Lighthouses of North East Florida

by Ted and Jo Panayotoff

A Christmas trip to visit relatives on the Central Florida coast gave us an opportunity to see and photograph four lighthouses in Northeast Florida. All are in or close to the Jacksonville, Florida, metropolitan area. The four represent an interesting cross section of architectural styles, ages and local history.

Amelia Island Lighthouse

This lighthouse, which is at the north end of Amelia Island, is the northernmost lighthouse on the Florida Atlantic coast. Amelia Island is one of the offshore barrier island chain that begins at Cape Hatteras, North Carolina, and continues to Central Florida at Cape Canaveral. The 64 foot brick lighthouse was constructed in 1839 on the high point of the island to add to the Atlantic shore chain of lighthouses and to mark the entrance to the St. Mary’s River and the important port of Fernandia Beach. The structure had originally been on Cumberland Island, Georgia, on the north side of the St. Mary’s River and was dismantled and moved to Amelia Island when Florida became a U.S. Territory.

After the Civil War, port development shifted south to Jacksonville and the town became a small Victorian resort. The Amelia Island light, however, retained its importance as a primary light for guiding offshore shipping, which in the southbound direction along the Florida coast had to keep in the “channel” between the offshore shoals and the swiftly flowing northbound gulf stream. Located at the site are the white lighthouse tower, keeper’s house, oil house and other ancillary buildings. Because of its elevated location, the focal plane of its third order lens is 105 feet above sea level. The Coast Guard maintains a family in the keeper’s house for site security. It is located about one half mile inland on Lighthouse Circle, just north of Route A1A (Atlantic Avenue) in Fernandia Beach. When seeking photo locations, permission should be obtained from the Coast Guard before entering the grounds and care given to the private property surrounding the lighthouse because it is now in a residential area.

St. Johns River Lighthouse

If you follow Route A1A south on Amelia Island, it
will bring you to the location of the next two northeast Florida lights; just follow the signs to the Mayport Ferry. The ferry, which takes you on a 15 minute ride across the St. Johns River, connects to the continuation of route A1A on the south bank in Mayport, Florida. The ferry runs every half hour from 6:30 AM to 10:30 PM and affords a view of the St. Johns River Lighthouse as you near the ferry slip on the south bank.

The red brick St. Johns River Lighthouse was constructed in 1859 and was the third lighthouse to mark the increasingly important entrance to the St. Johns River and the port of Jacksonville. The original tower was 66 feet high and in 1887 it was raised an additional 15 feet to improve its visibility. The light, with its third order lens, remained in use until 1929 when it was replaced by the St. Johns Lightship, stationed 7 miles off the mouth of the river. In 1969, the lighthouse site became part of the Mayport Naval Station. The lighthouse can be seen from outside the Naval Station to the left of Route A1A just after leaving the ferry slip. Access is also possible on the station during weekend visiting hours from 10:00 AM to 4:30 PM on Saturday and 1:00 PM to 4:00 PM on Sunday. Directions should be obtained from the visitors’ building or security personnel at the main gate on A1A and Wonder Wood Drive.

At the site of the lighthouse, all evidence of the keeper’s house, oil house, etc., is gone, covered by approximately 8 feet of fill added to the area when the naval base and airfield were constructed. Conspicuously missing is the entrance to the tower, also buried under the fill. While not an ideal situation it is better than if the tower, protected since 1982 on the National Register of Historic Places, had been razed as was once suggested because it was a hazard to the air operations at the base.

St. Johns Light Station

Also on the Mayport Naval Station is the St. Johns Light Station, which was built to replace the St. Johns Lightship in 1954. It is probably one of the most modern lighthouse structures to be constructed by the Coast Guard. The 64 foot high concrete tower is unique both for its architectural appearance and for the special beacon that is the light. The combination is decidedly a non-traditional lighthouse. The St. Johns Light Station was automated in 1967; however, the site is still maintained by the Coast Guard. Security personnel at the Naval Station gate will supply you with written directions to the lighthouse during visiting hours. The lighthouse is open to the public and rooms on the lower level contain exhibits from the American Lighthouse Museum in Jacksonville Beach, Florida, a few miles south of Mayport on Route A1A.

If you are lucky, your tour guide may be William Trotter, the Director and Curator of the American Lighthouse Museum and noted Coast Guard and lighthouse artist. Some of his work—both paintings and models—are on display at the lighthouse. Access to the lighthouse includes a climb up the inside of the square tower and a walk around the beacon on the "roof." Time constraints did not allow us to visit the American Lighthouse Museum, however, it should be well worth a future visit. Mr. Trotter is very knowledgeable about lighthouse history, especially of those in Florida and the Southeastern U.S., and is most willing to share his interest and knowledge with visitors. Our visit with him was most enjoyable.

