Lighthouses of Iceland and the Faroe Islands

By Jim and Nancy Cope

This summer's vacation plans took us back to Iceland for flights to Greenland and the Faroe Islands. In early July, 1993 we left New York's JFK and the 101° heat wave for a five hour flight to Reykjavik, Iceland's capital. There we were welcomed by a cool 43° temperature and 21 hours of daylight for extended sight-seeing.

From Iceland, we took two separate trips to Greenland (one to the Inuit village of Cape Dan on the east coast and the other to Narsausaq on the southern tip) that were filled with magnificent views of icebergs, mountain peaks and glaciers. Hiking through the scenic "Valley of the Flowers," greeting the Inuit (Eskimo) children, and visiting historic Viking settlements including Brattahlid, the home of Leif Ericson (who explored our northeastern coast, without the aid of lighthouses, more than 900 years ago) were wonderful experiences on this beautiful island of Greenland - the world's largest island. A real highlight of our vacation was cruising through the fiords, viewing the many sized icebergs tinted in various shades of blue. None of the bergs had lights on them and all were variations of the same color without any stripes or diamonds. We made several trips on a small fishing boat (used as a ferry /sight-seeing craft) piloted by the most skilled captain we've ever encountered. A pity we couldn't bring him back home (along with his boat) to conduct lighthouse tours for our New Jersey Chapter.

Another flight from Iceland took us to an entirely different terrain of rocks and cliffs in the secluded Faroe Islands. The Faroes are a group of 18 desolate islands located in the North Atlantic between Iceland and Norway, just north of Scotland. Seventeen islands are inhabited, although some have no roads. The islands are connected by a ferry system. Our prop plane landed on the island of Vagar. We then loaded our luggage on a bus expecting to be taken to our hotel. About one half hour later, to our surprise, the bus stopped at a small ferry. We followed the other passengers, unloaded our luggage, and carried it on the ferry. After a 15 minute trip we landed on the island of Streymoy, and again transferred our luggage on to another bus, arriving at our hotel some 45 minutes later. Our hotel was in the Faroe capital of Torshavn. As we explored town on foot, we were excited to locate a lighthouse, Skansin Light, at the end of town overlooking the harbor. The light is about 30' tall, of metal construction, with a ladder on the outside. It is two-thirds white with one-third red stripe at the top. Due to the inaccessibility of the other lighthouses, we were unable to see them. Our map indicates that there are three other lighthouses on outlying islands. In questioning our Faroese guide on a city tour, we found that her grandfather had been a lighthouse keeper on the island of Nolsoy. She recalls her grandmother telling her of having to walk 2.5 hours each way to go into town due to the lack of roads on the sparsely populated island.
Incidentally, one difficulty we have found traveling to foreign countries is the translation of the word “lighthouse” [See George Feier’s article in BEAM #13-ed]. In both Faroese and Icelandic “lítlu” is the word for lighthouse. When people learn English, “lighthouse” is not a common word taught, so we’ve learned to carry a picture of a lighthouse. In this case, a picture is definitely worth a thousand words!

Since flights to the Faroes and Greenland are limited and are only scheduled on specific days of the week, we knew it would be necessary to spend extra days in Reykjavik. We were delighted to return to Iceland again. Nine years ago we spent eventful weeks in Iceland touring the entire island by bus, visiting waterfalls, volcanos, glaciers, geysers, and thermal areas. Since we were on a guided tour, we only visited one lighthouse then. We returned this time with a list of local “things to do” such as pony trekking on the Icelandic ponies and visiting the old town harbor area.

While passing through our hotel lobby, however, we happened to see an island map hanging on the wall and noticed that Iceland’s entire coastline is dotted by about 50 lighthouses, plus another dozen or so on nearby islands. Being familiar with the road conditions on this barren, largely undeveloped island, we realized that most of these lighthouses would be difficult and timely to reach. Except for the cities, most roads are unpaved, made of dirt, gravel, or lava. A paved highway can turn into a rough gravel one with no warning or indication on a map. But then, we were staying in Reykjavik where half of Iceland’s population lives. We noticed that the nearby Reykjanes Peninsula (where the main airport, Keflavik, is located) contains several lighthouses. We hurried to the gift shop to purchase an area map and the clerk informed us that the roads are paved there. When we asked about locating lighthouses, she said, “You see the lighthouse, then head for it!” So, needless to say, we immediately proceeded to the nearest car rental and picked up a car for these two free days before our next flight.

