Touring the South Carolina Lights

by Al Smith

Betty and I joined the Chesapeake Chapter of the U.S. Lighthouse Society on an excursion to South Carolina on Columbus Day weekend. We met them on Saturday morning on Cap’n Rodd’s Low Country Plantation Tours boat for a trip to Georgetown Lighthouse at the entrance to Winyah Bay. Along for the ride was Captain Rodd’s "mentor," Cap’n Sandy who, it turned out, was a great story teller. He related the tale of the Georgetown lighthouse keeper’s daughter who drowned while they tried to return to the lighthouse to light it in a storm. He told us that the girl’s ghost was seen many times by seamen warning them of approaching storms. Cap’n Sandy told us he saw her once when he was a cook and it was only the Captain's belief in the ghost that saved the ship he was on. Believe me, he had EVERYONE’S attention.

We were able to land on North Island, which is used as a rehabilitation center for delinquent children, and found that the lighthouse was open. We all had the chance to climb the 124 steps to the top and view the fourth order Fresnel lens in place there. The windows are very cloudy, probably plastic, which made for poor viewing. It was a beautiful day, however, and that made for many good pictures.

After spending about a half hour on the island we 'shoved off' and headed for Cape Romain. Along the way Rudy Kagerer, author of A Guidebook to Lighthouses of North and South Carolina, Georgia and Florida’s East Coast, told us all we needed to know about the South Carolina Lights. Rudy has a great sense of humor and is a good story-teller also. It made for an interesting passage. We also used that time to consume the lunches that were provided for us, which made the passage even better!
This lighthouse has its own tale of horror and ghosts. Seems the wife of Keeper Fischer inherited some gold and jewelry and wanted to use the money to return home and visit family.

Keeper Fischer did not want her to 'waste' the money that way and after a huge argument, she ran out and buried her 'treasure'. When she returned, Keeper Fischer, still in a rage, killed her with a butcher knife. They say her ghost still roams the beach on stormy nights looking for her treasure!

Upon returning to Georgetown we all set out for Beaufort, S.C. and a late night dinner mixed with some very tired fellowship. Hilary Salley, our tour planner, gave us the news we had all been hoping for: we would be allowed to go to the REAL Hilton Head Lighthouse!

The first Cape Romain lighthouse was built in 1827 on "Raccoon Island" but proved to be too short at 65 feet. A new tower, 150 feet tall, was built next to it in 1857. The old tower, sans lantern room, is still there and makes for an interesting comparison. Although we couldn't go on the island, now called Lighthouse Island, we were close enough to get good shots of the recently painted structures. The lighthouse now serves as a very distinctive day mark with its black and white upper panels and all white bottom.

Sunday morning dawned as beautiful as Saturday and since Betty and I were on the late boat to Haig Point Rear Range we were able to sleep in 'just a little bit'. Unfortunately, only the first 25 people who signed up for the tour were allowed to land on "Mongin" Island, named for Captain John Mongin who claimed that the Island was granted to him by George II in 1740. The lighthouse is now a bed and breakfast for employees of International Paper and they did not want a bunch of people tramping through the house. Those that did get on the island only saw the first floor. While it would have been nice to get a little closer, we were still able to get good pictures.

Our boat departed from Harbour Town Marina and, I'm sure, we ALL know that lighthouse. It was built in 1969 and is the symbol of Sea Pines Plantation. It has been seen many times on TV as it is across the harbor from the 18th green of a famous (I'm not a golfer) course.
Then, the “piece de resistance!” Hilton Head Lighthouse! The lighthouse is located on Palmetto Dunes Resort on the golf course and is private property. They would only allow us to take 9 cars so 40 people squeezed together and away we went. This is a rear range light and appears to be in good condition. We were able to spend a good deal of time there. Rudy told us that the keeper’s house was now a deli at Harbour Town Marina. We all got together and took a number of group pictures at the base of the lighthouse. One of the cisterns used to collect water is still there and in surprisingly good condition.

Hilton Head has its ghost also. She is called the Blue Lady of Hilton Head. She is Caroline, the daughter of Keeper Adam Fripp. Keeper Fripp had a heart attack at the height of a fierce storm that flooded the island and Caroline tended the light and her father until the storm abated and she was able to move him to the house. He died a short time later and she, grief stricken, died soon after. Some say they have seen her in the windows of the lighthouse or at the foot of it in a torn and bedraggled blue dress, hence the name.

