



Key Points:

- Our lighthouses were built to guide and protect shipping traffic on our major water transportation systems.
- The passage of time has resulted in deterioration of these aging structures and has created a need for money...



**Bryan Lijewski, AIA** is a licensed architect with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), Michigan State House Development Authority. Lijewski has a Bachelor of Science in Architecture from the University of Michigan and a Master of Architecture with a specialization in history and preservation from the University of Illinois. He has over 20 years of experience with federal and state historic preservation programs and is responsible for all SHPO maritime and lighthouse project reviews. He currently serves on the design committee of Downtown Lansing and the Board of Mid-Michigan Chapter of the AIA.

**Published: January 2018**

**Previously published in:  
CAM Magazine**

AIA Michigan  
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## Working to Preserve Michigan’s Historic Places

### Bryan Lijewski, AIA; State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)

Michigan’s rich and diverse history gives us tangible links to the past through our built environment. To help preserve our historic buildings and places, the Michigan State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) at the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) was created in 1966 as part of the National Historic Preservation Act and formalized by the State of Michigan through executive order in 2007. SHPO is responsible for administering a number of federal and state historic preservation programs including Environmental Review, the National Register of Historic Places, the Federal Historic Tax Credit program, and the Local Historic Districts Act. Through these programs and other initiatives, SHPO staff work every day to identify, designate, and preserve our history.

Historic preservation in Michigan involves resources and projects of all shapes and sizes ranging from major rehabilitation projects in downtown Detroit, to barn preservation on rural farmsteads, to underwater archeological explorations. These projects involve partners at the local, state, and federal levels. Preservation happens in every region of the state, and from the shoreline of Lake Superior to the shoreline of Lake Erie. Our Great Lakes State coastline is home to a significant number of maritime-related historic resources including piers and breakwaters, life-saving stations, and more than 120 lighthouses.

Our lighthouses were built to guide and protect shipping traffic on our major water transportation systems. Accordingly, they had to be well designed as living and working spaces for the light keepers and their families, solidly built to withstand extreme weather conditions, and efficiently planned for their primary function— keeping the beacon lit. Although some lights and their associated buildings were built using standardized designs, others used individualized plans to respond to specific site needs. Either way, their setting, materials, and current condition make them all unique. Perhaps the most distinctive, because of their geography and environment, are the offshore lights. Of the more than 120 lighthouses in Michigan, about three dozen are considered offshore lights. These lights are built on reefs, cribs, and small or uninhabited islands, and are often the most isolated and difficult to access. These conditions created huge logistical, design, and construction challenges to ensure that they were properly constructed to withstand harsh weather.



At the time the lighthouses were built, the most up to date construction methods, materials, and technologies were employed. Orlando Metcalfe



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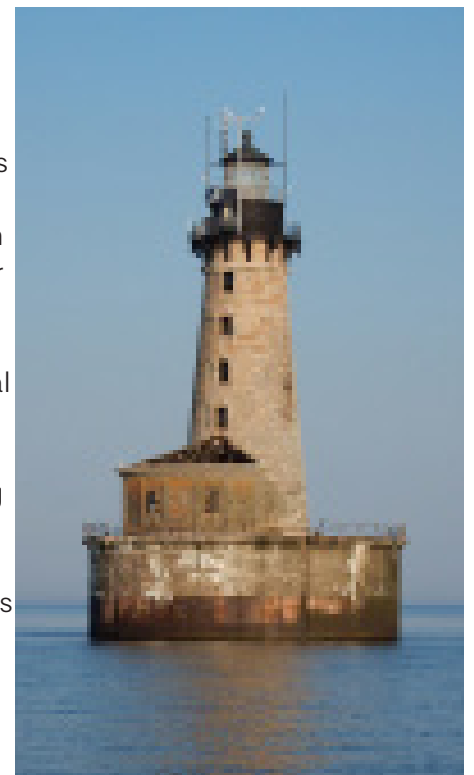
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Poe (designer of the Poe Lock at Sault Ste. Marie) devised the structure and construction method for the Stannard Rock lighthouse crib, which sits on a shoal in Lake Superior and forms the base of the light. The construction of this crib was rated by the National Park Service as one of the top ten engineering feats in American history. Completed in 1883 after five years of construction, the light is located 24 miles from the nearest land. It was a “stag station,” meaning it was staffed only by men, and was nicknamed “the loneliest place in the world” by its keepers. Stannard Rock Light’s design was critical because it saved lives while withstanding the gales of Lake Superior and guiding shipping traffic to safety.

The passage of time has resulted in deterioration of these aging structures and has created a need for money to support maintenance and rehabilitation. To provide financial assistance, the state introduced its Michigan Lighthouse Assistance Program (MLAP) grants in 2000. The grant program is wholly funded by the sale of the Save Our Lights specialty fundraising license plate. Twenty-five dollars from the sale of each new plate and ten dollars from each renewal goes directly into the lighthouse fund. The state has granted more than \$2 million dollars for lighthouse preservation assisting in rehabilitating more than 30 lighthouses. Because the grant requires a match, total investment in these maritime resources tops \$3 million. Grant administration includes a review process in all phases, from project bidding to construction site visits to project closeout. All completed work must comply with the U. S. Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation.



Utilizing MLAP funds to leverage additional financial assistance, we are currently working in partnership with our lighthouse stewards on a project funded by a National Maritime Heritage Program grant and an MLAP grant to complete a Historic Structure Report (HSR) and Public Education Project for four offshore lights. Those four, all listed in the National Register of Historic Places and built between 1832 and 1883, are Thunder Bay Island in Lake Huron, and Gull Rock, Manitou, and Stannard Rock in Lake Superior. A consulting team of architects, engineers, contractors, and materials analysts has been retained to work on this



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project. The HSRs will provide a complete history of each site, document current materials and conditions, and provide recommendations for treatment and use. The education component will bring awareness to the resources and allow the public to visit them virtually.

Today, our lighthouse stewards, architects, and engineers have to develop ideas for feasible uses for these unique structures, determine appropriate materials conservation techniques, and identify ways to provide basic building amenities such as plumbing, electricity, and waste removal. For example, when it was built, the Gull Rock Light in Lake Superior provided for waste removal by providing two holes in either side of the bottom of the privy vault. Wave in, waste out. How do we provide basic accessibility and building services at isolated locations that do not have the infrastructure to support them? How do you transport building materials, equipment, and workers to a site where there are no docking facilities? How do you accommodate workers, volunteers, and visitors when you do not have restroom facilities? What is possible and how do you do it? Good design solutions crafted by experienced professionals are critical to adaptively reusing all sorts and sizes of historic structures, especially remote maritime resources.

No preservation project happens without a team of dedicated project partners, the commitment of owners and stewards, and the support of the community. Some preservation projects, including our offshore lights, have specialized issues and challenges that need to be overcome, but the power of design and preservation will make it happen. We must continue our efforts across the state to preserve Michigan's historic resources—even when they're the "loneliest place in the world."