As directed, we set out: map in hand, in our standard shift, compact car, looking for a lighthouse. Surprisingly, our first lighthouse in the distance was orange/yellow in color. Leaving the main road, with lighthouse in view, we drove from a paved road to a one-lane dirt road, and then into a gravel drive, where the sea was visible in the distance. Knocking on a farmhouse door, we asked the usual leading question, “Do you speak English?” The answer to this question seems always the same, “A little bit.” The Icelandic woman, like almost all Icelanders, was very pleasant and agreeable when we asked permission to cross her fenced property to see the lighthouse. Our little walk to the lighthouse involved at least a quarter mile hike across lava fields and horse pasture, climbing a barbed wire fence, and a muddy walk across marshlands. The orange/yellow concrete light with a yellow top was

Aslaksstadir Lighthouse, Iceland
Photo by Jim & Nancy Cope

Aslaksstadir Light. One of the few square (about 10') lighthouses we have seen, it is about 40' tall. It was impossible to get right up to the light as it was surrounded by the sea, a marsh, and a lagoon. Returning to the highway a little muddy and realizing that our first mistake of the day was leaving our hiking boots back at the hotel, we returned to the main road in search of Keflavik Light.

Keflavik Lighthouse, Iceland
Photo by Jim & Nancy Cope

After driving around the town of Keflavik searching for the light, we stopped at a fire station to ask assistance. Following a tour of the station and an invitation for
morning coffee, we followed the fire-fighter’s directions and headed toward Keflavik Light. This involved taking the dirt road by the cemetery and driving to the end, then hiking across another half mile of lava rock to a beautiful cliff above the sea. There we found the orange/yellow Keflavik Light with its yellow top. This concrete structure is about 40’ tall, about 18’ across at the base and 12’ at the top. Following our hike back to the car, we discovered that we could not move the car at all. Finally, we noticed that a huge piece of lava was caught under the car frame. At this point, we also realized that we should have rented a Jeep and not a Colt (obviously, the clerk who sold us our map and the man who rented us the car had never visited these lighthouses!) Removing the lava and returning to the highway, our trek around the peninsula continued.

Gardskagi Lighthouse, Iceland

Photo by Jim & Nancy Cope

The next three lights were all on paved roads and could be reached easily. Sandgerdi Light is a well maintained concrete lighthouse about 80’ tall and painted orange/yellow. This square lighthouse has a black vertical stripe which is about one-third the width of the lighthouse, covering the top half of the structure. It also has a large metal triangle fastened to the top/middle portion which faces the harbor. This lighthouse is most unusual as it is a part of a red building about 100’ long, appearing to be a type of storage building. A small road separates the lighthouse from the harbor.

The Gardskagi Light at the northwestern tip of the peninsula is a stately and magnificent concrete structure. This round lighthouse is about 90’ tall and all white except for the red top. Sixteen windows face the front of the lighthouse. Well off the tidal coast, the light has a keeper’s home right next door. The gate guarding the dirt driveway to the house had one of the few English signs we had seen - “Private”. Having to be content with our photos, we walked a very short distance to the end of a jetty where an old but very well-kept range marker stands. This square concrete marker has the appearance of once being a full lighthouse. Now with a flat roof, the white building has two red stripes at the upper portion. A very small 2-3 room building is attached and it seems that could have been a keeper’s home. A sign stated visitors could go inside for a fee, however, no one was around and the door was locked.

Reykjaness Viti (Light) on the southwestern tip of this peninsula is the most popular with local people. It is even included in one of the local tours, via tour van. Therefore, we were surprised that we had to travel miles of rough gravel/dirt road to reach this light. None of the roads are marked so we just followed the coast as much as possible. The lighthouse stands on a cliff so windy that Iceland’s
Reykjanies Lighthouse, Iceland

Photo by Jim & Nancy Cope

The flag constantly flies straight out. Nothing else is in the area, but the location is popular for birds that nest on the cliffs. Reykjanes Viti is a typical round concrete lighthouse about 50’ tall and about 20’ wide at the base. On the top of the light is a huge mast with a radio antenna on top. A set of “home made” stairs takes you almost straight up about 100’ from the keeper’s home to the light. A sturdy white rail provided us climbing assistance and would prove an invaluable aid in times of storms and fog on this point of land.