While that was the end of the ‘official’ trip, Betty & I decided that there was one more lighthouse close enough to seen before returning to the hotel.

We set off for Hunting Island Lighthouse. The existing lighthouse is the second one and it is in its second location, having been moved due to beach erosion. The tower is 140 feet high and has 181 steps. The last time I was there I was able to get into the lighthouse and climbed to the top where I found they had inverted a street lamp to provide a ‘glow’. There have been a number of improvements there including new signs and an outline of the keeper’s house. It’s still a beautiful setting, surrounded by the white picket fence and all.

After a good night’s sleep we headed for home. Betty asked if I had been to Morris Island Lighthouse and plotted a course there when I said no. Well, it turned out I had been there but knew it as Charleston Light. The pictures I had weren’t very good so I took the opportunity to try to improve on them. It was a great day and you could see the new Charleston Lighthouse (Sullivan Island Lighthouse) in the distance. In spite of it being the only Lighthouse in the U.S. with an elevator, Rudy told us he has been there twice and has had to walk up both times because the elevator didn’t work! The old lighthouse sits on the remnants of the island which has been eroded away. The new lighthouse is 163 feet high and has a range of 26 miles with a light that has the potential output of 28 million candlepower!

Seventeen hundred miles later, we arrived home Tuesday evening, just in time to get ready for work on Wednesday!

Sandy Hook Lighthouse Receives $884,000

The National Park Service (NPS) has been given $884,000 to restore the historic Sandy Hook Lighthouse, built in 1764. News of the congressional appropriation has been met with enthusiasm by the Park Service staff, and members of the NJLHS who have been giving tours there for the past two years.

Ownership of the lighthouse was transferred in 1997 from the United States Coast Guard to the NPS, and is administered by the Sandy Hook Unit of Gateway National Recreation Area. Our Society entered into a cooperative agreement with the NPS to provide tours. Since then NJLHS volunteers have logged more than 2,500 hours taking visitors up the 97 steps to the top. In 1997, 4,915 visitors climbed the Sandy Hook Lighthouse.

The Federal appropriation will allow the NPS to stabilize the lighthouse structure, return most of the tower to its mid-19th century appearance, and make safety improvements to the interior. Layers of exterior paint applied over the years will be removed and a new fresh coat applied. This should remove the stains from deteriorating metal work at the top of the tower. The back-up beacon mounted on the pole behind the lantern room will be removed and the modern battery equipment used to provide power to the light during outages will be less intrusive. Plexiglas covering the windows leading up the circular stairs will be replaced with glass. The metal work, railing and plaster will all be repaired. The grounds will be made handicapped accessible.
It is hoped that restoration work will begin in the spring or summer of next year and will take three to four months to complete. One disadvantage is that the tower will be closed down during restoration.

The Society volunteers are deciding weather to keep an active weekend presence in the form of an information table or tours around the grounds while work is in progress.

**President's Corner**

*by Tom Laverty*

The National Lighthouse Center and Museum (NLCM) had a kick off celebration October 17, at the old lighthouse depot on Staten Island, New York. The site was selected by the National Lighthouse Museum Steering Committee to be the home for the new NLCM. Establishing a national museum devoted to lighthouses has been a dream of many people for a long time. About two years ago the process of selecting a site began. Representatives from most of the major lighthouse organizations in the country met in Washington D. C. to lay the ground work and form the Steering Committee. A sub-committee was formed to visit potential locations. Organizations from around the country were invited to submit proposals and, eventually, six sites were selected for in-depth consideration by the committee. Another meeting took place in Rhode Island last March, and finally in July of this year, we met in Washington D.C. to hear final presentations, review the findings of the site selection committee, and then we voted on a site. Staten Island was the committee's choice, although Mackinaw City, Michigan; Norwalk, Connecticut; Point Judith, Rhode Island; Rockland, Maine; and Hull, Massachusetts, all put together excellent proposals and presentations.

