Irish Lights

with John Eagle

by Janet Cerame Sebastian

Noted photographer John Eagle was my very knowledge-
able escort for my week in Ireland touring Irish Lighthouses. Our first stop was The Mizen Head in County Cork. Originally built as a fog signal station in 1909, it was first lit in 1959, and automated in 1993. While it doesn’t have the charm associated with other Irish lighthouses, it makes up for it by offering spectacular views of the surrounding cliffs and the Atlantic Ocean. The Visitor’s Center and lighthouse are reached by crossing a concrete foot bridge that spans the cliffs. Waves crash 50 meters below. For those of you that know me, crossing the span was no small feat, as I’m terrified of heights. I was bound and determined to cross the bridge and was rewarded with some of the most spectacular views I’ve ever seen in Ireland. The Visitor’s Center is very nicely done, offering a glimpse of the keeper’s life and information about the Fastnet Light which sits 4 miles offshore. I was pleased to meet former keeper Stephen O’Sullivan who showed me about Known as the Tear drop of Ireland, the Fastnet Lighthouse must be the most well known of Irish Lighthouses. Fastnet stands 200 feet tall and took 7 years to build. When we arrived at Mizen Head, I was very disappointed that I could not see the Fastnet Lighthouse, as the weather had been teasing us with showers off and on. But as we were leaving the skies cleared just long enough for me to see it. What a wonderful treat!

John decided that since I was there, I needed to go where most tourists don’t venture, so we went to Dursey Island. Dursey Island is reached by cable car (certified to carry 3 men and a cow!). Once again, my issue with heights was tested, but I was very pleased that we went. We walked the 4 miles out to the end where we were able to see the stump of the Calf Rock Lighthouse, Bull Rock Lighthouse and, in the distance, the Skelligs. We were blessed with a beautiful sunny day. We then had to walk the 4 miles back to the cable car to leave the island, all the way enjoying the sights, cliffs, sheep and the Atlantic Ocean.

On another day we ventured north to County Clare where we boarded the ferry to cross the River Shannon and got a nice view of Tarbert Lighthouse. John’s photograph of this light-
© Commissioners of Irish Lights
Used with permission.
Irish Lights

Mizen Head Lighthouse (in distance) established in 1909 as a fog signal station. It was first used as a lighthouse in 1959.

Kilcredaun Lighthouse, sited near Carrigaholt on the Shannon River. The light was established on September 1, 1824, and was automated July 11, 1979. It has a white light which flashes every 6 seconds.

Loop Head Lighthouse, County Clare. A cottage type light was built there in the 17th Century. The first lighthouse was established there in 1802 and the present tower dates from 1854.
house was featured on an Irish postage stamp. We then went on to visit Kilcredan Lighthouse, which is owned by the River Shannon Estuary Commission. We were able to climb the 3-story tower. The keeper had her houseplants and Irish lace curtains in the lighthouse windows. We then drove the 10 miles to Loop Head Lighthouse. Built in 1854, it is walled in to protect the keepers, their families and their livestock from the cliffs that surround the light station on three sides.

From my window on the plane I got a lovely bird's-eye view of the Bailey Light, the red "Poolbeg" Light in Dublin Harbor and the 2 lighthouses in Banagher.

John and I also saw Roancarrig Lighthouse, Little Sampshire Island Light and Scattery Island Lighthouse.

The Irish lighthouses are full of history and legend. The oldest is Hook Head Light, believed to have been built in 1172 by a group of monks concerned over tending to the victims and burying the bodies from the numerous shipwrecks.

John was a wonderful guide. His postcards of the Irish lights are in many of the shops along our route. He has just finished his book, *An Eagle View of Ireland*, which will be published soon.

I'm very lucky to be able to put my two interests, travel and lighthouses together. On a recent tour of Irish Lights, even the motorcoach driver, John O'Neill, got involved, climbing the lighthouses with the tour group. He wrote a poem about the experience (re-printed below). The group, which included NJLHS members Rudy & Samantha Picardi, Roland & Lilian Fulde, Louise McKenna, Killy Williams, and myself, toured eight Irish lights, met with eight lighthouse keepers, and saw and photographed over 25 lighthouses. If you are interested in participating in future tours, please call Tricolor International Tours at 732-774-1959.