Hafnarfjordur Lighthouse, Iceland

Photo by Jim and Nancy Cope

The last lighthouse we visited was the most difficult to find. The map showed it located in the town of Hafnarfjordur. After driving around town and the harbor several times, showing our lighthouse picture and asking directions, we were fortunate to find some fluent English-speaking visitors. To our amazement, the small lighthouse was not near the sea but on a hill in the middle of a residential area. This lighthouse is more like a range beacon with a light on only one side. The corrugated metal building had to be held up on all four sides with cables. Freshly painted, the lighthouse had four red stripes and five white. Walking and driving around town, it is difficult to see the light, but it undoubtedly can be seen better from the sea. It appears as if the lighthouse and cables are in the backyards of four different homes on a hillside.

Due to the 21 hours of daylight in summer, we did not see any of these lighthouses in operation. Conversely, in the winter, when Iceland experiences 18-20 hours of darkness, these lights must have to work overtime.

Locating and photographing lighthouses is always a special part of our vacations. These eight lighthouses of the Faroe Islands and southwestern Iceland are all unique in structure and setting, all with lovely views of the sea. We were unable to learn much about these lights because of their remote locations, our language barrier, and the lack of local interest and enthusiasm for lighthouses. Unfortunately, these factors meant we had to abandon any thoughts of purchasing a book on Icelandic or Faroese lighthouses. Yet, we know that you, our fellow members of the New Jersey Chapter, would have shared our thrill and excitement in seeking and locating these lighthouses, each with its own character and special place along the Norse coast.

The Keeper’s Cache

The following items are available at Chapter Meetings or via mail. If ordered by mail please enclose price plus $2.50 per item for p&h. Make checks payable to U.S.L.H.S. - New Jersey Chapter and send to U.S.L.H.S. - New Jersey Chapter, Attn: Katie Moser, P.O. Box 4228, Brick, N.J. 08723.

NJ Chapter Logo articles
T-shirt (L & XL) in white or birch $10.00
Sweatshirt (L & XL) in birch $20.00
Hooded Sweatshirt (L & XL) in birch $25.00
Benton T-shirt (L & XL) in birch with navy trim $15.00
NJ Chapter logo rubber stamp $8.00

Keeper’s Bookshelf
The Lighthouses of Rhode Island, by Wally Welch, paperback, $9.00.
The Lighthouses of Maine, by Wally Welch, paperback, $11.00.
The Lighthouses of Massachusetts, by Wally Welch, paperback, $11.00.
Clockwise:


Posters are available at Twin Lights Historic Site, Fort Mott State Park, Batsto Village, and Cape May Point State Park for $5.00, or by mail $8.00 from DEPE Division of Parks and Forestry. Barnegat Light Poster, CN 404, Trenton, NJ 08625. Photo by Bill Geilfuss.

Newly constructed bulletin board at the East Point Lighthouse, paid for by the New Jersey Chapter. Photo by Kim M. Ruth.

New Jersey Chapters members at the East Point Lighthouse. Photo by John Siegel.

Al Smith in cupola at East Point Lighthouse. Photo by Kim M. Ruth.
Stony Point Lighthouse

by George M. Feirer, Historian

Standing on a bluff overlooking Haverstraw Bay is the Hudson River's oldest lighthouse. It, like so many others, has become a victim of age and improved technology.

In 1826 a field stone lighthouse tower was built on the site of a 1779 battle in which General "Mad Anthony" Wayne, with 1200 Light Infantrymen, modified British plans for permanent residence.

New York's Hudson River has played a very important part in the history and growth of our country. As an artery of transportation, by 1895 it required as many as 48 illuminated aids to navigation starting at Jeffrey's Hook and ending up-river at Troy. Most were post lamps or towers. The number of lighthouses never grew beyond thirteen. The first of these was Stony Point.

Funds amounting to $4500 were appropriated on May 26th, 1824, for the lighthouse's construction. Although several sources mention that Thomas Phillips contracted to build the stone lighthouse tower and dwelling place in July of 1826 for a cost of $3350, there appears to be one source who may be a challenge to that date (see notes).

