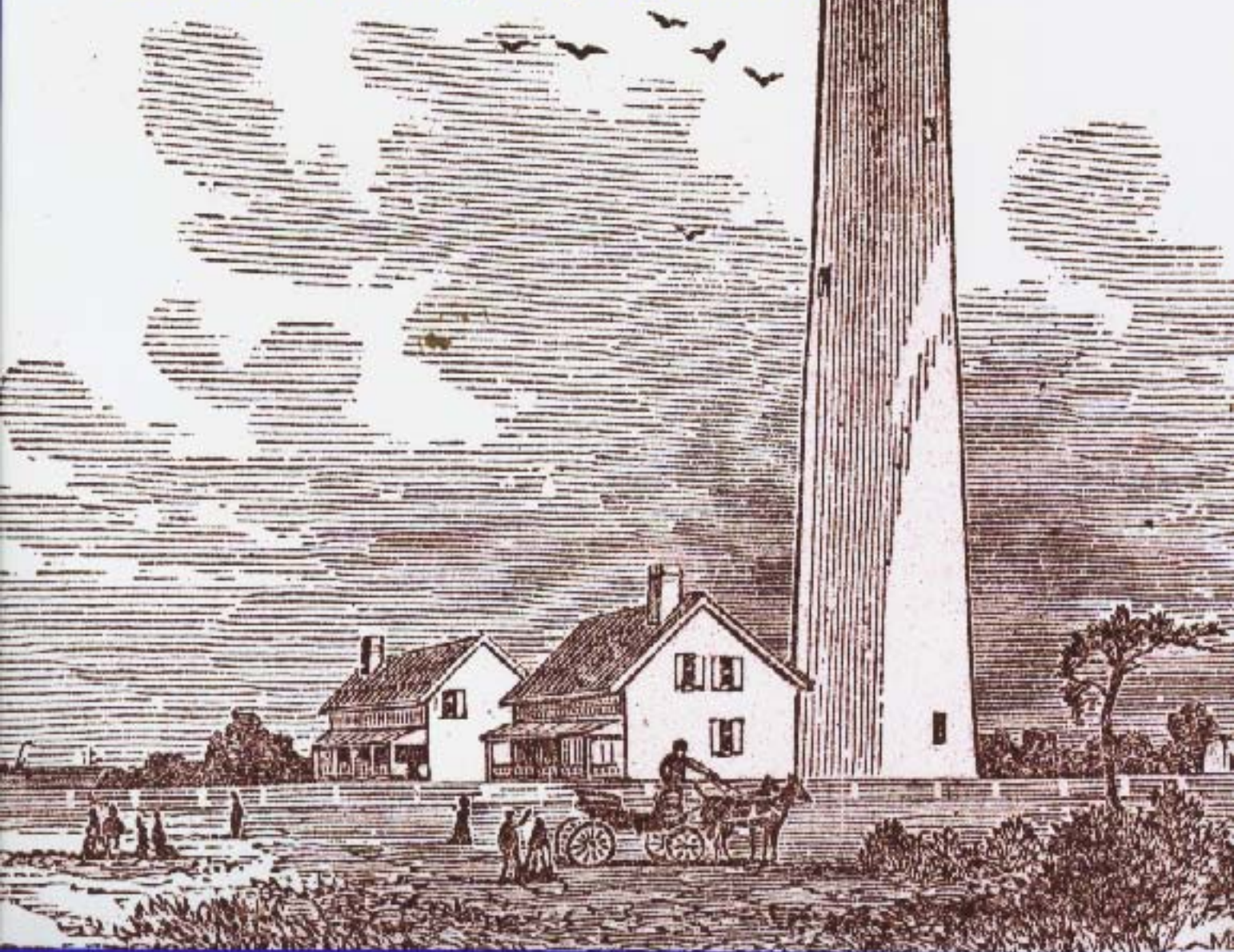


Sentinel

of the
Jersey Cape

The Story of the Cape May Lighthouse



by John Bailey

Lighthouses of Cape May

*“Oh! Dream of joy!
Is this indeed
the lighthouse top I see?”*

- Samuel T. Coleridge,
Rime of the Ancient Mariner

Behold the Cape May Lighthouse. She stands there so silently and aloof that we find it difficult to fathom her age and the epochs that have swirled about her base. At her birth (1859), the era of the steamship had not quite dawned. As the first keepers trimmed her sperm whale oil lamps and polished her lens, clipper ship captains scanned Cape May for her 30-second flash. As armies clashed at Gettysburg (1863), her beacon probed the Delaware Bay once every 30-seconds. As Queen Victoria gripped the helm of the British Empire (1837-1901), this beacon swept the sea as steadily as the rhythms of time. As the heart of Cape May City burned (1878) and entire blocks of grand hotels, shops and homes fell into heaps of blackened rubble, her light flashed behind the smoke and the flames once every thirty seconds. Every night, through great wars and great storms, through hot sunny summers and cold dark winters, her keepers carried oil up these same 217 steps and faithfully lighted the lamp. She flashed her signal every 30-seconds. Yet, she is not the first to stand here on this spit of land.

Since 1823, we know of three different lighthouses that have commanded the Jersey Cape. Have other unknown sentinels stood and then fallen before them? That very question has fascinated Cape May Lighthouse enthusiasts for years.

