

What's Going On Here?

Au Sable Cultural Landscape Restoration



Au Sable Light Station was constructed in 1874, the same year barbed wire and Levis jeans were patented in the U.S. Monet, Pissaro, and other "Impressionists" were painting their famous landscapes in France.

While the buildings at Au Sable have aged well, historic photos tell us that the Station has changed in appearance over time. The "L" shaped dock has been taken by the vagaries of wind, ice and waves, and trees have grown in as the forest encroached on the station. Buildings like the "hennerly" and wood sheds have come and gone.

Over recent decades, Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore has worked to rehabilitate the Station buildings, both interior and exterior in accordance with National Park Service and the Secretary of the Interior's policies for historic structures. Past projects have included reconstruction of the assistant keepers dwelling front porch, interior wall plastering and trim restoration, and roof and chimney work on several buildings. In 1996, the Lakeshore returned the original third order Fresnel lens in the lens room atop the Station tower. Linen curtains were also installed to recreate the historic scene and help protect the fragile lens from light damage.

The National Park Service is responsible for the long term care and interpretation of these historic buildings and the landscape in which they exist. Historically, the U.S. Lighthouse Service, and later the U.S. Coast Guard would have maintained the grounds in a manner that would reduce the potential for fire or wind throw tree damage and assure that the light was visible out on the lake some 17 miles. Photographs from the 1880's and 1920's for example, show a distinct forest perimeter with only grasses and blueberries permitted to grow near the buildings.

In 1998 a Cultural Landscape Report was completed for Au Sable, documenting the original landscape elements, dates of various buildings, and other changes to the appearance of the Station. That study also made recommendations for enhancing the cultural landscape for historic accuracy and visitor enjoyment.



Restoration of the sand bank



1940's aerial view of Au Sable

Recent projects at Au Sable have been completed to cultural landscape report recommendations. Trees have been cut to replicate the historic forest perimeter. Brush from these trees has been placed “over the edge” to cover and stabilize sand blowouts that have been exacerbated by visitor foot traffic up and down the slope between the beach and the buildings.

Lakeshore a maintenance staff pushed sand dunes that had grown on top of the banks back down the slope, resulting in a setting that more closely matches the historic landscape features of the early 1900's. It is this period we are striving for when it comes to historic authenticity of both the buildings and landscape in that 1910 was when the assistant keepers dwelling was made into a duplex, and the new head keepers quarters were constructed.

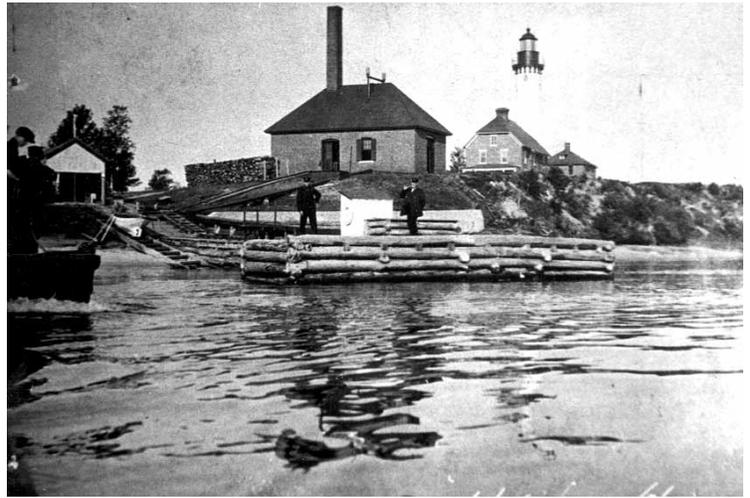
Park staff have also leveled and reinforced the existing historic sidewalk system. Work has also included leveling of the entire site to approach the appearance of the station in 1910. Native seeds and seedlings have been planted to help slow erosion rates on the sand bluff.

You may notice too that the white boathouse beyond the fog signal building has been rehabilitated, as have the outhouses and oil storage buildings.

As you visit Au Sable Light Station, please notice the fine work completed by park staff and contractors as we continue to rehabilitate both the buildings and the historic landscape for its cultural integrity and public safety.

Please use the staircase to and from the beach rather than climbing the sand bank that we have worked hard to restore.

Think back in time when barbed wire and Levis jeans were invented and picture yourself at the lighthouse in 1874 – or 1910 and dream what it was like to be a keeper of such an important aid to navigation.



Dock and fog signal building in 1920's



Boathouse after rehabilitation