

Mackinac Straights, Michigan



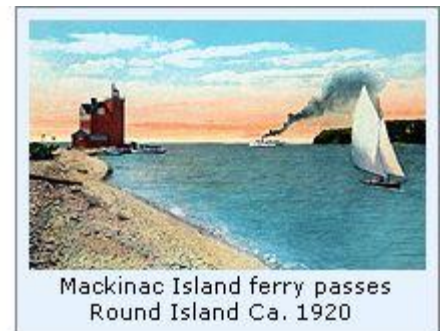
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Historical Information

The area around the Straits of Mackinac is riddled with islands and reefs, which made vessel traffic at the transition from Lakes Huron, Michigan and Superior particularly difficult. While the construction of the Old Mackinac Point Light in 1892 eased the situation, the Lighthouse Board requested funds from Congress to augment the Mackinac Light



Schooner passing Round Island Ca. 1900



Mackinac Island ferry passes Round Island Ca. 1920

with a second light in the Straits to be located on a shoal off Round Island.

Congress responded to the request with an appropriation of \$15,000 for the construction of such a light in 1894. The construction contract was awarded to the local contractor Frank Rounds. The construction was completed, and the light first exhibited on May 15.

Set on a forty-foot square concrete pier, the three-story red brick building became home to the Head Keeper and two assistants. The first floor held the boiler and compressors for the steam-operated foghorn. Mounted on a shelf on the exterior of the second floor, compressed air was piped up to the second floor via iron pipes on the inside wall of the building.

The second floor contained the keepers' kitchen, living room, dining room and one small bedroom. The third floor held three bedrooms, and a service room, which also provided access to the tower and lantern room by way of an iron ladder.



The light after 1972 storm

Equipped with a **Fourth Order Fresnel lens**, the lamp showed steady white with a flash of red every twenty seconds. The lamp was rotated with a clockwork occulting mechanism, which was powered by weights hanging in a weight pocket built into the wall. This pocket extended down through all three floors and each floor provided with a weight access door.

Automated in 1924, the keepers and their belongings were removed from the station. After the Coast Guard assumed responsibility for the Nation's lighthouses in 1939, the automated Round Island Passage Light was erected off the harbor breakwater on Mackinac Island in 1947. Thus, Round Island Light was

deemed to be no longer necessary as a navigational aid, and was abandoned and left to the elements. Round Island became part of the Hiawatha National Forest in 1958, and as part of the transfer, the lighthouse became Park property also. Over the next twenty years the Park Service gutted the interior, and without the ongoing care afforded by the keepers of the past, the exterior of the building began to deteriorate.



3rd floor Head Keepers quarters

A particularly violent storm on October 20, 1972 blew so hard against the building that one lower corner of the building was completely broken away. The resultant opening allowed access to vandals, who could not resist working their destruction on the once mighty building.



Round Island spit from gallery

Many Mackinac islanders feared the entire structure would collapse, and were embarrassed by the poor impression that the deteriorating building showed to the many visitors coming into the island harbor. A groundswell of public desire to save the lighthouse began to surface.

The Mackinac Island Society began to investigate every avenue for funds and assistance. In late 1973 loads of rip rap were spread around the base of the building to help stem erosion. In 1974, the lighthouse was placed on the National Register of Historic Places, and local groups friendly to the restoration effort raised \$12,000 through various drives and sales. However, restoration experts estimated that the cost to put the building back into stable condition would be closer to \$100,000, and while the Federal Government showed willingness to lend assistance, the price tag was too high. Finally, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation stepped-in, and appropriated \$125,000 in 1977 for the restoration.

Naturally, in such a restoration effort, there is a tremendous amount of labor involved, and Boy Scout Troup 323 and The Great Lakes Lighthouse Keepers Association stepped-up to answer the call. With the GLLKA providing the knowledge, and the Boy Scouts providing the muscle, the work progressed rapidly.



Today, the exterior of the Round Island Light appears as good as must have during its active days. Still serving as an active aid to navigation, a **300mm Acrylic lantern** now guides mariners passing through the Straits. Plans are ongoing for interior restoration and further exterior improvements, and once again Round Island stands proud at the entrance to Mackinac Island Harbor.

Keepers of this Light

[Click here](#) to see a complete listing of all Round Island Light keepers compiled by Phyllis L. Tag of Great Lakes Lighthouse Research.

Finding this Light

Sheplers Ferry Service out of Mackinaw City offers a number of lighthouse cruises during the summer season. Their "Eastbound Tour" includes passes by Round Island, Bois Blanc Island, Poe Reef and Fourteen Foot Shoal. For schedules and rates for this tour, visit their website at:

www.sheplerswww.com or contact them at:

PO Box 250

Mackinaw City, MI 49701

Phone (800) 828-6157

Reference Sources

Inventory of Historic Light Stations, National Parks Service, 1994

Lighthouse Adventures, Wes Oleszewski, 1999

Lights Of The Lakes, Chris Duncan, Mich. Coastal Mgmt Program, June 7 1984

Round Island Lighthouse, Lynne Cohen Duncan, Website.

Mackinac Town Crier News

USCG Historian's Office - photographic archives.

Personal observation at Round Island, 09/10/1998

Photographs from the author's personal collection. Keeper listings for this light appear courtesy of [Great Lakes Lighthouse](#)

[Research](#) <http://www.terrypepper.com/lights/huron/roundisland/roundisland.htm>