Eight aspiring keepers applied for the Stony Point position and Cornelius W. Lansing was appointed on October 26, 1826. This fact is also contested (see notes). Not finding the tower completed, Keeper Lansing probably rigged a temporary device until sometime after March 14th of 1827 when he signed for eight patent lamps, eight twelve-inch reflectors, one iron stand to support them and the necessary supplies to keep the lamps lit.

The lighthouse is an octagonal tower whose walls are of blue splitstone, pointed with quicklime and sand mortar. At the top of the water-table the walls are 3 feet thick and taper to a thickness of 2 feet at the height of 20 feet, the base of the lantern room. The stone tower is 12 feet in diameter at the top and the lantern room resting upon it has a diameter of nine feet. This allowance of a walkway no wider than 18 inches demanded rather slender keepers if they planned on washing the outside of the glass panes. The original building had a cellar, two floors and the lantern room. The cellar was paved with large flat stone and the other floors were constructed of tongue and groove planks. A wooden stairway led from the first floor to the second, and a wooden ladder led from the second floor to the lantern room. At present it is not known how entry was made into the basement. In the 1860's a cellar entrance was added, but it was removed by the 1900's.
The entrance door was originally a 36-inch wide, four paneled wood door. Two windows are in the tower, one to the left of the doorway on the ground floor, and a second window in the floor above, directly over the entrance. A 1904 post card shows the second floor window to be a 4 over 4 double-hind with a stone lintel and sill. Sometime after 1904 the lower sash was blocked with stone, as was a four-paned transom over the door. It seems unlikely that these modifications were made for security reasons, as there is still a first floor window next to the entrance door.

At present, the lantern room floor consists of a wooden cornice and deck. Originally a 4-inch thick cut-stone deck secured with iron clamps and leaded joints was specified. The octagonal lantern room is constructed of wrought iron secured to the tower by 2-inch posts of the same material and with iron anchors. The original 1826 specifications called for 21 lights of "white glass, twelve by fourteen inches and one-sixth of an inch in thickness, the rabbets of the sashes to be 3/4 of an inch deep." Visibility being limited by white glass, we can assume such lights were of colorless glass. Part of the sash is hinged on the west side to permit access to the outside platform. The lantern is enclosed by a baluster 3 feet 6 inches high, constructed of 1 inch square wrought iron. The dome is formed by 16 wrought iron ribs that meet at a central open hoop and was covered with copper sheathing. This was open at the top to provide ventilation in the days when whale oil was burned. During the period when the State of New York was planning on restoration of the lighthouse, it was protected with asphalt roll roofing. The dome itself was to be black, with all other parts, including the tower, painted with white lead primer. The tower was then white-washed both inside and out. At present, everything is painted with oil-based white paint, except for the black lantern.

As is the case of most lighthouses with a venerable history, the illumination source has evolved. The original 8 patent lamps and twelve inch reflectors of 1826 were changed to fourteen inch reflectors and one less (7) lamp in 1838. In 1855, a 5th order Frensel lens was installed. In 1902, the light source was increased and the same year the lens was upgraded to a 4th order Frensel. At about the same time a fixed red light was installed at the end of Stony Point on the roof of the bell tower.

As most of the river traffic was concerned with up-stream navigation, the light shining from the 24-foot structure located on this 1500-foot high promontory could be seen a maximum of nearly twenty-two miles from the south and about three miles from the north. A fog bell was installed in 1855, but after 20 years the tower had deteriorated to such a condition that the bell was remounted on a bracket on the tower. In 1890, it was returned to a tower and programmed to be struck mechanically every fifteen seconds. The stone light tower was discontinued in 1925.

At present the lantern room is glazed with plexiglas and is without lens or lamp. The station and lower light continued and was manned until 1973.

During the active life-span of the lighthouse, it played host to many visitors, not the least of whom were Admirals Dewey and Schley, and General Sherman. Of course, since its discontinuance it has had many notable visitors, including the author and his wife.