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**"Oh to the Lighthouse"**

The next lighthouse is very close, It must be out here by the coast. They told us that the light is lit, Just drive up there, you can't miss it.

Back up John, it is not here, We're very close now, do not fear. In the distance we can see the light, We won't get home before night.

Come on John, are you all set? The view from here is the best one yet. Climb up here John, don't be slow, We've 15 more lighthouses to go!

It's almost nine and I can fear, Tonight now, I will have no beer! Well, they tell me that I must hurry. They'll see 2 more if we cross the ferry!

Of these lighthouses, I am very sick, But, the cameras still go click. click, click! Perhaps if we turn down this way, We'll see 2 more near Galley Bay.

But the Lighthouse family are not too bad, And on leaving now, I feel quite sad. This time, I won't shed a tear, And you all might be back next year!

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John O'Neill
Of Killiarney, Ireland
21-June-1999

For more information about Irish lighthouses, the Commissioners of Irish Lighthouses have a wonderful website at www.cil.ie/home.html. The site features maps (which they kindly granted us permission to re-print), a photo gallery and their newsletter, (also called Beam). Their newsletter has a section on new aids to navigation and features articles on recent events in their lighthouse service, such as "Emergency Operations at Kish Lighthouse." The motto of the Irish Lighthouse Service is "In Salutem Omnium," which, loosely translated, means "For the safety of all."

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**Climbing Lighthouses**

by Ernest W. Corty

Recently we were reminded of the number of emotions that occur when you climb a lighthouse. We were with dear friends visiting Sandy Hook Lighthouse in New Jersey. The April day was cool and the sky was remarkably beautiful. We were all looking forward to the view from the top, as the visibility was incredible from below. We were climbing to the first landing area, some 40+ steps to the top, when Dawnelle, my wife, insisted that she couldn't continue any further. It was at this junction that Mike, our tour host, broke into a discussion of how vigilant the former lighthouse keepers must have been. He said something to the effect that "they were able to carry a ten gallon container of oil, weighing some remarkable total per pound, more than ten times daily to the top of the tower".

All my wife and I could think about was how we could keep from hyperventilating and breaking out in a cold sweat. Perspiration was quite a feat for a day when the temperature barely broke into the fifties. Next, Mike added to our two daughters that, "you may have to carry some of the oil in the dark, because carrying a candle to light your way may cause the oil to ignite". Do you get the same picture that I got, the top of Sandy Hook lighthouse rocketing into the sky headed towards New York City?

Let me side-step this opening scenario to tell you that we have climbed a few lighthouses in our day. I'm not fond of numbers but it is well into the double digits. When climbing lighthouses a few words of wisdom are in order.

For starters, I don't recommend looking down through the open staircases found at most lighthouses. This has a tendency of making a person dizzy, unless this is a feeling that you enjoy. Next, and always appropriate—take time at the landings to catch your breath. I'm constantly reminding our seven-year-old Richelle of this. Third, prepare yourselves prior to beginning your climb for the worse part of the climb. It will undoubtedly be when you get to the top and discover that there is a ladder. Those of you experienced in climbing know about the dreaded
ladders. Some of them are only a few steps but aren’t they wea-
risome? Sometimes it’s the smallness of the rungs that causes
alarm. Other times, it’s the opening that you need to squeeze
through to enter the lantern room. Almost always, one of the
corners of the ladder is not connected any longer and you can
feel the ladder move in your hands as you embark upwards to
the lantern room. I was wondering if you disembark forward or
do you do it backwards? It seems that each tour guide has his
own opinion on how it should be done, that is, if you’re fortunate
enough to have a tour guide.

I almost forgot to warn you about carrying all your para-
phernalia with you on the way. It is most helpful to have both
hands free (most of us won’t take a picture or use our binocu-
lars, or break out the bag lunch at the top anyway). Long past
are the days that I carried each of my daughters, separately of
course, at one year of age, to the top of Barneget Lighthouse. I
have a sneaking suspicion that carrying children is not allowed
any longer, nor would I recommend it.

