Beacons of Light – From the Lone Star State

by Tony Libero

The State of Texas does not offer an abundance of lighthouses such as the states of Maine and Massachusetts, but it does possess 5 lighthouses, 3 of which are in beautiful and natural settings.

Earlier this year, while visiting the Gulf Coast, I was able to see and photograph the lighthouses of Texas. The following is current and historical information pertaining to all of Texas’ lighthouses.

The Lydia Ann Channel Lighthouse, formerly known as the Aransas Pass Light Station, is located just north of Corpus Christi on Harbor Island. It was built in 1855 providing a safe passage into Corpus Christi and Aransas Bays. The site, consisting of the tower, a double dwelling, two single dwellings and a wharf on 25 acres of marshland are all connected by a raised walkway. This lighthouse also fell victim to the Civil War when the Confederates blew off 20 feet of the tower’s top, but by 1867, the repairs were made and the tower was relighted. The station remained in service until 1952. By 1970, the government sold the entire site to the highest bidder. The current owner has put a live-in keeper in charge and the tower is lighted each day at dusk. The lighthouse can be reached only by boat from the Port Aransas Marina.

The original Point Bolivar Light, located near Galveston, Texas, was built in 1852 and constructed of cast-iron plates. During the Civil War, Confederate forces dismantled the tower and reforged the iron into weapons. A new lighthouse was constructed on the site in 1872 and, like the original, was made of iron. The Coast Guard discontinued its use in 1933 and the light was eventually sold as a private residence. Although closed to the public, the tower can be viewed from State Highway 87 on the Bolivar Peninsula, which is reached from the north end of Galveston Island by taking the free ferry across the bay.

Port Isabel Lighthouse is Texas’ southernmost lighthouse on the Gulf Coast. It was constructed in 1852 on an old army camp named Fort Polk which was used by the army of General Zachary Taylor during the Mexican War. It was discovered that General Taylor had not purchased the land but in fact, set up temporary camp on private property. The owners offered the land after years of litigation and negotiation. In 1894, the site was sold to the government for $6,000. Thus, the Lighthouse Board ended up having to buy back its own lighthouse. It was permanently discontinued in 1905 and eventually turned over to the State of Texas which maintains the lighthouse and grounds as a small state.
A Quest for Fulfillment

by George M. Feirer, Historian

Part II

I shall have to admit to being ill-prepared to get close photo opportunities for either Long Beach Harbor, or Los Angeles Harbor Lights. A boat or helicopter is the mode of transportation to do justice to either. Long Beach Light would have been interesting, if only for its non-traditional appearance, looking more like a mechanical man or a transmitting tower from outer space. Having been built in 1949, when California-based engineers were more concerned with earthquake and other seismic activity protection, they opted for permanence. Needless to say, I missed this one.

America’s closest architectural clone to Pharos at Alexandria has got to be the San Pedro Breakwater Lighthouse (Los Angeles Harbor Lighthouse). I last had seen it in 1945, but at that time I was much more interested in what lay at the other end of the breakwater. Three years away from home modifies your perspective somewhat. The light is visible from the top of Point Fermin Hill, but it is a very long way and photographically a disaster.

My son took the accompanying photo while passing the light in a pleasure boat. I recommend that approach, for even if you had the opportunity and stamina to walk the length of the breakwater, the structures added since it was originally built in 1913 interfere with getting a decent picture of it.

Jutting out into the harbor as it does, the light has been a target of numerous sea-going craft, including a battleship. Most tales of lighthouses and their keepers have a degree of solemnity, however, I think one of the funniest has to be Don Newman’s piece, entitled “Check Your Bearings.” For those who haven’t had the chance to chuckle over it, it bears repeating:

"First Voice: Our radar has you on a collision course with us. You should alter course 10 degrees south.

Second Voice: We have you on our radar. Suggest you alter course 10 degrees north.

First Voice: We have Admiral Goodman aboard. Strongly suggest you bear 10 degrees south, this is a battleship!

Second Voice: This is Seaman Farnsworth. Still suggest you bear 10 degrees north. This is a lighthouse!"

I can’t guarantee it’s authenticity, but it’s funny to everyone but battleship commanders.