St. Augustine Lighthouse

If you remain on Route A1A going south after leaving the main gate of the Mayport Naval Station, you will soon arrive at St. Augustine, Florida, the location of the last lighthouse on our visit. This light is located on Anastasia Island, a few blocks east of Route A1A. The 161 foot brick tower with a first order lens was completed in 1874 to replace an older light which dated from 1824. The older 73 foot structure called the Old Spanish Lighthouse was destroyed by erosion in 1880. The tower is painted a distinctive pattern of black and white diagonal stripes similar to Cape Hatteras Light. The lighthouse structure is a near duplicate of those at Cape Hatteras, Bodie Island, and Currituck Beach on the outer banks of North Carolina. In 1955 the lighthouse was automated, and the keeper’s house vacated. In 1970 the keepers house was extensively damaged in a fire set by vandals, however, in 1988 a major renova-
tion project was completed and now the keeper’s house is a museum, gift shop and video theater. Recently the lighthouse itself has been opened for tours. The nominal fee for the museum and lighthouse tour is well worth the price and supports restoration efforts. It was the highlight of our Florida lighthouse visits last Christmas and is a very worthy stop, especially during its daily open hours from 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM.

These four lighthouses are only a few of the many interesting and unique ones along the Florida Atlantic and Gulf coasts.

Further information of Florida lighthouses is available in:
Florida Lighthouses by Kenen M. McCarthy with illustrations by William Trotter of the American Lighthouse Museum.
Guide to Florida Lighthouses by Elinor De Wire.

TIME: 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
DETAILS: See map enclosed with your newsletter

Barnegat Lightship - Photo by Carl Nelson

We will meet in the museum’s auditorium at 10:00 A.M. Due to limited space we suggest that you not bring memorabilia (this time only). The museum is the finest in the country. We will have a presentation by the Curator and will be able to browse throughout all 4 floors. Admission fees have been waived for members.

Afterward we will walk three blocks to the Barnegat Lightship and will be given a guided tour of the lightship.

Parking is 2 blocks from the museum as indicated on the map. There is a fee for parking. See you in Philly!

From the President’s Desk

by Jack Granger

Hi Folks - We have almost completed our second year of operation if you count from the June 30, 1990, meeting where we decided to get serious. However, we are almost half way into our second membership and all is well. We have almost 270 members. That is gratifying to all of your officers and directors.

I have noticed that members are more relaxed at meetings and it shows the proper spirit of the group when people meet and greet each other and swap stories and experiences.

We have been getting good publicity. The Journal of Morris County in Morristown is preparing an article on our group and is planning a longer pictorial article on our group. That will make the ninth paper which includes The Star Ledger, Asbury Park Press, Jersey Journal, Atlantic City Press and the New York Times plus several local papers. Recently, WOR-TV (Channel 9 - New York) has contacted me and plans to do a TV program
on the Chapter.

We have a good working relationship with the Virginia Chapter and its President, Herb Entwhistle. In March, I was joined by several of our members in Delaware where we saw the Fenwick Island Light and the Overfalls Lightship plus several lights in the Delaware Bay. A boat trip had to be cancelled due to gale force winds. We did have an opportunity to meet some of our Southern Virginian brethren.

On April 22, 1992, we had 70 people in Kingston, New York, where our chartered boat took us to see Saugerties Light, Roundout II Light and Esopus Meadows Light. There were several people from Virginia, two from Florida and several from New York on the trip. The weather cooperated somewhat so we could get some pictures.

Presently we are working on another New York Harbor cruise that went over so well last summer. Also there is a Long Island Cruise in the works for sometime in September.

We are looking into the possibility of a 10K run in the fall. It will go from Sandy Hook to Twin Lights and back to Sandy Hook. Debbie Torres, our new publicity person is working on that event.

Future meetings will be at Sandy Hook on October 3, 1992, at 10:00 A.M. and at Absecon Lighthouse on December 5, 1992 at 10:00 A.M. Ross Holland will be our guest speaker in October. Jim Gowdy is working on the arrangements for the Absecon meeting. We are planning on having Ken Black, Curator of the Shore Village Museum as our speaker.

Other Chapter news -

Barbara Cowling has assumed the duties of our Membership Chair. Pat Paulus has resigned as our Activities Chair. We owe a great debt to Pat Paulus for the hard work, time, and expense spent organizing and planning most of the clubs trips to date. I will be picking up the duties until a worthy successor can be found. Thank you, Pat.