Then there is your experience at the top. As a true light-
house enthusiast one of your top priorities will be not to damage
anything that is within reach. I can remember being inside the
lantern room at Cape Bonavista Lighthouse in Newfoundland,
Canada. The tour guide was encouraging us to be careful of the
original lighting apparatus, nearing 150 years of age, a type of
which I’ve never seen before and may never see again. We all
know the value of a Fresnel lens. Then you notice for the first
time that the tower is moving. It starts as a slight back and forth
movement. Then it seems that the rocking of the tower has in-
creased; maybe it’s just your knees knocking and thighs throb-
bting (I’ll talk about that later). Before you know it, your eldest
child, in our case that would be our twelve-year-old daughter
Kendyl, finds the door outside to the catwalk (an appropriate
name I might add, I only wish I had four paws to stand on when
I’m out there). The view is breathtaking, it is only surpassed by
your gasping for breath as you try to catch your next one amidst
gusts of wind in the 30 to 40 miles per hour range. You inch
your way around the tower, with your back to the wall, so that
you can proudly boast you went the whole way around it when
you reach bottom.

Finally, you’re back inside the lantern room preparing to
make the journey back down the tower. First, you’re faced with
the backward, forward dilemma on the ladder. As you continue
the descent you need to be concerned about the pace you set.
You must be very careful not to go too fast, anticipating your
arrival on the ground. Then there is always the possibility of
meeting up with someone headed in the opposite direction.
(Don’t you just love those lighthouses that allow people to go
up and down at the same time.) Finally, you wind your way to
the bottom. It is at the bottom, where your knees seem to jerk
for hours and your thighs throb endlessly, that you learn from
your friends and others around them that they had similar ex-
periences. They tell you of one time when someone fell on the
steps. Then you hear that another person got sick and had to
return to their vehicle to rest for a few hours. Finally, you hear
a story of someone descending the entire staircase on their bot-
ttom as a baby would have done. Actually, hyperventilating and
excessive perspiration don’t sound too bad after hearing all
those other nightmares.

Before you decide to climb (or not climb) a lighthouse, let
me finish the story I began at the opening of this article. With
very little coaxing Dawnelle got her legs back and finished the
trek up and down Sandy Hook. I believe she used the backward
method on the ladder (or was it the forward method?) Neverthe-
less, once she reached the bottom, she was engrossed in a con-
versation with the others on all those memories she and they
had while climbing lighthouses.

Aren’t we peculiar people, to find joy in frustration? Maybe
that’s the same principle we should express in life, when we are
faced with tall towers to climb. You know what I mean, one
step at a time, keep a steady pace and don’t rush life, and when
we face those moments of anxiety rely on God and others to
help. Maybe just as important is that we don’t forget to share
our story of the climb to as many others that will listen. Because
in sharing our story we are helping others find their way.
Happy Climbing and God Bless!

**Society News**

**Twin Lights ‘Dig’**

Twin Lights had some unusual visitors over the summer, Mon-
mouth University Professor Richard Veit and his archaeology class of 20 graduate and under-
graduate students conducted a “dig” to uncover the foundations of the 1828 lighthouse.

Besides the foundations of the 1828 lighthouses, the stu-
dents found a 200 year old musket ball, a pre-World War I mili-
tary button, tobacco pipes and a 1906 Indian Head penny.

**NJLHS Educational Outreach**

The Board of Directors of the New Jersey Lighthouse Society, Inc., has agreed to expand our mission of historical
preservation, restoration and education to include efforts to
inform the youth of our state of the historical significance of our
lighthouses and the need to protect and preserve them for future
generations.

This effort would focus on the primary and secondary
educational systems and would utilize the New Jersey Network
video, The Eye of the Mariner, and the book, Sentinels of the
Shore by Bill Gately, to engender a consciousness of our
lighthouse structures and to begin an awareness of the need to
preserve them.
Our initial thrust is to enlist members and private foundation support to finance this endeavor. It is our ultimate desire to make the video and book available to each public or private school district in the state that expresses an interest. The cost of each book and video kit will be $27.00.