Point Fermin. You only need a "picnic lunch and stroll through the park effort" to get to one of the most charming, Victorian style, frame lighthouses still around. In some ways it reflects the elegance of our own Hereford Inlet Lighthouse. The point Fermin Lighthouse was erected in 1874 as a Los Angeles lighthouse. It has since been replaced by a pole-mounted light, but
in 1939, a civilian keeper continued his duties there until he retired in 1955. The light was automated in 1973 and the radio station, built in 1934, was automated in 1980.

Automation deprived the Point Vicente Lighthouse of its last human being. There had been reported one of the vavorous variety in the lantern room many years ago. It was supposed to have been a woman in a flowing gown (naturally), pacing the catwalk around the tower. This was to have been the spirit of a woman who jumped into the sea when her husband was lost in a shipwreck off the point. It would have taken a prodigious leap if she jumped from the catwalk, as the light stands back away from the cliff. At any rate, several coats of white paint on the landward side of the lens room finally ended her career in 1955, and she hasn’t been seen since.

Additional Suggested Reading:
"Pt. Vicente Lighthouse." U.S. Department of Transportation, U.S. Coast Guard (Distributed as a leaflet in the area).

Cape May Meeting - June 22, 1991
by Barbara Nelson

The New Jersey Chapter meeting will take place at the Cape May Point Lighthouse on Saturday, June 22nd at 11:00 a.m. Mid-Atlantic Center for the Arts member John Bailey, author of Sentinel of the Jersey Cape: The Story of the Lighthouse at Cape May Point, will be our guest speaker.

Within the lighthouse complex are facilities for parking, exhibit rooms, nature trails, a bird watching observatory, rest rooms and a meeting room for those who wish to exhibit lighthouse memorabilia. There are also pavilions available for your picnic lunch. The Cape May Light is open to the public daily.

The newly renovated oil house, now used as a gift shop and museum, is officially open to the public. Gifts pertaining to the lighthouse are available along with a video explaining the interior and exterior of the structure. A photo album is placed there for the visitor to view the structure and its surroundings without actually having to climb the lighthouse stairs. This has been most helpful to the handicapped.

In order to accommodate the increasing New Jersey Chapter membership, with a guest speaker, will take place in the upstairs meeting room of the Cape May Point Volunteer Fire Company, No. 1, after lunch. This building is located on Yale Avenue, next to the Post Office, approximately four blocks from the lighthouse. Entrance is from the rear of the building. A blackboard
outside will direct you to the entrance door. Enclosed with your newsletter is a map showing the location of the Cape May Lighthouse and Fire Hall. With your New Jersey Chapter Membership card, [enclosed with your newsletter], you'll be granted free admission to the tower.

Parking is limited at the Fire Hall area and it is suggested you leave your car at the Lighthouse parking lot and walk, if possible. There are no restaurants in the area, therefore, please remember to bring a bag lunch.

Plan to share your knowledge, photos, postcard collections, and other memorabilia with fellow lighthouse enthusiasts in Historic Cape May.

Looking forward to seeing you!

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**NJ Chapter has logo!**

by Kim M. Ruth

After nine months we finally have a logo, thanks to our own Rich Hellenbrecht. After considering sketches and other works, your officers decided on a submission by Rich. We had been thinking along the lines of an outline of the state with a lighthouse (tall one like Barnegat or a stylized version) inside the outline, but the proportions just wouldn't fit due to New Jersey's shape. Rich's logo is contemporary, clean, recognizable, and unique to our state. In tribute to Rich we featured it this quarter on the masthead, but, as our membership requested, we will continue to rotate designs in the masthead. Our logo is being used on your memberships cards (Hurrah!) and letterhead. After due consideration we decided not to put an address on the letterhead, but instead to add the address of the writer. This saves us from printing new stationery each time the officers change.

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**September Meeting**

As of this writing, May 1, 1991, we are working with the State of New Jersey to hold our September meeting at Sandy Hook. There are several large buildings there which can hold our membership. The date will probably be September 14th. We hope to make arrangements to go up into the light. More details in the next newsletter.

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**Long Island Tour**

by Jack Granger

Early in April, I took a two day trip along the north shore on Long Island (Route 25A) to Orient Point, N.Y. From there I caught a ferry boat (1 1/2 hour ride and $27.00 single fare with car) to New London, Connecticut. I returned along Route 95 (New England Thruway) to New Jersey.

The trip, which covered about 325 miles, was condensed into two days because of inclement weather. Figure spending an additional day for a more leisurely approach.

