



Every Artifact Tells a Story – The Foghorn from the Fairport Harbor Lighthouse (Type CC Diaphone Fog Signal)

Beeeeeeeeeee-oooooooooh, the sound is magical, its music seductive, haunting as it reverberates in a grey colored waterscape. Its signal, a cadence hailing to seamen and landlubbers alike. The foghorn's lifesaving warning that emanated from shorelines to the sea - spoke to people, place and time.



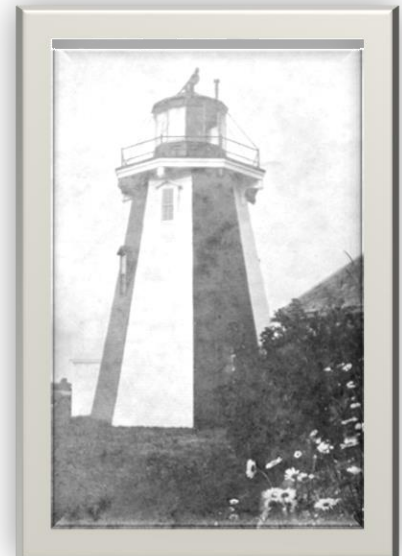
The foghorn's lament dates to 1854 when **Robert Foulis (1796-1866)** of St. John, New Brunswick, replaced the centuries-old lighthouse bell with his new and improved steam whistle creation. Lighthouses protected mariners along the Canadian coast; but foggy conditions presented a great hazard, with ship's often lost because the beacon was not visible. Fog bells were used but couldn't be heard at long distances. Cannon signals were also tried, but the cost and efficiency made that an unsatisfactory solution.

In 1818, Robert Foulis, a transplanted Scotsman intending to travel to Ohio, was diverted to the Canadian Maritime provinces by poor weather. He settled first in Halifax, Nova Scotia, and then in Saint John, New Brunswick.

Foulis worked at the lighthouse on New Brunswick's Partridge Island.

He was a civil engineer by training. Walking home in the fog one evening, he heard his daughter playing the piano and noticed how fog muffled the high notes she played, but the low notes were carried clearly. His observation gave him an idea.

Foulis built a steam whistle which could produce a very low note. His clever invention proved to be a much better fog alarm. A clockwork valve sounded it automatically at regular intervals so that ships at sea could gage their locations. The whistle's deep bellow could also be operated manually to send signals in Morse



code. **In 1859, the first foghorn was placed on Partridge Island, New Brunswick.**

The first steam-driven foghorn in the U.S. appeared in 1867 at Sandy Hook, New Jersey. Its chord notes were B-F-A or a B root, or more precisely it was a B7b5 chord. This new form of maritime communication started as an unwelcome sound, an intrusion to families, towns, and domiciles within earshot and able to hear its guttural drone. While weather could make it seem to be right outside your door, the foghorn's voice had a **20-mile range**. Its sound spoke differently to the one on shore, at sea or in the lighthouse.

In 1995, A Plain Dealer article mentioned the foghorn that was part of Fairport Harbor's Mardi Gras parade, a trailered artifact that has been seen on the parade route many times since.

What created the most 'buzz' was that the foghorn was a **CC Diaphone, one of two left on the Great Lakes**.

This chance encounter led to Jeffrey L. Laser, Ohio TOOT to express great interest in what he termed the Holy Grail of foghorns. Visits, documented research and visits by other notable maritime / U.S.C.G. 9th Coast Guard District experts provided the following details.

1925 was the first year of use for this CC Diaphone sound signal, with June 1, 1925 believed to be its first day of operation. This happened at the FH Westbreakwater Light. The horn characteristic was: **1 second blast, 1 second silent -- 1 second blast, 3 seconds silent -- 1 second blast, 23 seconds silent.**

This foghorn stayed in service at Fairport Harbor's channel until 1965, when it was replaced with the current one on site. In an effort to standardize and automate all land-based aids to navigation, the U.S. Coast Guard installed the electric pure tone fog signal- ELG-500. The introduction of radar, radar beacons and enclosed ship's bridges over time had changed shoreline to sea 'warnings' forever more. The 'grunt' of the old steam driven fog signal was lost to time with only cartoons, old radio shows or a 1970s Lifebuoy commercial to resurrect its once familiar sound. (The beloved Looney Tunes rooster, Foghorn Leghorn, was named in honor of his big personality and booming voice by Mel Blanc.)



Happily, what was not lost to time is the fact that FH CC Diaphone was saved and is on display at the Lighthouse and Marine Museum. It is fully functional, last bellowing on September 14, 2022. Parts circa 1966 and donated by the Coast Guard were used by the Fairport Harbor Historical Society in 1998 when the foghorn was restored by a horn, whistle, and bell enthusiast, Paul Shelton of Michigan City, Indiana. The only other known CC Diaphone display resides in Canada. The last active navigational Type F Diaphone (retired in October 1968) was returned to duty in Duluth, circa 1995. Come visit the Fairport Harbor Lighthouse & Marine Museum in 2023 and experience the disappearing music of the Great Lake's North Coast. The foghorn is often brought out for visitor display and soundings on Wednesday afternoons or for special events programming.



Sources: Fairport Harbor Historical Society archives; *Fog Signals*, USCG 1966; *Emergency Manual Foghorn*, Dwight Boyer, 1973; *Manual Foghorn*, USGC, 1973; *The Foghorn's Lament*, by Jennifer Lucy Allan, 2022; <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2017/oct/24/weatherwatch-piano-notes-key-to-victorian-inventors-foghorn>. 24 Oct 2017.

Submitted by Dan Maxson - Local Lore by Max (2010-2016), News-Herald Community Media Lab; Trustee, Curator - FHHS / Fairport Harbor Lighthouse & Marine Museum, 1996- present; Curator / Docent - Old Stone School, Concord Township, 2016 – present.

Additional research material added by Virginia Jeschelnic.