The Lighthouses of Block Island

by Odette Cummings

North Light:
The northern tip of Block Island stretches several miles into the sea, as if reaching out to connect itself to the mainland. The serenity of a bird sanctuary where white seagulls nest amidst the pink and green of the beach roses belies the treacherous currents found here, in a place called Sandy Point. It was here, at the very tip of this point, where the first lighthouse on the island was built in 1829. But the sea prevailed and in just a few years it claimed the light.

The remains were razed and in 1837 a new light was put into operation, farther inland, nestled safely in the dunes. This light functioned for almost twenty years, but it was too far away from the long sand bar and ships ran ashore.

In 1857 the third light was erected. Again the government chose to erect it near the end of the point, to try to prevent shipwrecks rather than cause them. Again the sea took its toll.

In 1867 the fourth light was built. The government chose a good location and built the lighthouse out of Connecticut granite. The Fresnel lens magnified a kerosene light until the 1950's. The Coast Guard closed the lighthouse in 1972, after 106 years of service.

In 1984 the town of New Shoreham acquired the lighthouse and began to restore it. A new light was installed and in 1989 the North Light was relit. The Block Island Historical Society is currently working on the interior to make it into a maritime environmental center. They hope to reopen using the original Fresnel lens that it now has on display at the Historical Society. Although the lighthouse is closed, you can take the long walk through soft sand and rocks to see it. This summer there will be someone there to talk to visitors and answer questions. For those of us who love lighthouses, it is worth the hike.

Southeast Light:
A sentinel atop the beautiful Mohegan Bluffs, the Southeast Light has directed many ships to the safety of the Old Harbor of Block Island. In 1854 a petition was presented to the General Assembly requesting land so a light might be built at the south end of the island. The land was appropriated, but the Lighthouse Board decided to use the available funds to move the North Light.

After the shipwreck of the Palmetto in 1858 the need was realized for a first class light and a fog whistle at the southern end of the island. In 1872, the locals petitioned the government for the lighthouse. The government agreed, and in 1874 the Southeast Light was erected. It was first lit in February, 1875.

When the lighthouse was built, there was a keeper's cottage between the light and the water. Because of erosion, there is now only a small strip of land separating the wall from the edge of the 175 foot bluffs and the
A Quest for Fulfillment - Part III

George M. Feirer, Historian

Anacapa Island Lighthouse, on one of the Channel Islands, is quite beyond the reach of the casual tourist and even devoted lighthouse searchers limited to four wheels. Although located in what is now Channel Islands National Park, it is about eleven miles off the coast. It therefore became a lighthouse to "see next time." Unfortunately, I have quite a list of those in that category.

Settling for something a bit more accessible, we left the Pacific Coast Highway to find the lighthouse at Port Hueneme (pronounced Wan-eem-eee). It is a concrete building and tower, surrounded by industry, a chain link fence and approachable by an ankle-testing combination of dirt, rocks and jetty. It is a rather stark, but beautiful concrete building in use since 1932.

Point Conception and Point Arguello didn’t meet our time schedule and the San Luis Obispo Lighthouse, not being open to the public, is only accessible by boat. I just wonder if every lighthouse aficionado should not have available a World War II "Duck" or other amphibious vehicle.

The Piedras Blancas Lighthouse is well named, for it really over-looks a huge white rock. The lens was removed and placed on display in Cambria to its detriment. That however, is now being rectified. It has been taken back by the Coast Guard for restoration, with the possibility that it might be displayed sometime in the future at San Simeon.

The Piedras Blancas Lighthouse exchanges views with the William Randolph Hearst mansion at San Simeon, making it a great family destination. Those who don’t like lighthouses can spend time at the hill-top palace. Thanks to the presence of a Coast Guard officer from the Garden State, we were permitted to go on the grounds now controlled by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to protect sea otters. They must be successful for we managed to see two of them playing just offshore in the kelp beds.

Up the coast at Point Sur, the 1889 light is now off-limits to the public as vandals apparently had become a problem. The Lighthouse sits on the edge of a headland and although the view is a distant one, it is an inspiring one.