Lighthouse Ferry Boat Cruise at Cape May Point

by Katherine Von Ahnen

On Saturday, June 27th, the Grand Lighthouse ferry boat cruise will leave the dock at 5:00 p.m. and return at approximately 7:00 p.m. Boarding will begin at 4:30 P.M. Admission price is $22.00 for Adults and $11.00 for children and will include free admission to the Cape May Point Lighthouse tower.

Watch the dolphins play as you sail lazily by the Cape May Point Lighthouse and Brandywine Shoal Lighthouse. Live bands for dancing on each of two decks, cash bar, strolling entertainers, complimentary refreshments, and a brand new t-shirt for mariners will all be part of the day's entertainment.

All proceeds benefit the restoration of the Cape May Lighthouse. For more information, call the Mid-Atlantic Center for the Arts at Cape May, (609) 884-5404. See you aboard.

1st Annual Photography Contest

by Rich Hellenbrecht

Welcome Keepers! You are invited and encouraged to submit slides and photographs of lighthouses, lightships, and other lighthouse related items to our 1st Annual Photography contest.

When should you enter? Now! We will begin accepting entries immediately, but all entries must be received by the September meeting at the Sandy Hook Lighthouse.

We will accept 35mm slides, color photos, and black and white photos. Photos should be at least 5"x7", preferably mounted for display purposes. Up to five entries per person. All photographs should have the name of the photographer and the subject on the back (on labels please so they don't ruin your prints!). Slides should have the same information placed on the mount. All submissions become the property of the New Jersey Chapter. There will be prizes, so hurry with your entry before Carl Nelson walks off with everything.

Jane Warren and Hank Miller, both professional photographers not associated with the chapter, have agreed to be the judges for what we hope will become an annual event.

Eligibility - New Jersey Chapter Membership. Judging Committee not eligible.
New Jersey Chapter Hudson River Cruise

By all accounts the weather could have been better, but the comradaric couldn’t. Braving cold and rain, members cruised the Hudson River, visiting the Saugerties, Roundout and Esopus Meadows Lighthouses. Some members took the opportunity to visit shore-based lighthouses on the trip up or back, such as the Stony Point or Tarrytown Lighthouses. For those who didn’t make the trip here’s a sampling of what you missed. (Photos courtesy of Bill Geilfuss).
Awards - Awards will be 1st, 2nd, 3rd place. Honorable mentions will depend on the number of entries received and the quality of the submissions.

Send entries to:
Rich Hellenbrecht
39 Hillcrest Boulevard
Warren, NJ 07059

New Lighthouse Publication

*Lighthouse Digest*, a new magazine devoted to lighthouses, life-saving stations, lightships and other nautical news from around the nation has just begun publication in May. Subscription rates are $24.00 for 8 issues. Their address is *Lighthouse Digest*, P.O. Box 2748, South Portland, Maine 04108 or call (207) 934-9137.

Future Activities

by Jack Granger

I have temporarily taken over as Activity Chairman until we find a replacement for Pat Paulus. In the past, we received expressions of interest in various activities from members who attended our meetings.

I feel this does not give us an accurate picture because some people cannot make meetings and therefore cannot make their wishes known. We are using a new approach so that all members can indicate their interest and we can plan accordingly.

Currently we have two cruises under consideration:

Cruise #1 - Long Island Sound - 12 lighthouses - in September or October
Cruise #2 - A repeat of last year's successful cruise in New York harbor with minor changes (drop Ambrose Lightship, add Old Orchard Shoal).

I cannot quote prices at this time, but we have been successful in negotiating reasonable rates in the past.

If you are not at the Philadelphia meeting please use the enclosed questionnaire so we have some means of gauging your interest. Thank you.

Hereford Inlet Lighthouse Day

Ed Hewitt reports that the Hereford Inlet Lighthouse will be having a Hereford Inlet Lighthouse Day on June 20, 1992, with a craft show and refreshments available. The rain date is June 21, 1992.

The lighthouse is located at 1st and Central Avenues in North Wildwood, New Jersey. You can call the lighthouse at (609) 522-4520 or 522-2030.

The Littlest Keeper

Editor Kim, and proofreader wife, Sharon, have been busy with more than just the publishing of *The Beam*. The newest keeper in the Ruth-Fitzpatrick clan is Kevin Joseph, born March 28, 1992 at 5:13 pm, and weighing in at 8 lbs. 6ozs. Mother and new keeper are doing fine; We're not so sure about dad!

For Sale

At this writing, we have about 11 of the Maryland Lighthouse Posters available for $12.50. This is a discount for us, as they usually sell for $15.00.

We are also having rubber stamps with our chapter logo manufactured for your use. Prices haven't been set yet, but will probably be about $7.00 - $7.50 each.

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

**Officers and Board Members**

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