During the trip I saw about 20 lights both on shore and offshore. Some of the offshore lights which would have required a 200-500mm lens were unfortunately obscured by fog and haze.

I followed a detailed itinerary prepared by Rich Hellenbrecht, who had made the trip earlier.

If you are interested in making this trip, contact Jack Granger, 21 Channel Road, Toms River, NJ, 08753, (908) 255-7484, and I'll give you a copy of Rich's itinerary.

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**New Jersey Chapter Lighthouse Tours**

by Kim M. Ruth

Though by the time you receive this newsletter the New York Harbor Lighthouse tours will probably be history, we mention them for the benefit of those who did not attend the Twin Lights meeting.

We have scheduled two trips aboard the North Star, skippered by Captain Chris Wvestoff, on May 25, 1991 and June 1, 1991. The boat will leave at 11:00 a.m. from Pier I, slip 5, at the Atlantic Highlands Marina. The cost is $15.00 per person and the cruise is limited to 30 persons. Bring box lunch and beverages. There is no rain date; the trip will be rescheduled if bad weather interferes.

We expect to see Twin Lights, West Bank, Romer Shoals, Robbins Reef, Great Beds, the Statue of Liberty, Old Orchard Shoals and Sandy Hook. Bring plenty of film and be prepared for a good time.

A Delaware Bay lighthouse tour is in the planning stages.

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**Barnegat Lighthouse Contacts**

by Jack Granger

I met with several people recently in the Township of Barnegat Light, in an attempt to get the schedule for the re-opening of the lighthouse. The lighthouse has been closed to the public for over a year. At this time, however, the date and program for the re-opening has not been established.

I met with several people who are closely involved and who are very knowledgeable about the lighthouse and the town museum. The Barnegat Light museum has a collection of lighthouse memorabilia including the First-order Fresnel lens from Barnegat Lighthouse. The museum opens for the summer in early June.

If you would like more information about Old Bar-
From Your President’s Desk

by Jack Granger

Hi lighthouse friends — I hope you were as pleased with our meeting at Twin Lights as I was. We had over 100 attendees which keeps intact our record of doubling the number of attendees at each meeting. Our membership now exceeds 275 members.

We are grateful to Tom Laverty and the Division of Parks and Forestry for their hospitality.

I want to offer my apologies for the amount of business that was discussed at the meeting. Please remember that we are only nine months old and many organizational topics must be discussed. This is your organization and I do not want to decide our future without your input. Also I want to be sure that we can be responsive to the wishes of the general membership.

It was gratifying to see the pictures and memorabilia that you brought to the meeting. Keep doing it and we will improve the display area so that access by all will be improved.

I have had the pleasure of corresponding with a number of you and chatting on the phone. Won’t you please come up and introduce yourselves to me during future meetings.

Once again I would like to renew my invitation to all of you to get involved in our meetings. We all will benefit from an exchange of information on your likes, desires and, most importantly, from your lighthouse experiences. Shared experiences, good or bad, will certainly help all of us in planning our trips.

Please let your officers know the types of activities that you would like us to pursue in the future.

Ship John Shoal Update

By Jim Gowdy

By the middle of February, 1991, repair work was nearly completed on the Ship John Shoal Light Station in the upper Delaware Bay. The weather and waters of the bay had taken their toll on the metal superstructure, which was erected in 1877. Since the last resident personnel left this station in the early 1970’s, only periodic maintenance had been performed, and the structure was showing obvious signs of deterioration.

The contractor hired for the major overhaul was the firm of Frazer Construction, of nearby Bridgeton, New Jersey. Doing lighthouse repair work for the first time, the firm went at the job with determination and interest. Led by job foreman Jim Campbell, scaffolding was erected, deteriorated metalwork was removed, and the lighthouse was sandblasted prior to repainting. From time to time passing vessels on the nearby shipping channel could observe large blue tarps in place around parts of the structure in an attempt to shield the job site from wind and rain. A major problem encountered was the many metal castings which had to be specially made to rebuild the deteriorated walkway around the structure’s first level. Also slowing down the entire process was the unpredictable and uncooperative weather of the bay.

