

VERMILION'S LIGHTHOUSE

Location: Vermilion, Ohio, in Erie County. Marker is on Main Street north of Huron Street, on the left when traveling north in Harborview Park.

This interpretive panel has seven illustrations. On the dark blue heading is a reproduction of a postcard captioned "A postcard of the Vermilion lighthouse 1911." Across the center of the panel are four photographs and one illustration: (1) "The wooden lighthouse, 1847." (2) "The new iron lighthouse 1877, featured in a postcard from 1906. The small building on the left stored the oil." (3) Bertha and Joe Wetzler, the last lighthouse keeper, 1919." (4) The metal tower, 1929. (5) "Cross section of the lighthouse, 1991." On the lower right is a color photograph captioned "The lighthouse at night 2016, photo courtesy of Scott Dommin."



"Cross section of the lighthouse, 1991." On the lower right is a color photograph captioned "The lighthouse at night 2016, photo courtesy of Scott Dommin."

Inscription: At the time Vermilion became a village in 1837, the people had built their own navigational aid at the mouth of the river using wooden stakes topped with oil-burning beacons.

In 1840, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers dredged the river and built two piers at the mouth, constricting the water to prevent

flooding. This provided the depth needed for boats to travel in and out of the harbor. Thus began the "golden age of shipbuilding" on the Vermilion River.

In 1847, a new wooden lighthouse was placed on the western pier. A lighthouse keeper, who lived in the village, lit the lamp inside it each evening and went out every morning to quench it.

The early Vermilion lighthouses were lit with lanterns fueled with whale oil, which burned clearly. In 1855, due to a decrease in the harvest of sperm whales, the cost of whale oil increased dramatically. Lard oil became the common energy source and then kerosene. A small building was erected on the pier to store the oil in 1906.



In 1876, the lighthouse was dilapidated. Congress appropriated \$3,000 to build an iron lighthouse, which was made from obsolete cannons melted down after the Battle of Fort Sumter. This iron structure was towed to Vermilion on barges along the Erie Canal. It had both an oil lantern as well as a Fresnel lens.

The former Inland Seas Maritime Museum Photographed by J. J. Prats, February 14, 2020 This marker is the one on the right. The Vermilion Lighthouse is on the grounds.



The new lighthouse, which was erected in 1877, stood at the harbor entrance for 52 years. According to a 1920 newspaper, residents believed there was "no more romantic spot on earth than the Vermilion lighthouse, not even Niagara Falls excepted."

In 1929, two young brothers, Ted and Ernest Wakefield, noticed the lighthouse was leaning. The Corps of Engineers was contacted and the old lighthouse was taken down and replaced with a skeletal tower. Residents were sad to see their

beloved lighthouse go. In 1935, it was re-installed at Charity Shoal on Lake Ontario in New York, where it remains today, now privately owned.

Ted Wakefield cherished his memories of the old lighthouse and with a group of volunteers raised funds to build a replacement. This 34-foot-tall structure was erected in 1991 at the foot of Main Street, where it still stands today. It was wired for electricity to power an incandescent light in a Fresnel lens. It was sanctioned by the U.S. Coast Guard as a navigational aid.

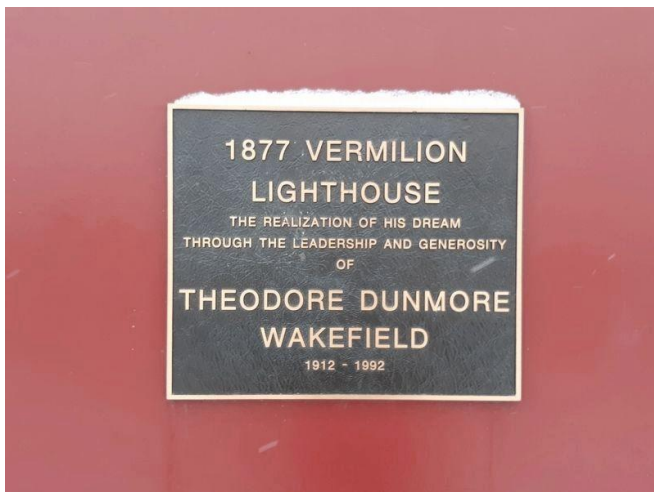
News outlets reported that the facility, operated by the Great Lakes Historical Society since 1953 in Vermilion was able to display only about 10 percent of its collection at any given time. So the museum decided to move to the Toledo Maritime Center on the Maumee River, after plans for a new museum at the Lorain pellet terminal, including a full-size, three-masted schooner in a glass enclosure resembling a ship in a bottle, proved to be too costly. Plans called for the Inland Seas Maritime Museum to operate in Vermilion through 2010. The [Wakefield house was demolished 2021](#).



In 2012, the lighthouse went dark when the Fresnel lens was removed and later placed in a museum in Toledo. Local residents, as part of Main Street Vermilion, raised \$40,000 to purchase a new lens, which was installed in 2016. The lighthouse was lit once again.

Vermilion Lighthouse at Lake Erie. Photographed By J. J. Prats, February 14, 2020

The interpretive panel was erected 2019 by the Erie County Community Foundation.



Vermilion's Lighthouse Marker Plaque on the Lighthouse. Photographed By Craig Doda, January 19, 2020

This information was mostly taken from the Historical Marker Database

<https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=147951>