

Coase misrepresented the nature of the Trinity House. James Taylor's emphatically more historical approach was to examine the evolving debate in England beginning in the 1820s about ending the era of private owned lights, setting the parliamentary maneuvering in the context of other reforms of the period.<sup>4</sup> The nature of the policies under discussion informs some of the options that might have been considered by the legislature and government of Upper Canada.

Aids to navigation were long considered a key element in promoting safety for both passengers and property. In Upper Canada, this activity was almost entirely confined to the construction and operation of navigational lights. There were no publicly funded channel markers, no licensing of pilots, and the British Admiralty issued navigational charts, not the local government.

For these reasons, this paper is largely confined to the consideration of public lights. Individuals or firms established informal beacons in a number of locations, often by raising a lantern on a "mast," not infrequently at the ends of the earliest piers. Unlike the private lights of England, here the only compensation for the provision of this class of light was in the safe arrival of vessels at a wharf where fees could be charged for docking. In contrast, the lights under consideration in this paper were constructed using public funds, and for most of them so too would be the associated costs of maintenance, supply, staffing and housing.

## 1803 - 1826

In 1803 there were no public lights on the shores of the Great Lakes. Indeed, in Upper Canada there were almost no public works, a statement that could be applied to the American side as well. North of Lake Ontario, public energies and funds had been expended on Yonge and Dundas Streets and the less-than-successful Danforth Road.<sup>5</sup> The first customs officials had been appointed two years earlier. The entire commerce of the port of Kingston in 1803 was conducted by a fleet consisting of one boat and eight named vessels of twenty-five to ninety tons making between them a total of sixty-one entrances in the course of the shipping season. Apart from the Provincial Marine, based in Kingston and Amherstburg, and the government yacht, *Toronto*, there were not many more British vessels on the Lakes. The American fleet was even smaller.<sup>6</sup>

The first act establishing lighthouses in Upper Canada was passed in the spring of 1803. More precisely, two paragraphs were dropped into a lengthy bill dealing with the establishment of customs duties and their collection. Three lights were to

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<sup>4</sup> James Taylor, "Private Property, Public Interest, and the Role of the State in Nineteenth-Century Britain: The Case of the Lighthouses," *The Historical Journal* 44:3 (Sept. 2001), 749-771.

<sup>5</sup> Edwin C. Guillet, *Early Life in Upper Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1933), 504-16. W. H. Breithaupt, "Dundas Street and other early Upper Canada roads," in Ontario Historical Society, *Papers and Records* 21 (1924), 5-10.

<sup>6</sup> Customs Records, Port of Kingston, "Account of Vessels coming into the Port of Kingston, passing Isle Forest, between ..." for 26 Apr to 30 June, 1 July and 30 Sept., and 1 Oct. and 31 Dec., 1803, Library and Archives Canada (LAC), RG 16, Department of National Revenue, A-1, v. 133. For the Provincial Marine see Robert Malcolmson, "'Not Very Much Celebrated:' The Evolution and Nature of the Provincial Marine, 1755-1813," *The Northern Mariner* 11:1 (January 2001), 25-37. For want of a better study, on pioneer American shipping see J. B. Mansfield, ed., *History of the Great Lakes* (Chicago: J. H. Beers & Co., 1899), v. 1, chap. 10.