

# A VIEW THROUGH THE PORTHOLE



Fairport Harbor Historical Society

August 2025

## From the President's Desk

Marty O'Gara

### PRESIDENTS LOG

Hello everyone. It seems like we only opened a few days ago, but it is actually late summer, and we will be closing in a little over a month. Our closing date this year will be September 28 which is also Community Day In Fairport Harbor.

Our season began with the re-dedication of the USS Michigan mast which had undergone extensive restoration and repair. The ceremony was well attended including Mayor Manross, and a representative from Rep. Dave Joyce's office. Both presented us with proclamations recognizing the mast and it's historic significance.

We were filmed and interviewed by two Cleveland television stations; Channel 19 and New Day Cleveland. The museum and grounds looked great on TV!

June 21, from 7 to 10 PM at the base of Lighthouse Hill, we held our Gala celebrating 200 years of a lighthouse being on this site. Over 140 people attended and enjoyed a DJ, delicious food and desserts, and a cash bar featuring Debonne wines. Historical figures such as Amy Kaukonen and Frenchy the Pirate mingled with the crowd and posed for photo ops. It was a great evening with a light breeze blowing in off the lake.

July 5, we marched in what may be the last Mardi Gras parade. The theme was Thanks for the Memories; our float featured historical icons from our past: Mrs Joseph Babcock, The Grinch, Captain Babcock, and Sentinel the Ghost Cat. Once again Jerry and Carol Popp allowed us to decorate and store our float in their garage.

On July 12 we had members from the BMW car club who visited the museum and climbed the tower. Brenda Traffis, our favorite local photographer happened to be passing by, also and took a great shot of the group.

On July 15, 16, and 17 we had a total of 160 young people from the Gilmore Summer Camp. They ranged in age from 5 to 15 and were very energetic and inquisitive. Thanks to Dan Maxson for organizing the tour schedule and conducting some. Thanks to Bob Manross, Lee Silvi, and Cindy Shega as well. It was quite a three days!

July 19 was Pirates Day in the village. Greg Major turned the museum and tower into a Pirates Lair and the staff dressed accordingly. Everyone had a fun time!

On August 8, Marty and Bill attended the launch of The Lake Erie to Ohio River Trail at Geneva State Park. The Trail is part of America 250-Ohio "Tales and Trails" program. This commemorates Ohio's waterways and their importance in the development of our country. The program is part of Ohio's celebration of the 250th birthday of the USA in 2026. Our museum and lighthouse have been selected as one of the sites along this trail. More information will be coming in the next few months.

On August 16, the museum had a paranormal visit. Bob and Sally Selby from Ashland Ohio spent the evening investigating the museum and tower looking for the ghost cat and any other spirit inhabitants. Jan, Bill, Marty and our friend and local artist Beth Lynne observed. There was activity especially in the library and boat room. They will send us a report when they review their findings. Another group, this one from Virginia, is scheduled to visit in September.

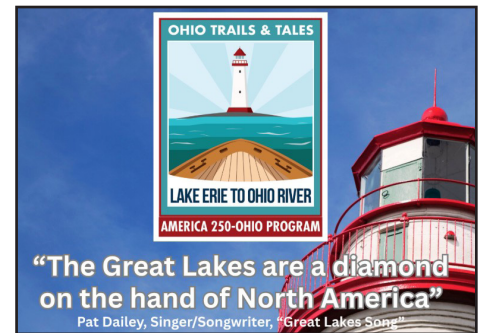
August 23, the FHHS will have an information table at the Painesville Railroad Museum for their Northeast Ohio History Day. Come visit us! The museum will also have a table at Community Day on September 28 in Veteran's Park. After that, we will close for the season. There will still be activity at 129 Second Street. We will participate in Witch's Night Out October 4, 7PM to 10PM. Once again, we will have the "Haunted Tower" Halloween night for those who dare! We have also joined the newly formed Kiwanis Club here in Fairport. We will also be part of the America in Bloom program. Both of these will enhance our village in a positive way and we want to be a part of this. Thanks to all who have visited and supported us this season. Come and see us before we close. There will still be many days to enjoy our towering view!