The shoal upon which this lighthouse rests was named for the ship “John,” which came to grief there in late December of 1791. The vessel, built in Newburyport, Massachusetts, was enroute from Hamburg, Germany, to the port of Philadelphia when it ran aground on the shoal. All of the passengers reportedly were rescued, and the freight which could be salvaged was taken to the nearby port of Greenwich, New Jersey, on the Cohansey River. The wrecked ship was soon broken apart by ice and today only the ship’s figurehead, on display in the Gibbon House Museum in Greenwich, remains.

The superstructure of the Ship John Shoal Lighthouse was on display in Philadelphia during the summer of 1876 as part of a large centennial exhibition, and completion of the permanent lighthouse was delayed until the exhibition was over. A twin lighthouse was erected at Southwest Ledge, near New Haven, Connecticut, and still exists today.

A 4th order Fresnel lens is still in operation at Ship John, and as the lighthouse structure stands its lonely vigil in the upper bay a new group of "resident personnel" has made the site its home. A number of swallows have built nests underneath the lower walkway, and
from late spring to early fall can be seen incessantly darting and flying around the light station searching for insects to feed themselves and their young. Some of the mud nests observed during the previous summer were quite large, and home to as many as five young swallows at a time. The amazing thing about the nests is that at least a five mile roundtrip was required for a tiny mouthful of mud.

The lighthouse is maintained by the Aids to Navigation Team at the U.S. Coast Guard base in Cape May, New Jersey, and its interior is closed to the public. For more information, the Aid to Navigation Team (ANTS) can be reached at (609) 884-6987.

There are some artifacts from the Ship John Lighthouse available for sale from Fraser Construction of Bridgeton, who did the refurbishing of the light. They have a number of pilasters, gutter sections, metal brackets, old railings and posts, and pieces of the deck plate. If you are interested in purchasing any of these items, please call (609) 451-9403 from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday thru Friday, or write:

John Fraser
Fraser Construction
34 Burt Street
Bridgeton, NJ 08302

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**Speakers Bureau**

by Jack Granger

Your officers are developing a Speaker’s Bureau to make presentations to local groups. Recently Jack spoke to the Descendants of the War of 1812 in Freehold, New Jersey, as well as a group of senior citizens at the Community Medical Center in Toms River. A presentation is planned for the Nutley Historical Society in July. Anyone who would be interested in joining the Bureau and sharing his/her knowledge and enthusiasm for lighthouses with others can contact Jim Gowdy, Kim Ruth or Jack Granger.

Our chapter has acquired a Kodak 35mm carousel slide projector with remote control and a screen which we hope will add to your enjoyment at future meetings and for use of those involved with the Speakers Bureau.

We encourage you to bring your slides to meetings so that they may be shared with our members.

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**Cheryl Spenser Collin Studio Miniatures**

by Jack Granger

Our Chapter has "struck a deal" with the Cheryl Spencer Collin Studio in Eliot, Maine, for miniature lights. Cheryl has generously offered to return a part of the sale price of each miniature to our organization.

Her work is spectacular and is shown in at least two local shopping malls. She offers 25 different lights including Barnegat and Sandy Hook. A copy of her price list is enclosed with your newsletter. Jack will have several at the June meeting to display. If you are interested before the June meeting, drop Jack a note at 21 Channel Road, Toms River, NJ 08753.

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**Rockland Breakwater Light**

The Greenwich Workshop, 30 Lindeman Drive, Trumbull, Connecticut 06611, has made available a limited edition print "Rockland Breakwater Light," by noted artist Charles Wysocki. The print is the first in a Limited Edition (2500 signed and numbered) Fine Art Series. Size is 21" w x 18.5" h. Price is $165.00. Available only through the Greenwich Workshop at the above address or phone (800) 243-4246.

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**Quilt for Lighthouse Lovers**

Gainor Roberts and Katy Burke have created a unique embroidered coverlet featuring lighthouses they have seen on their seafaring travels. The coverlets fit a double or queen-size bed, although you can work individual blocks as pillows or to frame as pictures.

The quilt package contains 25 actual-size lighthouse designs to copy, color photographs of each quilt block, and a 56-page booklet with instructions for assembly, embroidery, and finishing. Total cost is $140.00. A brochure with a color photograph of the quilt is available for $2.00 (refundable with your order) from Prism Productions, P.O. Box 596, Oriental, N.C. 28571. Submitted by Barbara Gowdy - as seen in Country Living, May 1991.

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

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