

Lookout Station Memories of Captain John P. Wellington

by Dusty King- November 28, 2025



(picture courtesy Sault Historic Sites)

John Wellington joined the United States Coast Guard (USCG) in 1949. He first served on the USCG Tamarack.* In 1957, he was stationed at the Little Rapids Cut to the Light Attendance Station. He moved into a little house by Cylde's Drive in. John became Officer in Charge of Lookout Stations #3 & #4 and the St. Mary's River from Sault Ste. Marie to the Mud Lake Junction Buoy. His territory was later extended to Moon Island in the Munuscong Bay, then to Point Aux Frenes and finally all the way to Detour. John served in this capacity until 1964 when he was stationed to Alaska. He was then sent to Portland, Maine where he served until his retirement on August 1, 1969.

John shares the following stories about the lookout stations up and down the river:

Lookout #1 was burned.

Lookout #2- There was a house on the east side of the Middle Neebish Channel built by the Lighthouse Service. Two men lived there. One was a civilian and the other a coastie. They took care of the lights from the top of Neebish all the way to the southern end on the east side past Lookout #1.

Lookout #3- Little Rapids Cut. This lookout was on Mission Point [now called Rotary Park] and was active in 1964. A row boat was used to access the site. The causeway to the island was built around 1961.

Lookout #4- The men stationed here would serve 8 hour shifts around the clock. *Sometimes I would get a call from main base, "We can't get Lookout 4". Then I would have to go down there and I would find the man on duty asleep (too many parties). This occurred at Station #3 also. If they fell asleep, they might miss a ship going by and not report it. #4 had a shortwave radio installed in later years.*

In 1959, the rock cut was drained and dredged. I drove a truck down through the middle of the cut when it was dry. It took two years to deepen it.

Lookout #5 was gone after WWII. May have been burned as well.

Lookout #6- *I had under my command a 40' buoy boat with a crane attached that I used in my work.* While Lookout #6 at Point Louise (east of Brush Point) was never under his control, he does recall taking supplies out to the men manning that post with the Tamarack. The lookout was built on a crib out on the water and could only be accessed by boat. There was a long dock by the old water station [next to Sherman Park]. A house was built on the dock that was a Dispatch Station for Search and Rescue. Boats carrying men and supplies for #6 used this dock. This was all burned down.

Lookout #7 was closed after WWII. There is only an aide light on Moon Island now.

There was a bell on Lookout #6 and when it was foggy, the crew rang the bell to warn boats. There was also a fog bell on the buoy just off Lookout #4. It was connected to the lookout by electricity and was also used as a warning bell for the boats.

John was born on Mackinac Island in 1931. He married Delores Niemi from Duluth, Minnesota in 1951. John has served on the Sault Historic Sites Board for 40 years and was named their "Marine Man of the Year" in 1993. The Great Lakes Marine Hall of Fame in the Valley Camp is named in his honor.

** The Tamarack was first based in Detroit. After World War II, it was towed to the Sault by the Mackinaw. This vessel had a diesel engine and replaced the Aspen (a steamer).*

It was built in 1934 by the Manitowoc Shipbuilding Company as a buoy and sound tender for the U.S. Lighthouse Service, which later merged with the Coast Guard. (www.library.wisc.edu)