## America 250-Ohio “Ohio’s waterways didn’t just move boats - they moved a nation.”

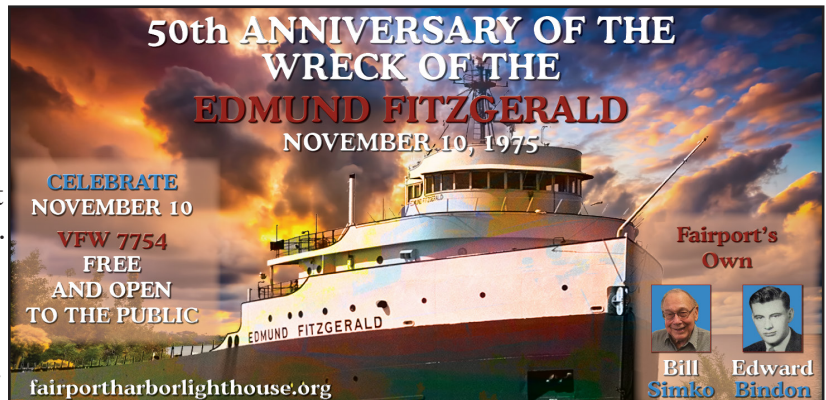
The Fairport Harbor Marine Museum & Lighthouse will be part of the new Lake Erie to Ohio River Trail. The trail is a “drive your own adventure” experience. On August 8th FHHS participated in the trail’s launch at the Geneva State Park Marina. America 250-Ohio is the official state commission responsible for spearheading Ohio’s celebrations and commemorations relating to America’s semiquincentennial in 2026.

The Lake Erie to Ohio River Trail is an experiential driving trail of more than 150 sites across Ohio that celebrates the crucial role that water has played in moving people, goods and ideas across the state. A full list of trail sites with an interactive map that can be filtered by category can be found at <https://america250-ohio.org/lake-erie-to-ohio-river/>. There is also a Spotify playlist. Ashtabula County and Lake County highlights include: • Fairport Harbor Marine Museum & Lighthouse • Fairport Harbor West Breakwater Lighthouse • Ashtabula Harbor Lighthouse • Conneaut Harbor West Breakwater Lighthouse • Ashtabula Maritime & Surface Transportation Museum • James A. Garfield National Historic Site in Mentor • Headlands Beach State Park • Headlands Dunes State Nature Preserve • Fairport Harbor Lakefront Park • Geneva State Park • Conneaut Township Park. With over 150 sites, guests will be able to get a true picture of these waterways either by theme or geographic region.



## Edmund Fitzgerald Remembrance

November 10, 2025 marks the 50th Anniversary of the sinking of the Great Lakes freighter Edmund Fitzgerald. A ceremony is being planned to be held at the VFW on that day. Fairport Harbor has many connections to the ill-fated ship. One of the crew members that was lost that night was a popular figure in town. Edward Bindon was an athlete at Harding High School and village employee who was the First Assistant Engineer on board the Fitz when lost on Lake Superior during the early winter storm. He will be remembered that night, also 91 year old Bill Simko is scheduled to talk about his time on the ship and share many never before seen pictures that he took while on board the Fitz. Mark your calendars for that date. More info will be posted on our website and facebook page in the future.



## The Fairport Beacon (1935-1960) has been digitized and is now available online.

Karen Zoller, Director of the Fairport Harbor Public Library recently announced the archived issues of Fairport Harbor’s hometown newspaper The Fairport Beacon are now online. The historic paper previously was only available in the form of microfilm. The new digitized format online is fully searchable and makes research much easier. The Fairport Harbor Friends of the Library donated the funds to have the microfilm scanned by Advantage Archives and hosted on their Community History Archives Website. That website also has many other Ohio newspapers archived online along with newspapers from many other states. There is no charge to access this extensive database.

The links for the Fairport Beacon archive along with scanned copies of the Fairport Harbor High School Yearbooks dating back to 1923 can be found on the library website <https://fairportlibrary.com>.





## Fairport Harbor's Five Lighthouses by John Ollila

The first lighthouse in this harbor was built in 1825. At that time the town name was Grandon, and the lighthouse marked the entrance to the Grand River. That original lighthouse was designed by Jonathan Goldsmith and built by Goldsmith and his partner Hiram Wood.

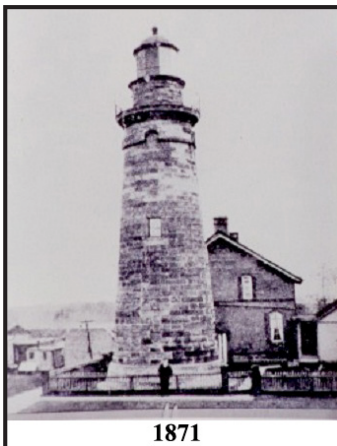
A second lighthouse was built on the east pier of the Grand River in 1838. This beacon light and the lighthouse on the hill served as a range for ships sailing to Fairport from the west. By the way, the town was officially incorporated as the Village of Fairport in 1836.



