Paradise Island Lighthouse

by George M. Feirer, Historian

The Commonwealth of The Bahamas is blessed (from our point of view) with upwards of one hundred lights, of which ten may well be considered major. The one most likely to come within our range of vision is located on the western tip of Paradise Island. This delightful little tropical locale, now used for the escape from daily chores of the so-called rich and famous, was once known by the more prosaic name of Hog Island. Certainly not an appellation to attract tourists!

If we can give Lord Dunsmore credit for clairvoyance, his setting aside of the western tip of the island for “crown use” made the site available for the eventual location of a lighthouse. The light, however, was not to be for many years. A feeble attempt at an aid to navigation was installed upon the completion of Fort Fincastle (on neighboring New Providence Island, slightly west of metropolitan Nassau) by affixing a lantern to “it’s northern angle.” This was in 1794. Lanterns have not made the most effective light, but ships moved much more slowly in those days and could adjust their direction more easily when within a mile of shore.

In May of 1816, after better heads prevailed, Alexander McBride prepared plans and specifications for the construction of a lighthouse. James Wood submitted the accepted bid. Preparations were made for the laying of the “cornerstone” on October 2, 1816. This was to be no minor occasion, for the group most apt to be familiar with ceremony and protocol on New Providence Island, the masons, were given the honor of holding the dedication. Two lodges were involved: Number 242 marched from their rooms on Shirley Street to join with lodge Number 298 at waterside, where they embarked and sailed across the harbor to the west end of Hog Island. After suitable speeches were made, His Majesty’s 2nd West India Regiment Band tooted a few tootles and a nine-gun salute was fired from artillery at Hog Island Point. This was answered by an equal number of guns firing from Fort Charlotte located across the harbor entrance and up on the hill. This basically finished the ceremony, except for the fact that at one point a “phial” was buried and cemented in the “bedrock” containing some appropriate momentos, very much like our time-capsules of today. I assume it is still there.

Paradise Island Lighthouse
(Hog Island Light)

Photo by George Feirer

The limestone for the tower was quarried close-by, and the depression from which it came can still be seen, although quite covered with vegetation. The tower, after taking the better part of a year to erect, was topped by an octagonal lantern made in England, and on September 1,
1817, was lit for the first time.

As with most exposed lighthouses, the Hog Island Lighthouse has suffered through many storms, including one reported in 1866 as throwing waves over the island that were equal to the level of the gallery, sixty feet above the sea. John Drudge, known affectionately as “The Admiral,” cared for the light for thirty-seven years during its halcyon days and carried kerosene up its wooden stairs until April of 1931, when the light was semi-automated and he was retired on a pension of 120£ a year.

Floors and interior wooden walls are beyond redemption. The assistant keeper's house was washed away in a storm while actively being used, and the assistant keeper would have gone with it except for the heroic efforts of John Drudge to save him. The flag pole is no longer in existence, although its location can be seen.

When the light last flickered out, I do not know, but 1964 nautical guides gave information that there was “one flash every five seconds” and it “changed to red when bar is dangerous.”

Information available indicates that the last alteration to the light was in 1931, it was visible for 14 miles, the lens was 66 feet above high water, and the white tower, located on the west point of “Hogg” Island was 63 feet high. Its nautical position is given as 25° 6’ North Latitude and 77° 22’ West Longitude.

Those wishing to photograph the lighthouse from a distance can avail themselves of several boats that either go between Paradise Island and the City of Nassau, or ride a “banana boat” that travels along the north beach area and can be boarded from one of the several hotels on the island. A waterproof camera is indicated for the “banana boat” ride, however.

The source of energy was changed to gas in 1931 and even this system required someone to turn the cylinder on and off. Egbert Hall was hired to do this, along with hoisting the flag, until 1948 when he was replaced with Eugene Hall. By 1958, the light was completely automated and personnel were no longer needed except for occasional maintenance.

