

McQuiston, McQuiston, McQuesten, McQuestion,
McCuiston, McCuiston and other related names.

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McQuestion Lighthouse

Standing on a tight bend in the Ottawa River, which is located in upper Ontario, there is a small lighthouse bearing our family name. Known as the McQuestion Lighthouse, this beacon was built to protect lumber rafters and steamboaters from wrecking their crafts in these narrow straights. It has stood for over 125 years, from at least 1883, and it is still in use!

It appears to have been built either by James John McQuestion, an immigrant from Armagh, Northern Ireland, born in 1804, or his son.

James' son was also named James John McQuestion, and he lived from 1854 to 1900. Some say the lighthouse was built in 1883, which means it would have been the son who built it since the immigrant James passed away in 1874.

Others say it was built after the 1850s, which means it could have been built by the elder James. There is a chance that both men worked on it, if it was actually built in the 1860s or 1870s.

The tower is located at a place called McQuestion Point where once stood a small hotel of sorts, known for a time as the McQuestion Hotel. While officially recorded as McQuestion Lighthouse, it has mistakenly been referred to as McLeod's Lighthouse because the last keeper was named McLeod.

This is a sketch I created of McQuestion Lighthouse, located on the Chalk River Nuclear Laboratories property, formerly Buchanan Township, in Ontario, Canada, along the south shore of an island in the Ottawa River.

The following detailed story was taken from "Tamarack Magazine": Exploration of Valley History, Issue IV, quoting one Gerald Nadeau -

"McQuestion Point, where we lived, was a stopping place by the river. Teams of lumbermen used to come to the old house. I think there's only three logs left of it now. There were quite a few of these places used for overnight stops, what you would call keepovers.

"From Sheenborough up to our old house was one day's trip so people would come that far and stay the first night. Then they'd go as far as the Swisha, which was another day.

"All of these places were ports for travelling lumbermen. There was no hydro, telephone, or radio at the old house. The only furnishings in the house were six chairs at a table, a box stove for night firing, a cook stove, a cupboard, three beds, two or three water pails, and some pots and pans.

"We just lived season to season; nothing ever made you hurry, so it wasn't important if it was



According to his descendant, Doug Tennant, this is a picture of Roger McLeod, circa 1890, the very last keeper of the lighthouse at McQuestion Point, sometimes referred to as McLeod's Lighthouse, but officially known as the McQuestion Lighthouse. What makes this picture extra interesting is that this exact same photo has been mistaken for one of Captain Jack McQuesten and his trained moose. A Yukon museum gave me a copy but said there was no verification that it was Jack, and now we know it isn't.

eight o'clock, nine o'clock, or ten o'clock.

"The closest house was about a mile and a half away and the roads were never plowed. In those conditions, if you were able to do anything like chop wood, get water,

or any of those other chores, you did them willingly.

"We used to look after McLeod's lighthouse which was on an island [McQuestion's Point]. The island was a beautiful spot. It was best in the springtime - the whole island would



Two photos found on the internet showing McQuestion Lighthouse as it stands, today.

just be covered with dandelions as thick as they could grow and the grass would be cut down because of the cows grazing on it.

“You’d hear the ice come down the mountains. The gather of ice would melt in the spring and it would just keep flowing down the mountain until finally it got so heavy that it would break away with whatever trees would come with it and it would tumble down onto the ice on the river. It would almost be like thunder.

“Every second spring, you’d hear it and the next day if you went to the river you’d see all the trees out on the ice where the big icicles had broken.

“The lighthouse had a globe about 20 inches high and it burned about two quarts of oil in twelve hours. Each evening you had to clean out the lamp glasses, trim the wick and check the wick for length. The wick was about two inches wide and there were two of them in the globe which was housed in a square glass enclosure. The two wick adjusters were side by side. If one fire went out then you always had the second one.

“You had to light it and then turn the wicks up until the globe got warm and then you’d turn it down so that there was no smoke from it. The coal oil had to be carried down in the spring. It took three 45 gallon containers to fill the tanks in it.

“They used to give us twelve dollars a month for looking after the lighthouse. You had to go down every morning and blow the light out. I never went alone, because I was too young and the lightstand was quite high. You’d have to get up on something to reach it.

“The lighthouse was put there because the river is quite narrow in that spot. It was built some time

after the 1850s for boats towing logs. The first big boats on the river were steam driven.

“There used to be a big red river boat, an old tow boat, thirty-five feet long with the engine taken out of it. It had been set adrift and had become wedged between the lighthouse island and the river shore. It stayed there until it had rotted away. The sides would be about three feet high and they got warm by the sun beating against them. The pike would lay against the side and sometimes you’d see eight or ten fish all beside the boat. Some of the pike were up to five feet long. We used to catch one fish each spring and that was enough for one week, as much fish as you wanted to eat.”