If you would like to donate a Lighthouse Education Kit to a particular school or district, the NJLHS will send it to the school of your choice, in your name.

Simply send your tax deductible check payable to NJLHS, P.O. Box 4228, Brick, NJ 08723. Be sure to indicate “NJLHS Educational Outreach” on your donation, identify the school or district of your choice and indicate the way in which you would like the gift card to read.

If you have any questions, you may call, write or e-mail Bill Volpe as follows: Phone: (732) 846-2196; Address: 220 Felton Avenue, Highland Park, NJ 08904; E-mail wvfotolite@aol.com.

In Memoriam—Betty Husarik

by Kim M. Ruth

Betty Husarik, a long time member and supporter of NJLHS, died July 30th in an automobile accident. Betty joined the society in 1990 and was elevated to Honorary Lifetime Member in recognition of her work for the society. I remember her most for her can-do attitude and her work in the restoration of the Finns Point Rear Range Lighthouse and ongoing work as volunteer coordinator for the light. I have known Betty almost fifteen years and she was one of the sweetest people I’ve ever known. The lighthouse community has truly lost one of its brightest lights. Our most sincere condolences go out to her family and the Finns Point group.

Notes from Near and Far

Barnegat Lighthouse Hours

Barnegat Lighthouse will be open from 4:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. on the following evenings: Saturday, September 4, Wednesday, September 8, Saturday, September 11, Saturday, September 18 and Saturday, September 25. This is an excellent time for viewing the sunset over the bay and the moon-rise over the ocean.

The interior of the lighthouse is open everyday from 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. through the end of October. Cost is $1.00 for ages 12 and older. The lighthouse is open on weekends November through April from 9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

Activities at the Absecon Lighthouse

The Absecon Lighthouse is open Thursday through Monday from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

On September 2, 1999, there is a lighthouse fundraising cruise which leaves Gardner's Basin at 6:30 p.m. (Cost $15.00 per person) For cruise tickets call Elinor or Rich Veit (609) 652-1876.

October 3, 1999, is the Lighthouse Fall Fest, 11:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. Entertainment throughout the day, lighting of the tower, and star-light tours of the tower are just some of the highlights.

Little Red Lighthouse Festival

The Little Red Lighthouse Festival will be on Saturday, September 18, from 11 a.m. - 4 p.m. at the Jeffries Hook Lighthouse, Fort Washington, New York.

The lighthouse will also be open on Saturday, September 4, at 11 a.m. Meet the park rangers at Plaza Lafayette, the westernmost end of 181st Street.

Meade Revisits Absecon Lighthouse

by Elinor and Rich Veit

On Sunday, August 15, 1999, the George Gordon Meade Society visited the Absecon Lighthouse for a Civil War Days reenactment. The society members set up camp on the lighthouse grounds and spent the day in their period costumes, performing various military maneuvers and demonstrations.

George Gordon Meade, in the person of Andrew Waskie, strolled the grounds of the lighthouse throughout the day, speaking to visitors about his affiliation with the lighthouse.

Betty Husarik, during dedication ceremonies after the completion of the restoration of the Finns Point Rear Range Light, 1984. Photo by Kim Ruth.
George Meade, as a Lieutenant, was the engineer of the Fourth Lighthouse District during the period of the construction of the Absecon Lighthouse. As a general he went on to command the Army of the Potomac. He later would be best known as the general who led the Union Forces at the Battle of Gettysburg.

During a rain storm later in the day, Meade stood on the spiraling staircase of the tower and addressed the visitors about his days as an officer in the army, his military accomplishments, his life as an Topographical Engineer, and his work with lighthouses.

Sara Cureton, Executive Director of the Absecon Lighthouse, and a number of volunteers, many from the NJLHS, were there to greet the Meade Society and conduct tours of the lighthouse and the grounds throughout the day.

For more information on the Meade Society, write the General Meade Society of Philadelphia, P.O. Box 45556, Philadelphia, PA 19149.