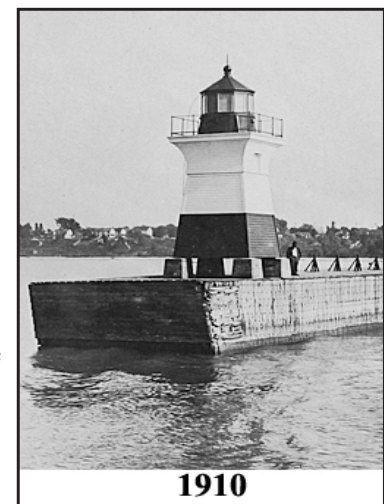
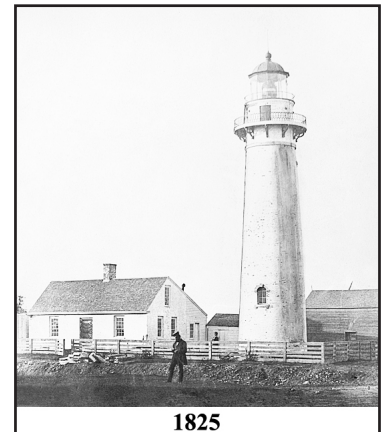
The original 1825 lighthouse had been repaired many times during its forty years of service and by 1869 Congress had appropriated \$30,000 for a new tower and keeper's dwelling. By 1871 the new Grand River Light was in operation and remained so until 1925.

The beacon light on the east pier was also replaced and lit again in 1875. It still served as the lower range light, until a breakwater was started to protect the harbor in 1907. The breakwater was completed about 1910 and a temporary red light was installed on its northern end. Although a lighthouse was planned for the west breakwater, World War I postponed the project for another 15 years.

The Fairport Harbor West Breakwater Lighthouse basic structure was built in Buffalo NY and arrived by steamer in 1921. It was completed on site and was lit for the first time on June 9, 1925. Since this lighthouse now marked the entrance to the harbor, the older lighthouse that was built in 1871 that stood on the hill where a lighthouse has guided mariners for 100 years was decommissioned. \$1,600 of the monies appropriated for the new lighthouse had been earmarked to demolish the old lighthouse tower.



The people of Fairport and Lake County did not want to see their old lighthouse torn down. The lighthouse had saved many people by guiding them to safe harbor over the years and now it was time for the people to save the lighthouse. Many letters were sent to government officials by local organizations and individuals. This community effort was successful and led to the formation of the Fairport Harbor Historical Society. In 1945 the tower and keeper's dwelling became the Fairport Harbor Marine Museum. It was the first time in the United States that a museum had been created on a lighthouse reservation.



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## Interested in a Model Ship Collection?

Two gentlemen have contacted us recently about ship models they thought we might be interested in. We were not able to accept them for the museum. Both men said we could publish their contact info in our newsletter in case any museum members wanted to inquire.

John Matteucci (216) 832-7444  
The Charles W. Morgan (Whaling Ship)  
Measures 42"x31"  
Otto J Kirchner model - In display case

Doug Galletti (972) 897-4588  
dougogalletti@gmail.com  
Collection of scale model ships and cannons  
Built by his father over 50 years.

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# 2025 Annual Fund Donation Drive

It is time for our Annual Fund Fundraiser. Our finances have been seriously drained over the past year due to necessary repairs and maintenance. Our Society runs solely on funds received from our Annual Membership Drive, Annual Fund Drive, Grants, Donations, Admission fees, and Gift Shop sales.

This year new blinds were installed in the museum by Budget Blinds of Painesville/Aurora. We also used the funds to purchase an Automated Emergency Defibrillator (AED) for the museum. Volunteers were trained on it's use by the Fairport Fire Department. In the coming years we will need to undergo some major restoration work and will be seeking fundraising monies for that. We appreciate all of you that can support us with a donation to the fundraiser.

We hope that you love this Museum and Lighthouse as much as we all do and can find it in your heart to make a donation to this drive.

***Thank you in advance for any help you can give us.***

Look for membership renewal forms in the November newsletter, on our website, or on Facebook. Current membership total is 189.

Donate instantly online by scanning the qr code below or go to

<https://square.link/u/RXtcAfVF>

The link is also on our website and facebook page.

\*Checks may be mailed to the lighthouse.



*The 200th Anniversary Gala was held on Saturday June 21st.*



*The theme for our Mardi Gras float was "Thanks for the Memories"*

## Thanks for another successful summer.

Thanks to Patience Wright for faithfully watering the museum flower beds. She has kept them alive and blooming all summer. Thanks to Marie Nelson for donating a new vacuum cleaner, replacing the antique Hoover. Thanks to Bill Farroni for taking pallets to our storage area and putting boxes and other items on them out of harms way. Bill did this when a bad storm hit and the storage building took on some water. All is well, and nothing was damaged. Thanks to Greg Major and Faith (his canine companion) for putting up and taking down the lawn flags all summer. And thanks to all the volunteers who have been hard at work in the gift shop, giving tours, and assisting in so many ways.

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"A View Through The Porthole" is the official newsletter of the Fairport Harbor Historical Society.

The newsletter is produced quarterly for members of the Society: February, May, August and November.

If your address changes, please notify us.

To be informed about upcoming events, tours, and Fairport Harbor Lighthouse news send us your e-mail address and we'll add you to our E-News list soon.



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