A visit to the site today revealed a very much neglected lighthouse and keeper’s dwelling. The lantern has different panes of glass, some sides a diamond shape and others rectangular. The side with an access door to the gallery is covered with wood. The door is half-off and the two sides of the lantern are without glass. The masonry steps leading to the tower door are intact, but the iron railing is lying on the coral nearby and the iron tower door has been left wide open. The floor of the lighthouse still contains banks of old, rusted acetylene tanks and the steps leading to the lantern room give the appearance of being decidedly unsafe. I did not feel motivated to enter, so I limited myself to photographing the tanks and stairs for the record.

The keeper’s house, a tiny, square building with porch, is in the last stages of collapse. The quarried limestone (old coral bed) exterior walls are still reclaimable, but the roof, for those wishing to visit the light itself, a small boat might be chartered in Nassau for a trip across the harbor. There is no place to dock that is easily accessible and how one might go ashore that way is difficult to foresee. I choose the landward approach, and that too was quite difficult.

There are no roads nor accesses for vehicles of any kind beyond the Paradise Beach Inn & Pavilion. The only
route is to travel the sand westward on Paradise Beach and Colonial Beach. The walk starts out very nicely, and other than being on soft sand (making walking difficult especially when loaded with photographic equipment) it is a pleasant stroll.

For some indefinable reason, when property was described on the western end of Paradise Island, each parcel was completely across the island, from waterline to waterline, with no through for access except by boat and private dock. The parcels are separated by limestone walls and/or fences, leaving one the “water and rock route” if one hopes to travel laterally along the island. Desirous of making a record of the installation, this was my choice. If you don’t mind crawling over and around rather large coral rocks, passing by a “nudist beach” (unoccupied during my traverse) [Or else we’d expect pictures! -ed.] getting wet if you slip and putting up with an exhausting walk, this is for you.

Accompanying photographs show the current condition of the lighthouse and the keeper’s quarters, and although it is in a poor state, it is still a wonderful experience to stand out there on a windswept point of coral rock, watching out over the blue sea toward an incoming ship. Even as a day-mark, it has probably outlived its usefulness, but nostalgia can never be denied.

References:


Thelma Mack, Reference Librarian, Portsmouth Public Library, City of Portsmouth, Virginia. Personal communications.

A Great Big Postcard
To All The Folks At Home:

by Joan Walton

Every year on my birthday I go someplace new and meet someone new. On my 60th I stood on the brink of Bryce Canyon, Utah – fantastic! On my 61st, it was Puget Sound: Admiralty Head, Mukilteo and Point Wilson Lighthouses. I missed the lightship at Seattle/Tacoma and couldn’t find the one at Anacortes. My 62nd took me to Salt Lake City and the lake where there were no lighthouses but a great golden seagull on a pillar (not salt). So when my 63rd rolled around, I was ready. It’s nice to have children who move around a lot and provide backgrounds for my photos, but they are planning to come East instead. Having just returned from the Outer Banks and Sapelo Island, Georgia (where I met the granddaughter of the keeper of St. Simons, Cumberland, and Sapelo – more later from her) – the thought of Delaware seemed a letdown. But BIG SURPRISE! It was new and exciting and worthwhile.

I think of the lights as the candles on my cake and every year it gets a lot brighter, thank heaven.

“God-Light,” artists call it – those rays of sunshine beaming down from the clouds in a painting or photograph. There is someone I would like you all to meet: Martha Steller Bierman, from Smyrna, Delaware – the inspiration for this trip. Martha stands in “God-light.” Her father was the keeper of the Reedy Island Rear Range Light at Taylor’s Bridge, near Port Penn. Actually, he kept two lighthouses at the same time and raised a family of five children. Of course, his wife helped.