So on a bright sunny Saturday this past October, a crowd of several hundred people came out to view exhibits, tour a Coast Guard Cutter, and enjoy the afternoon festivities at the former Staten Island Lighthouse Depot. The day before, New York Governor Pataki announced $335,000 in funding for the site so work could begin on stabilization of the six historic structures located there. An additional amount of money was added from the Staten Island Borough President's Office, and a group of local banks gave $55,000 in operating money to the new NLCM Board of Trustees. New Jersey Lighthouse Society members Yvonne Miller and Debbie Megonigal, staffed an NJLHS exhibit table at the event, aided by other NJLHS members who live in the area. I was there representing our society as a board member of the National Steering Committee.

Since the purposes of the National Lighthouse Steering Committee had been fulfilled, we met prior to the festivities and disbanded the organization. Two new groups, the NLCM Board of Trustees and the American Lighthouse Coordinating Committee (ALCC) were formed. I was appointed to the interim Board of Trustees and chair of the Collections Committee. The NLCM Board will direct the formation of the new National Lighthouse Museum. The ALCC will remain a separate organization and provide a forum for lighthouse groups around the country to work on common goals and concerns. The ALCC will be open to any group interested in the preservation of lighthouses and NJLHS will continue to be a member and participate in meetings and projects.

On another note, remember the December meeting is an important one. We vote for new officers. If you vote by absentee ballot, please remember ballots have to be at our post office box by Friday, December 4th (before the meeting), or they will not make it into the election count.

I would like to wish everyone a safe and joyous holiday season!
I’m happy to report (a little belated) that our enthusiastic travelers departed Rutgers University our bus driver and new friend.

Arriving in Maine ahead of schedule, we met David, our tour guide, and were off to see our first lighthouse, Portsmouth Head. By 4:00 p.m., we were on a cruise out to the Isle of Shoals.

Each day was busy from morning until night. One thousand four-hundred and thirty miles and 18 lights from Kennebunkport, Boothbay Harbor to Pemaquid, all beautiful coastal towns. Cruise to three lighthouses, a visit to Pemaquid Museum ending with a slide presentation by NJLHS owner Ted Panyatoff. (Ted and Jo, are the proprietors of The Elms, in Camden, Maine).

We were blessed with picture perfect blue skies at many light especially at Portland Head. In Acadia National Park, we enjoyed a delicious lunch in a beautiful setting, the Jordan Pond House, and then drove to the top of Cadillac Mountain.

David, our guide, added a special visit to Marshall Point on our last morning, which was the most beautiful site. It was a wonderful way to end our tour of Maine. Leon, our driver, then took over for a fun ride home. We stopped at the Maine State Prison, at one more seafood restaurant for lunch, and the grand finale, a visit to Lighthouse Depot!

Many, many thanks to everyone on the trip for making it a success. Special thanks to George Scott for being our lighthouse photography consultant.
For those who expressed sadness at seeing the destroyed keeper's house, there is some good news. On October 29, 1998 the structure was finally demolished to make way for rebuilding to start just as soon as the money is made available. However, Sara plans to open the tower for tours during the first three weekends in December. There are some repairs needed first. Before traveling any great distance to visit the lighthouse, it would be wise to check for exact times and dates by calling (609) 449-1360.

On October 29, 1998, the burned out remains of the keeper's house at the Absecon Lighthouse were demolished

photo by Elinor Veit

NJLHS Pledges Funds To Absecon Lighthouse For Museum Displays

by Rich & Elinor Veit

On September 26, 1998 the New Jersey Lighthouse Society held its fall meeting at the Uptown Complex in Atlantic City, NJ. After the business part of the meeting, Tom Laverty, President of the NJLHS presented a $2,500 check to Stuart Wiser, President of the Inlet Public/Private Association and Sara Cureton, Executive Director of Absecon Lighthouse. This was the first installment of a six-thousand dollar pledge to be given to the IPPA over the next two years. The donation will be used for interpretive exhibits at the lighthouse museum.

The program for the day was a slide presentation of the restoration of the Absecon Lighthouse, moderated by Sara Cureton. Sadly, she also informed the members of the society that the insurance company that holds the policy covering the lighthouse has refused to pay for the damage caused by the devastating fire of July 6, 1998. They do not consider the keeper's dwelling part of the lighthouse. This will now have to be settled through litigation.