A partial list of keepers follows:

- 1825: Robert Parkinson (see notes)
- 1826, October 26: Cornelius W. Lansing
- 1853, April 22: Alexander Rose (see notes)
- 1857, October 31: Nancy Rose (widow)
- 1904, May 17: Melinda Rose (daughter)
- 1905, December 1: Frank Guyette
- 1959-1968: John J. Kerr (last civilian keeper)
- 1968: Coast Guard personnel. The last Coast Guard keeper and the last keeper on the Hudson River was Terry Dixon.

Notes:

A biographical paper written by Melinda Rose, born January 5, 1851 and the last surviving child of Alexander and Nancy Rose, states that in 1825 her mother's uncle, Robert Parkinson was appointed the first lighthouse keeper at Stony Point. This date post-dates the funds appropriated

Postcard postmarked July 16, 1916, Stony Point, N.Y. showing keeper's dwelling and lighthouse.

(From collection of Kim M. Ruth)
for the light, but it pre-dates the year of 1826 when it was officially established. Until further information can be obtained the date and the name of Robert Parkinson must be held in question.

Bibliography

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State of New York, Stony Point Battlefield, State Historic Site, "History and Restoration Plan for Stony Point Lighthouse." No date.

Pagano, Melissa A., Park and Recreation Aide, State of New York, Stony Point Battlefield State Historic Site Personal communication.

Chapter Notes

by Kim M. Ruth

Elections for officers and board members for 1994 will take place at the chapter meeting on December 11, 1993, at the Jersey Shore Medical Center.

For the first time, we have two candidates for the office of President. The nominating committee selected Jack Granger as their candidate for the office, but Bill Geilfuss was nominated from the floor by Board Member George Feirer. Because we have two candidates for the office of President, a motion was made from the floor that the candidates present a "position paper" which would be printed in The Beam. These papers are included with this issue your newsletter.

Other nominations from the committee were: for 1st Vice President - Bill Geilfuss, 2nd Vice President - Kim Ruth, Treasurer - Marge Ridolfi, Secretary - Katie Moser. Dick Phillips was nominated for an expiring term on the Board. Jack Granger was nominated from the floor for the second board opening by George Feirer.

In other news, Rich Hellenbrecht resigned as a board member effective September 17, 1993. The remainder of Rich's term can be filled by presidential appointment or left vacant and filled at the December elections.

We thank Paul Bradley, who donated pictures and postcards, the sale of which was donated to the Maurice River Historical Society for the restoration of the East Point Lighthouse.

Our thanks also to Jim Gowdy, our featured speaker, and Al Smith for making the arrangements for our fall meeting and opening the East Point Lighthouse to us.

Photo Contest Winners!

Finally, in spite of many delays and other difficulties, we can announce the winners of the 1st New Jersey Chapter Photo Contest. Winners will receive certificates along with the prize money. FIRST PLACE ($25.00) - CARL NELSON - CAPE MAY LIGHTHOUSE. SECOND PLACE ($15.00) - ELLA CALL - CAPE OF ST. VINCENT LIGHTHOUSE. THIRD PLACE ($10.00) - APRIL L. ALDERSON - PORTLAND HEAD LIGHTHOUSE. Honorable Mentions go to Wendy Cikut - Portland Head Lighthouse, Al Smith - West Quoddy and Carl Nelson - East Point, N.J.

We thank the judges, Harold Wrona, Jean Haddock and Jane Preiser for officiating the contest for our chapter. We will reproduce the winning photographs in a future issue of THE BEAM.

Editor's Message

It seems a bit early to be thinking of the coming holidays, especially as this is being written on Halloween night, but this is our last newsletter of the year. We have entered our fourth year of publication (seems like much longer). From a small 4 page newsletter, to a 6 page one, and now to 8 pages and sometimes 10, we have grown in size as our group has grown in numbers. I am amazed at the number of new friends I have met and the things that we have shared. I suspect that this fellowship is one of the things that keep us together, although it is certainly our love of lighthouses that brings us together.

I have so many people to thank for making this newsletter possible. No one person could do it all. While I have to take credit or blame for the layout work and most of the typing and getting it out (sometimes barely so!), I have to thank my wife, Sharon, who proof-reads most of it and keeps the kids occupied while I am working on it; member Carl Nelson and Lincoln Graphics, for providing the excellent half-tones; the folks at Sir Speedy Mt. Holly for their advice and printing expertise; to the Panayotoff for their many contributions (we've considered changing The Beam to The Panayotoff Press); to Carole DiNapoli and George Feirer, Katharine Von Ahnen, Jim and Nancy Cope, Al Smith and Jack Granger for their contributions, for without you, we wouldn't have had a newsletter.