Reedy Island Rear Range Light at Taylor’s Bridge, Delaware - “Needs paint”

April 5, 1994
Martha is bright, cheerful and has a wonderful memory and attitude. We spent the day in the company of her neighbor, my sister-in-law Jean, and my sister Carolyn, driving around to the lights and introducing ourselves to anyone who was available to listen and talk. Now that’s when I should have had a tape recorder! We started with lunch at Port Penn and had the famous crab cakes and strawberry pie. Martha navigated for me, first to Liston Rear Range Light (restored) where we met Virginia Spicer, whose husband and brother-in-law purchased the two keeper’s cottages. The keeper in 1938 was named Spencer. Ms. Spicer’s son was also present. Mr. Spicer is a teacher and historian and belongs to several historical societies in the area, so he is well versed in the stories of this light and others. They shared with us memories of their years as they invited us inside to see the photograph (oval frame, curved glass) taken in 1919, and the certificate from the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Prized possessions. Lovely hospitable people.

Our next stop was Taylor’s Bridge and Reedy Island Rear Range Lighthouse where Martha and her brothers were born and lived for about 12 years, then to the church they attended just up the road, and the general store her father ran (another 30 years) to bring in more money to feed the family. The photos are of Martha and the light and the house, which she says could use some paint. It was always well maintained when they lived there. In her eighties, she still drives and visits regularly.

What a sad sight. Someone should do something! Drove back to Smyrna with Jean and Martha and promises to return. Carolyn and I went on to Chestertown, Maryland, and dinner. (I have the metabolism of a shrew!) The next day Jane (bridesmaid) joined us and we had lunch at St. Michael’s and paid our respects to Hooper Strait. What a beautiful restoration and setting. Jane had come fully supplied with maps of Kent County and the Chesapeake lights, having been forewarned. (These proved helpful on June 4th for the Baltimore Harbor/Chesapeake Cruise.) The docent at Hooper Strait was charming and a member of the Chesapeake Chapter. She and her husband are “sailors” from Connecticut so are currently at sea. If you visit on a Wednesday in the Fall, be sure to identify yourself and meet another interesting lighthouse person. Since then she has sent me articles on screwpiles which I would be delighted to share upon request.

Liston Front Range Light, near Port Penn, in Bayview - “past Hangman’s Hill.”
April 5, 1994

We traveled on to Bayview and the Spanish-style building some say is the Liston Front Range Light (some say not). I thought it was beautiful.

Couldn’t leave the area without seeing Mispillion.

Two views of the Reedy Island Rear Range Lighthouse, Taylors Bridge, Delaware. Photo on top shows pole light which preceded the iron tower.
Dear Sir, I am writing you for a Birth Certificate. I have a 35 1/2 Faith Lead and the Custom House is looking for a Birth Certificate. I have an Emily Leland of New Britain, CT.

I was born in the early 19th century in Bridgeton, NJ, the son of a lighthouse keeper. At 20 years old, I left the lighthouse to work in the city, but eventually returned to Bridgeton. At 25, I married Emily Leland. Our first child was born in 1877.

My son, John D. Stellar, was born in 1882 and worked at the lighthouse for many years. He married Martha Bierman in 1912.

Enclosed is a letter from Martha Bierman requesting a copy of her birth certificate, born in 1912 in Delaware.

Sincerely,

John D. Stellar

Taylor Bridge

Delaware

---

Letter from John D. Stellar (keeper of Cross Ledge and Reed Island Lighthouses and Martha Bierman's father) requesting a copy of his birth certificate.
A few weeks ago instead of going to Massachusetts for the New England Lighthouse Foundation breakfast at West Dennis, I returned to Delaware via the ferry and saw the Overfalls Lighthship at Lewes as well as the Zwaanendael Museum, and Fenwick Island Lighthouse, open to the public three days per year, so check your dates. Had lunch and met the chef at the Lighthouse Restaurant and had an interesting conversation with the ferry captain on the return trip about Nova Scotia and Newfoundland Lights, etc. Just say “lighthouse” and the whole world glows! Amazing. There is nothing like a birthday to inspire one to do today instead of tomorrow. How about Hawaii in ’95 or all those lights on the coast of Brittany? I’m game.