After the program, Sara Cureton, with the help of her volunteer "keepers" invited the NJLHS members to tour the tower of the lighthouse. They were the first group to climb the 228 steps of the lighthouse since its restoration.

Staff of The Beam - Editor Kim Ruth, proof-reader and in-house consultant Sharon Fitzpatrick and their four boys were among the many people who climbed the 228 steps of the tower of Absecon Lighthouse. Yes, there are four children. Look closely, that's not Kevin's shadow but brother Eamonn hiding behind him. Mike is above Dad and Sean is in the backpack

photo by Elinor Veit
Counting Lighthouses?

by Ernest W. Corts

For quite some time now, I've found myself wondering about the many various definitions of what a lighthouse visit is. It would appear to me that an Andy Rooney approach to this question might help shed some light on a serious topic among lighthouse lovers.

Let me explain. I have been visiting and photographing lighthouses with my wife and children for over twenty years. We've enjoyed the challenge of finding the lighthouse and then returning many times to get the so-called, "perfect picture." Twenty years ago we didn't have the aid of a variety of books about lighthouses. In fact, if you found four or five you probably found all that were written on the subject. But, in the course of the past few years, something has happened. Lighthouses have somehow endeared themselves to many individuals. The past twenty years has also brought to the front two very different but yet active views towards lighthouses. The first would be preservation and the second would be demolition/automation.

When visiting a lighthouse that has been adopted by a preservation group you are, more often than not, overjoyed by the efforts. The labors of the preservation group offer you rewards that are etched in your mind for years to come. If you can get that perfect picture, you can refresh that memory again and again. If you're fortunate enough to get your family in the shot you can probably remember the picnic lunch, nearby artist, or the boat ride you took to the lighthouse. You may even get a chuckle out of the wrong turn you made prior to your arrival, which at the time didn't seem funny at all.

But in truth perhaps the buildings, tower and gift shops aren't original at all. In fact, all of them may have been refurbished, rebuilt, or possibly not even close to the original design. This type of experience, to many, is the only lighthouse experience they have, unlike twenty years ago.

That visit is undoubtedly a countable visit! It really didn't matter that the tower wasn't the color it was in 1848 when it was first built. Furthermore, all the artifacts that are present at this lighthouse only enhance your desire to list this as a complete, countable lighthouse.

There are many lighthouses around the U.S. that would fit this description. Many people have seen Cape Hatteras, but few have seen Ocracoke, and fewer still Cape Lookout. Many people have seen Cape Nedick (Nubble Light) but few recognize Boon Island a few miles off in the distance. When we, as lighthouse enthusiasts, experience this type of preservation effort, we should respond wholeheartedly with a donation, a note of appreciation, or perhaps we could visit their gift shop and purchase a souvenir, postcard or another item.

Secondly, there is that lighthouse that has stood not only the test of time, but also the ongoing fight for recognition as a countable lighthouse. Some have only the tower in existence, many have been ravaged by storms and have little or no support for their current endangerment. Many have fallen victim to vandals. Even more have fallen under a government effort to automate and tear down excess buildings. The government of Canada has been extremely active in demolishing structures, including many towers, and rebuilding only a skeleton tower. It has practically gone unnoticed what they have done to the Lighthouses of Newfoundland. Furthermore, there appears to be more demolition, decay, and politics ahead. Sure, it's disappointing to visit a lighthouse that has a very nondescript gray tower with a wire fence around it. It's even more disappointing to take a picture of it. But, does that mean it isn't a countable lighthouse or the visit was in vain?

And what about that tower at the end of the breakwater? You know the breakwater I'm talking about, the one that you attempted to walk! The one where the waves splashed over the rocks and you got wet. How about the one where you slipped on the sand on the rocks and bruised your knees. Big time? Better yet was the one where the insects were so bad that you thought this was their home breeding ground. When you finally arrived at the end of the breakwater, you found some strange looking red tower that had no cupola. The Fresnel lens had been removed and replaced by some stick with a light bulb in it! There was no keeper's house, no boathouse; in fact, there was no boat to take you back to your motel or campsite. Besides all that, the sky has changed dramatically, and if you don't soon get another lousy picture of another stick tower, you're going to get caught in a thunderstorm.