I hope everyone has had a good summer, perhaps a bit too dry, but pleasant. The Society is gearing up for the fall season. As this goes to press the Sandy Hook Lighthouse should be closing down for much needed restoration. The National Park Service has been anticipating this for some time. Our volunteers who give tours were beginning to believe it would never happen, but the contractor startup meeting took place on August 17th and within two weeks of that date some signs of the work will start to appear. We are going to keep the keeper’s house as accessible to visitors as possible and anticipate tour guides giving short presentations about the lighthouse in place of the tours. The lighthouse will be closed at least until next April.

Lighthouse trips are still proving to be popular. The Cape Cod trip is filled and looks to be interesting. For those of you going, Carole DiNapoli has added a guided tour that was not on the original itinerary. For those of you who do not have the time (or the money) to take the extended tour, we are planning another day trip into Sandy Hook Bay from Atlantic Highlands. Carole DiNapoli and Yvonne Miller are working on that for sometime in late October. Itinerary possibilities include Roner Shoal, West Bank, Old Orchard Shoal—other options are Great Beds, Ambrose Light-tower, or Robbins Reef. A flyer will be mailed as soon as all the arrangements are made.

Our outreach programs continue to reach lots of people. Director’s Rick Weber and Mary Beth Doherty organized an event at Old Lafayette Village with the assistance of ten of our members. Ellen Caldwell, proprietor of the Mulberry Bush at Old Lafayette Village, issued the invitation to have us there. Director Bill Volpe did another outreach presentation for a seniors group in Highlands Park. He must have done a great job as the group later scheduled visits to two New Jersey Lighthouses.

Treasurer Debbie Megonigal has been in the hospital for the last few weeks dealing with cancer. Please keep her and Harry in your thoughts. We are optimistic that she will be back with us soon.

And finally, Betty Husarik, lifetime member of the Society, and main force behind the saving and restoration of the Finns Point Rear Range, was killed in an automobile accident in July. She will be sorely missed by the New Jersey Lighthouse Community.

Meade, in the person of Andrew Waskie, confers with one of his sergeants in front of the Absecon Lighthouse.

Photo by Elinor Veit
The Tucker Island Lighthouse replica at the Tuckerton Seaport Museum (June 25, 1999 photo) is going up. The grand opening is expected to be Spring, 2000.

Photo by William Schneider.

Program Signals
by Yvonne Miller

Fall Meeting—September 18, 1999

The fall meeting of the NJLHS will be held on September 18, 1999, near the Marcus Hook Rear Range, Bellefonte, DE. The meeting will be held in the VFW Hall on Brandywine Blvd., directly in line with the lighthouse. Parking is available at the VFW. It is one and a half block walk to the lighthouse. The Coast Guard will let me know closer to the date of the meeting if we will be allowed to tour the light. This is the annual Lighthouse T-Shirt/Sweatshirt Contest.

A map and directions are enclosed with this issue of the The Beam.

Summer Meeting Recap

Our June 26th meeting was held at the Tinicum Rear Range Lighthouse in Paulsboro, N.J. Despite the heat and humidity, about 126 people attended.

Members of the Tinicum Rear Range Lighthouse Society graciously opened the lighthouse for us and kept it open as long as anyone wanted to go in. The Little League refreshment stand served great food that was very reasonably priced. Our ways and means sales were very good and I understand that the Tinicum group sold out of the items they had available. I know they are very grateful to NJLHS members for being so generous. It never ceases to amaze me, but does not surprise me, that our members respond to supporting lighthouses when they are asked. The Boards of both the Tinicum Rear Range Lighthouse Society and the NJLHS thank you.

I want to thank all of our members who helped out at the meeting, but I have to particularly thank Betty Smith and her son Mike for pitching in at the refreshment stand to keep the food line moving and making the wait in the sun a lot shorter. As hospitality chairperson Betty always does a great job but that was beyond the call of duty.

Winter Meeting—December 4, 1999

Our winter meeting will be held on December 4, 1999, in the Sea Girt area. A visit to the Sea Girt Lighthouse, which is usually decorated for Christmas, is scheduled from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. Speaker has yet to be announced. More details will be in the December Beam and posted to the web site as soon as available.

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