Program Signals

From The Program Committee:

Fall Meeting – Saturday, October 1, 1994, at 11 A.M. promptly.

The business meeting will be held at the Auditorium on the grounds of Sandy Hook National Park.

Guest speaker will be Dr. Harlan Hamilton, author of Lights and Legends of Long Island Sound. Dr. Hamilton also teaches English at Jersey City State College. He will present a one and a half hour slide presentation of lights featured in his book and will autograph books purchased that day along with those already owned.

A lunch break will take place after the speaker and before the business meeting. Please bring a bag lunch as there are no restaurants nearby.

The Sandy Hook Lighthouse will be open on a limited basis.

Directions: Sandy Hook National Park is off of Exit 117 of the Garden State Parkway. Follow Route 36 to signs for Sandy Hook.


Business meeting to be held at the Billingsport Volunteer Fire Company Hall on Billingsport Road, Paulsboro. Elections will follow the business meeting.

During ballot counting, lighthouse enthusiast and Chapter member Dan McFadden will give a presentation on Fourteen Foot Light in Delaware Bay. Dan is a former Coast Guardsman and we look forward to hearing of his experiences as a Keeper.

Tinicum Rear Range will be open to members and guests on this day.

Absecon Lighthouse Restoration Program

by Jack Granger

Some time ago, I heard about a serious effort to restore the Absecon Lighthouse. I tried to find out who was involved and what their plans were. Recently, I gave my lighthouse presentation to a group in Margate, New Jersey. After I was through, I was approached by Ms. Felicia Grondin, who is a legislative liaison with the N.J. Casino Commission, and also the President of the Inlet Public/Private Association, a non-profit corporation that has been formed to do the restoration.

Briefly, the I.P.P.A. plans to raise $1.5 million through a number of fund-raising activities and has commissioned the same engineering company that did the Barnegat and Cape May restorations to do the same for Absecon.

Ms. Grondin and I have developed a good rapport and she has invited me to a fund-raising activity on the boardwalk in Atlantic City [exact location unknown at this time], on Friday, September 23rd, where I will make a presentation on lighthouses.

I have reported this information to Tom Laverty, Chairman of the N.J. Preservation Commission who will be the working liaison with the Inlet Public/Private Corporation.

As information becomes available, it will be passed on to the membership. I think this will be an excellent way for the N.J. Society to become involved in a very worthwhile activity.

From the President’s Desk

by Jack Granger

By the time you read this, we will be in the waning months of 1994. Where does the time go?

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome our many new members. Some of you I have already met, and I look ahead to meeting all of you. To our veteran members, I extend to you my appreciation for your continued support.

So far we have had a good year based on the comments I have received from you. The Barnegat meeting with our speaker on Tucker’s Island was well received. The boat cruise out of the Inner Harbor in Baltimore was blessed with beautiful weather as was our fourth birthday picnic meeting (complete with cake) at Finn’s Point and Fort Mott State Park. I knew that Betty Husarik was a
NJC Baltimore Cruise
June 4, 1994
Photos by John Siegel

Clockwise: NJC Members and friends, Sandy Point Lighthouse, Baltimore Lighthouse, Fort Carroll Light atop Fort Carroll in Baltimore Harbor.
“doer,” but the weather she provided was beyond the call of duty. Thank you Betty, and also the park authority and staff for their courtesy.

Looking ahead to the rest of the year, we can anticipate our Sandy Hook meeting on October 1 and our fall Long Island Cruise out of Norwalk, Connecticut, on October 15th. The agenda for the December meeting is being completed with Yvonne Miller working at breakneck speed as usual.

On a more somber note, we were all saddened at the sad demise of WLV-189 as was graphically portrayed in Nancy Hackney’s pictures in the June BEAM. It was truly sad to see that happen when we only have about 14 lightships existing in the country.