But in truth, wasn't there a time when someone did walk that breakwater every day. Or perhaps, they rowed a boat through similar stormy water to the tower. Sometimes, they did it numerous times every day. In fact, the pay to do this job was a paltry sum and they may or may not have been given a residence or an allowance for living expenses. I can recall a story of friends who started out one fine, warm day to visit Turkey Point Lighthouse, near Elkton, Maryland. They were going there because we had recommended the nice walk and the amazing view from atop the perilous cliff. The next day they reported that after driving over two hours, one way, and walking for hours along the shoreline, and, finally, climbing an amazingly high bluff, they couldn't find the remains of Turkey Point. Yes, that's right! All that remains of Turkey Point is the tower and a small out building.

Finally, there is that tower on a distant island. You saw it through your binoculars, the day when the fog finally lifted. Regardless of what size zoom lens you have, it won't take a picture larger that a dot and no one will recognize it. So what do you do? Sure, you might hire a boat, or perhaps you could fly over the tower. Well, once aboard the boat you discover it is tossing so vicariously that you can't possibly hold the camera steady enough to take a picture. After they are developed, all you can
tell from the blurry shots, for sure is that there is a building and a
tower. Oh yes, I need to mention that the day you flew over the
tower, a freak rainstorm hit and the fog was so thick that your
pictures looked like white billows of smoke.

Perhaps we that love lighthouses are too consumed in count-
ing the number of lights/lighthouses/ruins we visit. Maybe writ-
ing in the Andy Rooney approach to this question wasn't the
right mode. Perhaps the Paul Harvey approach would have been
better! Let me see...and the rest of the story is... I hope it is quite
simple, that when we get involved in counting we're likely to
miss the extraordinary efforts of those who have spent time,
funds, and energy in preserving lighthouses. Just as important,
we have missed the "love of adventure" that is so often asso-
ciated with visiting a remote lighthouse. Truly these are the things
that make lighthouse hunting worthwhile. Oh, I almost forgot to
tell you that our friends did go back to Turkey Point a second
time. They found it this time. I believe it was number forty-four
for them, but then, who's counting?

Society News

The winners of the Annual NJLHS T-shirt Contest were:
Tamarra Barton in the Handicrafted Division; Katie Moser for the Most
Unusual; Diane Falicki and Rod Mulligan for the T-shirt featuring the lighthouse farthest away.

Program Signals

by Yvonne Miller

The December 5, 1998 meeting will be held at the Heisler-
ville Community Hall in Heislerville, NJ. The usual time sche-
dule will be followed. Hospitality starting at 10:30 p.m., the Gen-
eral Membership Meeting at 11 a.m. Election of the Board fol-
lowed by a break for lunch. A presentation will be given and we
can then travel to the East Point Lighthouse for a tour.

Directions to Heislerville:
From the North take 295, NJ Turnpike south to Rt. 42. Fol-
low signs for Atlantic City; shortly after the signs for Atlantic
City take Rt. 55 South until the end. Rt. 55 empties traffic onto
Rt. 47. Follow Rt. 47 until the signs for Heislerville. Bear to the
right. This is the main street. The Community Hall will be on the
right.

March Meeting:
Plans for the March, 1999 meeting are still being finalized.
This will be the Photo Contest meeting. Plans will be on our web
site as soon as available and in the Spring issue of The Beam.

Fall Meeting Recap:
The September meeting in Atlantic City was probably one
of the best meetings I have had the pleasure to arrange. Every-
thing went like clockwork. Thanks to the staff of the Uptown
School Complex. Tom Laverty presented a check from our
Preservation Fund and the Memorial Fund to Sara Cureton and
Stuart Wiser of the Inlet Public Private Association. The presenta-
tion by Sara Cureton was excellent and she tells me that the
sales of their merchandise was very good. Bill Gately was pre-
sent to sign his book, Sentinels of the Shore. Thanks to Bill's
book and the NJN video, Eye of the Mariner, our Ways and
Means committee sales broke all records. The finale was the tour
of the Absecon Lighthouse, which was open for our members
and guests. NJLHS was the first group to climb the tower since
the renovations and we thank Sara and the IPPA for the opportun-
ity and honor.

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