So ends this colorful tale. Officially, the lighthouse was built in 1883, but this storyteller points to a date closer to 1850. Either way, it is almost certain that one or the other, or both men, named James John McQuestion, built it. These men were ancestors of Jack McQuestion, a member of our family organization.

Another writer tells us that -

“The lighthouse was situated on McQuestion’s Point because it was such a narrow point in the river.

“The Marine Co. used to oversee the management of the lighthouse, and would pay a family \$12.00 a month for keeping it, on 12 month leases.

“Each year, they would take four huge 45 gallon drums of coal oil down to the lighthouse on sleighs.

“The Marine Co. would also send a big wick and a huge pair of scissors; tar; a broom; paint for the boat; spare lamp glass; a shovel; a box of rags that you would go through first to see if there was anything you could wear; and a strong sharp axe . . .”

I wrote the Canadian Coast Guard and received this information:

McQuestion Lighthouse -

- Nearest Town or City:
Deep River, Ontario Canada
- Location:
South shore Ottawa River.
- Managing Organization:
Canadian Coast Guard
- Tower Height:
18 feet
- Description Tower:
White square wooden tower.
- Operational:
Yes
- Date Established:
1915
- Date Present Tower Built:
?
- Current Use:
Active seasonal aid to navigation.
- Characteristic Range:
Flashing white every 4 seconds; visible for 5 miles.
- Height Focal Plane:
21 feet
- National Register:
No
- Alternate Name:
McQuestion Point Light

I also received this letter from the Canadian Coast Guard -

Dear Sir:

RE: McQuestion Point L.L. 1312, Canadian Hydrographic Service Chart No. 1553.

The light you refer to was established on the Ottawa River in 1883 and was used to assist the tugs pulling large rafts of timber down the stretch of the waterway.

The light itself was named after the point of land it was established on and points of land were named after families who lived near or on the point itself. It is located approximately 22 miles above

Pembroke, Ontario (then gives longitude/latitude).

It is still an active light maintained by the Canadian Coast Guard.

I have enclosed a recent picture of the site and, hopefully, this information will be of some use to you. If you require additional information, we can be reached at (then lists phone numbers, email, etc.).

Yours truly,
Chuck Lemaire,
Supervisor,
Marine Aids Program
Fisheries and Oceans
Canada Coast Guard
Central and Arctic Region

Jack McQuestion's wife, Mary Joe, tells us that his grandparents used to live at McQuestion Point, that a relative, Russell Floyd McQuestion had given her and Jack some information and that he had a son, Russell, who still lived in the area.

The lighthouse now stands on land owned by the Chalk River Nuclear Laboratories.

The CRNL facility arose out of a 1942 collaboration between British and Canadian nuclear researchers which saw a Montreal research laboratory established under the National Research Council of Canada (NRC).

By 1944 the Chalk River Labs were opened and in September, 1945 the facility saw the first nuclear reactor outside of the United States go operational. It was about this time that McQuestion Point came under the ownership of the CRNL.

In 1946, NRC closed the Montreal laboratory and focused its resources on Chalk River.

In 1952, Atomic Energy of Canada Limited (AECL), was created by the



McQuestion Point and McQuestion Lighthouse, as seen from the air.

government to promote peaceful use of nuclear energy. AECL also took over operation of Chalk River from the NRC.

The Labs produce about half of the world's medical isotopes. Despite the declaration of peaceful use, from 1955 to 1976, Chalk River facilities supplied about 250kg of plutonium, in the form of spent reactor fuel, to the US Dept. of Energy to be used in the production of nuclear weapons. (The bomb dropped on Nagasaki used about 6.4kg of plutonium.)

Canada's first nuclear power plant, a partnership between AECL and Hydro-Electric Power Commission of Ontario, went online in 1962 near the site of Chalk River Labs. This reactor, Nuclear Power Demonstration (NPD), was a demonstration of the CANDU

design, one of the world's safest and most successful nuclear reactors.

Chalk River was also the site of two nuclear accidents in the 1950s. The first incident occurred in 1952, when there was a power surge and partial loss of coolant in the NRX reactor which resulted in significant damage to the core. Future US president Jimmy Carter, then a US Navy serviceman, was part of the clean up crew.

The second accident, in 1958, involved a fuel rupture and fire in the NRU reactor building. Both accidents required a major cleanup effort involving many civilian and military personnel.

This is just one more example of how pioneering by our family went on to play such an important role in world history.



The Chalk River Nuclear Laboratories located near McQuestion Lighthouse and owners of the land it sits on - McQuestion Point.