910 to oversee the upkeep and maintenance of all U.S. lighthouses) authorized the construction of a new steel tower to replace the lighthouse. The service ended in 1939 following a merger with the U.S. Coast Guard.

During the Depression, the government decided to surplus the valuable lakefront property and sold it in 1931. The lighthouse, which consists of a Greek Revival dwelling and a carriage house, has been well maintained by several private owners.

Recently, the original light was transferred from the steel tower back to the lighthouse tower, and on March 19, 2003, it was lit again. The lighthouse sits on private property and can best be viewed from Lake Champlain, just south of the Essex, Vermont ferry.

## *Point Au Roche (1858)*

In 1858, the Lighthouse Service built three new lighthouses on Lake Champlain using a standard design. Point au Roche



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Light was one of these so-called "Three Sisters," and was built opposite La Roche Reef. Like its "sisters," Crown Point Lighthouse (New York) and Windmill



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Point Lighthouse (Vermont), Point au Roche is an octagonal stone tower with an attached Cape Cod-style keeper's quarters. It was originally built to help water vessels steer their way along the rocky peninsula.

The Point au Roche State Park is located near Plattsburgh, adjacent to Monty's Bay State Wildlife Management Area on Monty Bay. It is a popular tourist attraction.

In 1934, the Lighthouse Service automated the light, divided the tower

from the keeper's quarters, and sold the property. Because of the deterioration of the tower, the Coast Guard decided in 1989 that it was no longer safe. The automated light was then moved to a buoy on La Roche Reef. Today, Point au Roche Light remains without its light, and its structure is slowly falling away. It is privately owned and can best be seen from Lake Champlain.

### *Crown Point (1858, 1910)*

Crown Point Lighthouse serves as a beacon and monument to the exploration and navigation of Lake Champlain. It's a popular tourist attraction and a reminder of Samuel Champlain's journey 400 years ago.

Crown Point Light is the other New York lighthouse that makes up the "Three Sisters." It is similar in construction to its "sisters," Point au Roche and Windmill Point, and was established in 1858. The 55-foot octagonal gray limestone block tower was once attached to a wooden Cape Cod-style keeper's quarters.

In 1910, the Champlain Tercentenary Commission received permission from the Lighthouse Service to commemorate the discoveries of great explorers by designing a neoclassical memorial. The new design is more elaborate, with Doric columns and Fox Island granite. A bronze statue created by German-born American sculptor Carl Heber graces the memorial, with Samuel Champlain appearing as the central figure.

Upon completion of the bridge at Crown Point in 1929, the lighthouse was decommissioned, and the keeper's quarters were removed when the entire property was given to New York State. Today, the lighthouse is part of Crown Point Historic Site, and is open year-round. For this year's Quadricentennial celebration, a special ceremony will take place in September at Crown Point to rededicate and restore the lighthouse. (Visit [www.ExploreNY400.com](http://www.ExploreNY400.com) for details.)

### *Barber's Point (1873)*

Located just south of Westport, New York, Barber's Point is midway between Crown Point to the south and Split Rock to the north. It was built in 1873 as a two-story lighthouse structure with a Mansard roof—a type of architectural style in which each of the roof's four sides has two slopes.



Barber's Point



Barber's Point



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The exterior of the lighthouse is finished with blue limestone blocks on the lower portion, and white siding on the upper portion and tower. In 1935, Barber's Point Lighthouse was replaced by a steel skeletal tower. The lighthouse and the surrounding property were sold in 1936 and have remained a private residence. Since then, the exterior of the building has received new paint and small structural additions, including a garage near the road.

The lighthouse has been included in the Camp Dudley Road Historic District, in the National Register of Historic Places.

## *Bluff Point (1874)*

Bluff Point Lighthouse overlooks the lake where the first naval battle occurred during the Revolutionary War. The light is located on a high bluff on the western shore of Valcour Island, and was placed in service in 1874. It consists of a 35-foot tower that sits 95 feet above the lake. When lit, the light could be seen for 13 miles.

In 1876, Civil War Veteran Major William Herwerth was appointed keeper of Bluff Point Lighthouse. As his health failed, his wife assumed much of the responsibility, and when William passed away, she became the keeper. Mrs. Herwerth had one of the best kept lighthouses on the lake and served faithfully until 1902.

In 1930 a steel tower was constructed to replace the manned lighthouse, and in 1954, the lighthouse and land were sold as a summer residence to a Massachusetts dentist. In the 1980s he offered the property to the state of New York. A compromise was reached whereby the State would own the lighthouse and Clinton County Historical Association would maintain the structure.

In November 2004, the light in the steel tower was returned to Bluff

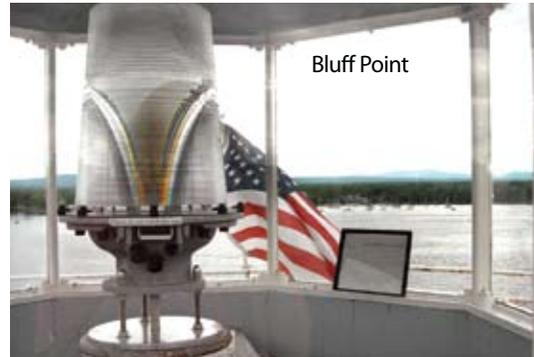
Point Lighthouse and re-lit. Today, the 1,100-acre Valcour Island is a popular destination for boaters, hikers, anglers and birdwatchers. Bluff Point Lighthouse can be seen from the marina dock at Day Point, or you can take a water taxi from the marina to Valcour Island to see the lighthouse up-close.

Sentinels of the Champlain Valley, New York's Lake Champlain lighthouses continue to safeguard visitors on the lake that Samuel Champlain

explored 400 years ago. While some no longer project their light, all of these lighthouses remain bright beacons in New York's unique history.

DEC Division of Water's **Rick Tuers** has won several regional photography awards. His photo of the Crown Point Memorial has also been featured by the Quadricentennial Commission.

Susan L. Shafer



Bluff Point



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