To the many new friends I have met and talked with in the last year, and to all of the membership, Sharon, Michael, Kevin, Eamonn & I wish you all a very joyous, happy and safe holiday season. I hope to meet and get to know more of you in the coming season.
Fall Cruise

Photos by John Siegel - Text by Carole DiNapoli

On a balmy October day, members and friends of the New Jersey Chapter set out from the Highlands Marina aboard the "Atlantic Star", Captained by Tom Buban.

Our first glimpse of a lighthouse was Blackwell's Island Light in the East River. Bagels and cream cheese were served as we headed towards Throgs Neck Light. We continued cruising into Long Island Sound to view Stepping Stones, Execution Rocks and Sands Point Lighthouses. On the return trip we sailed past Robbins Reef and Fort Wadsworth Lights. Nine hours and many rolls of film later, 70 happy, but tired, "lighthouse lovers" arrived back at the Highlands Marina.

Clockwise:
- Carole DiNapoli and Marge Ridolphi preparing the bagels for the long trip.
- Blackwell's Island Lighthouse, N.Y.
- Stepping Stone Lighthouse, N.Y.
- Execution Rocks Lighthouse, N.Y.
- NJC Members onboard the ATLANTIC STAR.
Chapter Meeting

The next meeting of the United States Lighthouse Society - New Jersey Chapter will be held at the Jersey Shore Medical Center, just off Route 33, in Neptune, N.J. on Saturday, December 11, from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

After the chapter's yearly elections, our speaker for the day will be Phil Correll, the newly hired coordinator for the New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail. The Trail was the idea of Senator Bill Bradley, and is a cooperative effort between the Federal Government's National Park Service and the State Government's Division of Parks and Forestry. The first trail theme, a maritime theme, opened on September 7th of this year. Most of New Jersey's land based lighthouses are on the trail. Phil will explain how the trail works and how the public's use of the trail will raise awareness of New Jersey's rich maritime resources.

At 2:00 p.m. we are expected at the Sea Girt Lighthouse. Nancy MacInnes has graciously arranged to have the lighthouse opened to chapter members from 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. after the meeting.

Directions:

From the north:
Take the Garden State Parkway south to Exit 100B onto Route 33 East (Corlies Avenue). The hospital is about 5 miles on the left side on Route 33.

From the south:
Take the Garden State Parkway north to Exit 100 onto Route 33 East. The hospital is about five miles on the left side of Route 33.

From the west:
Take the New Jersey Turnpike to Exit 7A (Shore Points). Follow I-195 east to Route 138. Take Route 18 north to Neptune Exit/Route 33. Make a left at the light at the end of the exit ramp onto Route 33 East. Hospital is 1 mile on the left side of Route 33.

Parking is at the West Lot - to the left of the front entrance as you are facing the building, or the North Lot which is behind the building and labeled as employee parking.

It's Renewal Time!

A reminder that USLHS-NJC dues are due January 1, 1994. A renewal notice is enclosed with this issue of The Beam. Please send new memberships or renewals to our general address at:

USLHS-New Jersey Chapter
P.O. Box 4228
Brick, NJ 08723

Arrival of New Keeper

Editor and Vice President Kim M. Ruth and his wife Sharon F. Fitzpatrick are pleased to announce that Eamonn Fitzpatrick-Ruth has reported for duty. The little keeper arrived on station October 19, 1993 at 8:24 p.m. He was 8 lbs, 8 ozs, and 21 1/4" inches. Mother and baby are doing fine, brothers Mike and Kevin are ecstatic, and Dad is a bit overwhelmed! Incidentally, Eamonn is an Irish name for Edmund.

Coming Issue:

A Visit to Trinity House and Lights Across the Pond by Ted & Jo Panayotoff.

The Beam, the official journal of the United States Lighthouse Society-New Jersey Chapter, Inc., is published quarterly, usually March, June, September and December. Membership dues are $15.00 single and $20.00 family. Memberships are for the calendar year. Back issues are available free for members joining mid-year.

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