

An American Tour: 22

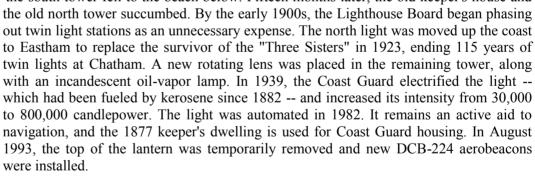


Massachusetts's Chatham Lighthouse

Chatham, nestled at Cape Cod's southeast corner, was named for an English seaport and incorporated in 1712. Maritime traffic passing the Cape was heavy by the nineteenth century. The waters off Chatham were a menace, with strong currents and dangerous shoals. Mariners talked of a ghostly rider on a white horse who appeared on stormy nights, swinging a lantern that lured mariners to their doom.

In April 1806, nine years after the establishment of the Cape's first lighthouse at North Truro, Congress appropriated \$5,000 for a second station at Chatham. A second appropriation of \$2,000 was made in 1808. In order to distinguish Chatham from Highland Light, it was decided that the new station would have two fixed white lights. Two octagonal wooden towers, each 40 feet tall and about 70 feet apart from each other, were erected on moveable wooden skids about 70 feet apart. A small dwelling house was also built, with only one bedroom. Samuel Nye was approved as the first keeper by President Thomas Jefferson.

In 1875, Keeper Hardy counted 16,000 vessels passing the lighthouse. He reported often on the serious erosion problems, but little was done to shore up the crumbling cliff. On September 30, 1879, the old south tower teetered 27 inches from oblivion. Another two months passed, and a third of the foundation hung over the edge. Finally, at 1:00 PM on December 15 the south tower fell to the beach below. Fifteen months later, the old keeper's house and



The erosion near Chatham Light had slowed in this century, but in recent years a new threat has developed. Hurricane Bob and the ferocious "Perfect" Storm of October 1991



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[http://lighthouse.cc/ chatham/ history.html]

