

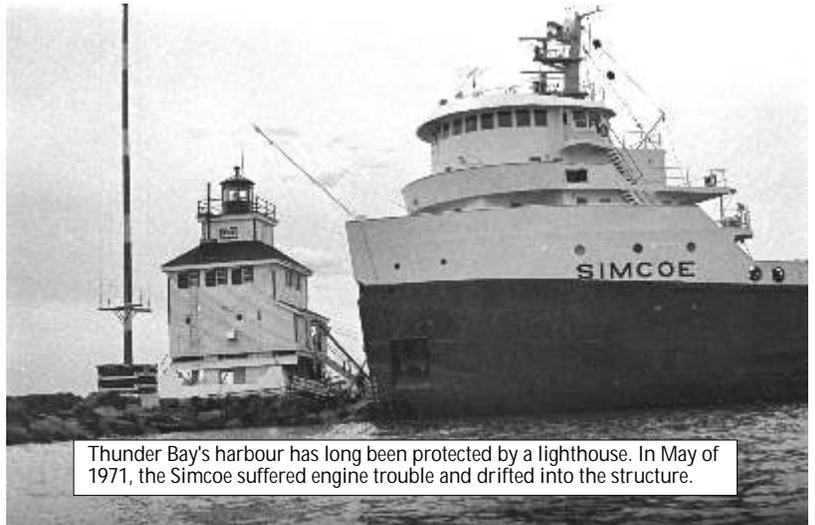
The Breakwater Lighthouse

The Lakehead apparently made do without a lighthouse until about 1909 when a small structure first appears in photos of the entrance to the inner harbour. As shipping activity increased, a new breakwater was erected, farther out into the harbour, and the old lighthouse seems to have vanished. This is the story of its replacement.

Situated at the entrance to the harbour, on the breakwall whose construction spans over a century years of local history, the current lighthouse is a focal point of waterfront geography for tourists and residents alike. Resting upon four concrete pedestals -- connected by struts into two pairs -- is a steel and timber platform which serves as a foundation for the two-storey frame structure that houses a fog alarm room, lamp room and dwelling.

Its exterior consists of simple clapboards, painted standard white. The housing for the light and all the building's accents are painted fire-engine red. Probably graced with cedar shakes in its early days (if the construction plans were followed), the roof was later covered in red asphalt shingles. For protection from the elements, the seaward corners were reinforced by steel plates, and each first floor window was fitted with steel shutters. Squatting sturdily upon its platform, the structure has withstood the test of time.

Originally proposed by the Department of Transport in June of 1939, the actual construction of the lighthouse was no doubt delayed by the outbreak of war. It was probably built five years later for the first recordings of the foundation elevation were taken in November of 1944, and such recordings would likely be made before settling could occur.



Thunder Bay's harbour has long been protected by a lighthouse. In May of 1971, the Simcoe suffered engine trouble and drifted into the structure.

Existing plans for the exterior bracing are dated December 1947, and 3 July 1948. These refer to the guy wires that can be seen on the two side walls, crossing from the upper corners to anchor bolts in the concrete pedestals. Perhaps these were added to secure the superstructure more firmly to its foundation after the lighthouse was reputedly knocked over by the Seneca, which missed the harbour entrance and struck the breakwall. In May of 1971, the Simcoe similarly struck the breakwall and damaged part of the lighthouse.

While it is difficult to say how closely the plans were followed, precise construction details were outlined in the original 1939 tender package. It was specified that all goods and materials used were to be produced in Canada, or if unavailable, preference was to be given to products of the British Empire. Framing materials were to be of spruce or fir, boarding and rough flooring of spruce or red pine, and all finished flooring of birch or maple hardwood. Shingles were to be of cedar from New Brunswick or British Columbia, The chimney -- which has since been removed -- was to be of brick. The iron railing and the lantern were to be supplied and installed by the Department of Transport. In addition, construction was to be completed within two months of the acceptance of the contract.

In later years, the breakwater lighthouse was converted to an automatic, unmanned beacon, as it remains today.