



THE UNITED STATES LIGHTHOUSE SERVICE AT OSWEGO, NY



The United States Lighthouse Establishment was formed in 1789 and operated under the U.S. Department of the Treasury when all U.S. lighthouses were transferred to the Federal Government which became the general lighthouse authority. By 1810, administration of the Establishment fell under the Fifth Auditor of the Treasury who delegated such responsibility to local customs officials. Local customs collectors became superintendents responsible for the construction, maintenance, land and keepers associated with aids to navigation.

In 1852, the quasi-military Lighthouse Board was created to address many mariner's concerns and to modernize the Establishment. In 1910, in favor of a more civilian organization, Congress abolished the Lighthouse Board and created the Bureau of Lighthouses that operated as the U.S. Lighthouse Service under the Department of Commerce until its merge with the United States Coast Guard in 1939, and thus fell back under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Treasury.



Above, the US Lighthouse Service facilities on Oswego's west-side (currently the site of USCG Station Oswego). Right, Burt Egelston, Keeper of three different lights at Oswego between 1929 and 1945.



At Oswego, NY, the jurisdiction of all lighthouses was placed in the hands of the district superintendent. Oswego's first keeper was Orlo Steele, in 1822. When merged with the USCG, US Lighthouse Service Keepers either enlisted in the Coast Guard as military personnel, or finished their career as civilians - by the mid-1950s, most civilian keepers had retired. In 1968 the West Pierhead Lighthouse was automated, thus ending the light keeper's profession in Oswego.