I want to publicly thank Joan Walton on the great membership promotion she carried out and also Yvonne Miller as the program person. She has very specific ideas for 1995. The hospitality really shows thanks to Betty Smith. Our Preservation Committee is working at top speed with Tom Laverty and his enthusiastic committee. My thanks to the Board for their support. I cannot forget the members who contribute to the BEAM, and Kim’s great editing and layout work. Remember all contributions are welcome.

Lastly, I want to remind the veteran members and to tell the newer members that this is your organization. The Officers and Board are here to serve you, so let us have your ideas and wishes.

See you soon.

Jack

In the article, Mr. Wheeler, the President of the United States Lighthouse Society, strongly suggested that members write to the museum demanding that the lens be returned to the lighthouse. You can imagine the consternation that has arisen. I have received a number of rather strong objections to the article, which, I repeat, is Mr. Wheeler’s and not mine. I have taken no stand, nor will I, because I do not know any of the circumstances.

I have written a strong letter to Mr. Wheeler insisting on a clarification. I am sorry that Mr. Wheeler’s opinion was attributed to me and that this incident has caused such misunderstandings.

The Votes are in!
by Kim M. Ruth

The results of the special vote on whether or not to retain our United States Lighthouse Society affiliation are in. By a vote of 212 to 10, the members of the chapter have voted not to continue our affiliation with the USLHS. The votes were counted by committee members, not officers or board members.

Our new name will be the New Jersey Lighthouse Society. Our initials will be NJLHS. We decided to keep the “H,” even though grammatically incorrect because it has historical significance and overtones and fits in with one of the aspects of our organization. At one time the lighthouse service in this country was called the United States Light House Establishment, and even today, USLHE can be seen on some boundary markers and doorways at many light stations.

Clarification of article in summer edition of the “Keeper’s Log”

For all of you who are members of the United States Lighthouse Society and anyone else who read the latest issue of the LOG, I want to clarify a point that has raised much controversy.

In the North Atlantic District section, page 38, there was an article on the Cape May Lighthouse restoration which, among other things, discussed the first order Fresnel lens that once was in the lighthouse, but is now located in the Cape May Historical and Genealogical Museum in Cape May Court House. I understand there are mixed feelings as to just where the lens should be.

The article appears in the section that is headed up by my name and Herb Entwistle’s name giving it the appearance of a by-line with the articles by both of us.

***** This is a mistaken impression *****

*** The article was written by Wayne Wheeler ***

Doorway of the Staten Island Rear Range Lighthouse, built 1909, with USLHS over the doorway.

Photo by Kim M. Ruth
ATTENTION

PHOTOGRAPHERS!

by Carl Nelson

Our second photo contest is planned for the March meeting. All members are encouraged to enter and share their favorite lighthouse photos.

Each entrant may submit up to 3 color and/or 3 monochrome prints. Complete rules for the contest are included in this issue of the BEAM (to the left - ed).

Workshops on mounting and matting are being planned to assist in the technique of enhancing and presenting your photos.

More details to follow in the upcoming issues of the BEAM, so dust off those cameras, take those memorable shots, and be prepared for this event.

Solution to last issue's Crossword

Rules for 2nd Photo Contest - Print Competition

1. All entrants must be currently paid up members of the New Jersey Lighthouse Society.
2. Any judges or Photography Committee are not eligible.
3. Awards will be given for First, Second, and Third Places. Honorable Mentions will be given depending on the number of entries, and at the discretion of the judges and the Photo Contest Chairperson.
4. Special awards may be given at the discretion of the judges and the Photo Contest Chairperson.
5. Each print must have a minimum of 50 square inches and a maximum of 320 square inches.
6. Each print must be mounted, one image per mount. Framed or unmounted prints will not be accepted. Matted prints are preferred, but are not required.
7. Each print must be identified on the back with the exhibitor's name and title of the print. No identification should be on the first; this will disqualify the entry.
8. Prints may be created by any source, but the photographs must be the work of the exhibitor.
9. Monochrome prints will be judged separately from color prints. There must be a minimum of three entrants in either category for a qualified competition.
10. Exhibits are limited to three entries per category.
11. All entries will be returned. Entries should be reclaimed at the conclusion of the competition. The Photo Chairperson is not responsible for entries left at the conclusion, but will take reasonable care of the entries until they can be claimed by the exhibitors.
Welcome New Members!

