

## Lighthouses of Manitoba

by James Werning, Demand Media



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In the early 1800s, Manitoba was home to about a dozen lighthouses -- a peculiar fact since this central Canadian province lies well over 1,000 miles from the nearest ocean. Still, Manitoba contains numerous large lakes, including Lake Winnipeg, the eleventh-largest freshwater body on Earth. Several Manitoban lighthouses remain, and they await today's intrepid explorers who trek by land or water to rediscover these historic treasures.

### Lighthouse History

For several centuries, fur traders, fishermen, loggers, miners, militia and settlers have traveled the watery highways of Manitoba. Storms can be fierce on these wide open bodies of water, so it is no wonder that Manitobans erected lighthouses in key locations to warn sailors of the treacherous shoals. Most of the lighthouses were built on Lake Winnipeg or on the rivers that flow to and from this lake. As railroad and highway transportation improved in the 20th century, the traffic on Manitoba's lakes decreased, as did the need to maintain the lighthouses. Today only six Manitoban lighthouses are operational, although nine lighthouses still exist.

### Lighthouse Design

Many of the original lighthouses were constructed in the traditional lighthouse design, as pyramidal towers of stone or wood. Cox Reef Lighthouse on Lake Winnipeg was simply a powerful lantern on top of a two-story house. Each lighthouse had unique red and white markings so ships could identify the lighthouse from the painted design. Each also had a unique flashing pattern for identification by sailors -- for example, Willow Point Range Rear Lighthouse flashed once every four seconds. Some lighthouses were easily accessed by road; others stood on isolated islands. Lighthouse keepers lived at each location to tend the lights, although only during the warmer months when the waters were navigable.

### Lighthouses Retired or Restored

Toward the end of the 20th century, many of the Manitoban lighthouses were outdated and in need of repair. Some were carefully restored. Others were replaced with simple lights on poles. Still others were demolished or permanently retired. At least one lighthouse, somewhere on the western shore of Lake Winnipegosis, was ruined and lost. Red River Range Front Lighthouse is one of the best examples of a restored lighthouse, although it was moved to a museum from its location at the mouth of the Red River on Lake Winnipeg in 1992.

### Visiting the Lighthouses

The first stop in a tour of Manitoba lighthouses is the Marine Museum of Manitoba in Selkirk. This museum has historic ships and many nautical artifacts of interest. Here visitors can view the Red River Range Front Lighthouse, in addition to the Black Bear Island Lighthouse, which was relocated from Lake Winnipeg. Some lighthouses, such as the old and new Gull Harbour Lighthouses at Gull Harbour, are accessed by hiking trails. Visitors can drive to see a replica of the Gimli Lighthouse at the New Iceland Heritage Museum on Centre Street in Gimli. The other existing Manitoban lighthouses are only accessible by boat.

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### References

- [University of North Carolina: Lighthouses of Canada: Manitoba](#)(<http://www.unc.edu/~rowlett/lighthouse/mb.htm>)
- [Amateur Radio Lighthouse Society: Manitoba Lighthouses](#)(<http://wlol.arlhs.com/index.php?mode=search&sc=MB&go=Submit&order=sp>)
- [Marine Museum of Manitoba: Ships at the Museum](#)(<http://www.marinemuseum.ca/exhibits.htm>)

### Resources

- [Barteauxartworks.com: Our Lighthouse Lifetime](#)

## About the Author

James Werning has authored books and numerous articles published on various websites. His scripts have aired for over 15 years on radio stations across the United States and Canada. He has a master's degree in communications from the University of Edinburgh, Scotland.

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