Belletten, Jackie
Bloom, Madelyn
Blom, Magda & Padilla & Frances
Burchie, Mike & Wanda
Cocco, John
DeAndrea, Elaine
Ferguson, Gail & Frederick
Ferry, Andrew
Freeman, Albert & Nancy
Hudak, Eleanor
Idell, Mrs. Ruth
Jameson, Doreen
Koblish, Cameron & Martha
Lang, Robert
Leslie, Frank
Liland, Mary
Meyer, Mr. & Mrs. Alan
Munson, Marjorie
Panesis, Grace
Provenzale, Carole
Quenzel, F. Neale
Raup, Gene & Teddy
Reitzo, Mr. & Mrs. Carmen
Schmoyer, Carl III

Letters...

We all know how devoted a lighthouse buff can be. Here’s a letter we received from the husband of member H. Virginia McMullin that’s speaks to that devotion;

29th June 1994

New Jersey Chapter-U.S. Lighthouse Society

My dear wife Ginny (H. Virginia McMullin) was strong on lighthouses. The house has plenty of her keepsakes from a tiny thimble lighthouse to an oil painting. On the rear bumper of my pick-up truck, I have the sticker “I break for lighthouses!” I thought it was a bit silly at the time but it was easy to spot my truck in the hospital parking space when I went to visit her. She died last month. I had promised her to mail off these light-house clippings although you probably have copies and you probably know the information they contain.

Sincerely,

Robert McMullin

H. Virginia McMullin grew up near Owl’s Head Light, Maine. She was a collector of all things lighthouse. She died in April, 1994. Our belated condolences to her husband Robert.

Schmoyer, Carl III
Smith, Jane
Sohyda, Bryan
Stevenson, Ruth
Taylor, Elsie
Weems, Don & Judy & Family
Wells, Robert
Wright, William

Post Card Pals

Erik Lund
Skipperstræde 5
2791 Dragør
Denmark

Collects lighthouse postcards only.

The Beam, the official journal of the New Jersey Lighthouse Society, 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.

All materials are copyrighted and cannot be borrowed or reproduced without permission of the New Jersey Lighthouse Society, Inc. The New Jersey Lighthouse Society, Inc., is a Not-For-Profit Corporation.

Officers and Board Members

President
Jack Granger
(908) 255-7484
Vice President
Tom Laverty
(908) 872-2966
2nd Vice President
Kim M. Ruth
(609) 386-4296
Secretary
Kathy Hackney
(609) 965-1043
Treasurer
Marie Ridolfi
(609) 448-5378
Board Member
Fred Theis
(609) 654-2451
Board Member
George Feirer
(609) 628-2210
Board Member
Jack Thompson
(908) 531-8502
Board Member
Richard Phillips
(908) 270-3177
Board Member
Ted Panayotoff
(908) 876-4831

Committees

Activities
Carole DiNapoli
(908) 297-4280
Historian
George Feirer
(609) 628-2210
Preservation
Tom Laverty
(908) 872-2966
Memberships
Joan Walton
(609) 361-8410
Newsletter Editor
Kim M. Ruth
(609) 386-4296
Publicity
Debbie Torres
(908) 872-8068
Program Chair
Yvonne Miller
(609) 654-2451
Hospitality Chair
Betty Smith
(609) 546-7810

General Address:
New Jersey Lighthouse Society, Inc.
P.O. Box 4228
Brick, NJ 08723