Sometimes lighthouse "buffs" just have to realize that someone else is looking out for them. When my son and I went searching for the Point Pino Lighthouse in Pacific Grove, we were surrounded by golf courses, fences and other general deterrents. The sign on the gate stated unequivocally that the lighthouse was only open on week-ends. Of course, our visit was mid-week. However, thanks to two Pacific Grove maintenance men, we were permitted access to the grounds for more than enough time to take our photos and enjoy being there. This light, built in 1854, is the only one of the
original eight California lighthouses that is basically the same as when first built. The third order Fresnel lens was purchased for the Fort Point Lighthouse in San Francisco, but ended up at Point Pino when it was found that a second order lens would be too large for Fort Point’s lantern room. Point Pinos, first lit on February 1, 1855, was the second California beacon to send forth its signal to wary mariners. The City of Pacific Grove maintains the building and grounds and they have done an excellent job of preserving this beautiful landmark.

Point Pinos Lighthouse. Photo by George Feirer

FRYING PAN SHOAL Lightship Update

by George M. Feirer, Historian

The Chapter’s last meeting in Cape May had more to offer than the scheduled agenda. Editor Kim Ruth called my attention to the presence of a lightship anchored in the Delaware Bay, near the Cape May Lewes Ferry, just off the entrance of the Cape May Canal.

Historians, like other investigators, have to have answers to questions put in their paths, so this is what followed.

Later that day, I confirmed for myself that the lightship was indeed there, and that it had "FRYING PAN" painted in black upon it’s typical red hull (editorial: it had been painted white in previous sightings). Knowing that this ship had to be in private hands, my first inquiry was to the Coast Guard at Cape May, the following Monday. They, in turn, referred me to the Marine Inspection Office of the Coast Guard, in Philadelphia.

A telephone call, followed by a letter to Lt. Commander Michael Riley resulted in his giving me the owner’s names (after receiving their permission), and telephone number.

Another telephone call, and another letter, these to Russell Buckingham in New York City, add the following bits of data. Russ and his partner own the lightship and their plans for it are not yet settled. Their affection for lightships is pretty apparent when you talk with them about it and I suspect that in some way or other, we shall all benefit from their efforts.

This ship, LS-115, was built in Charleston, South Carolina, and the builder’s plate bears the date of July 27, 1929. She served as the lightship for FRYING PAN SHOAL for almost fifty years, with time off during World War II. That “vacation” included duty as a Panama Canal gunboat.

As we gradually acquire other facts about LS-115 to add to our archives we know that she was sunk in the Wicomico River, near Salisbury, on Maryland’s Eastern Shore. Five years of work in restoring her, found that she was ready to leave Philadelphia, but the Coast Guard found that she did not meet all of their requirements permitting her to sail, at least on the open ocean. The bay anchorage, off the Cape May Canal, was as far as she had gotten, when some of our members spotted her.

By the time Russ Buckingham had returned my call from New York, her present owners had retained a marine lawyer, who, after determining some vagueness in the regulations, advised the owners to "go for it," and she sailed. As of July 2, 1991 the FRYING PAN SHOAL lightship was laying at anchor off the Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor.

The graciousness of LS-115’s owners indicate that further information and photographs will follow as they become available.

Cape May Lighthouse Bill

by Barbara Nelson

The House of Representatives has approved legislation sponsored by Congressman Bill Hughes of New Jersey to transfer ownership of the Cape May Lighthouse from the Coast Guard to the State of New Jersey.

This legislation will enable the state to provide historic preservation funds to repair the lighthouse and help the Mid-Atlantic Center for the Arts to continue to operate it as a non-profit center for interpreting and preserving maritime history in Southern New Jersey.

The 131 year old lighthouse is currently being restored on a ten year plan that will cost approximately $1 million dollars to complete.

Congressman Hughes’s bill is expected to be approved by the Senate shortly.

Cape May Lighthouse News

by Katherine Von Ahnen

The Cape May Point Lighthouse, site of our June meeting, is enjoying a bumper season. Highlight of the activity is the newly converted oil storage building.
Offering a visual experience to those who cannot make the climb because of a handicap, the new gift shop/orientation center has been a popular mecca for those who would ordinarily only come and then turn away. Photographic views, including a panoramic view from the top of the tower by Walt Dixon Photography, have brought thousands of compliments to the lighthouse staff. The new gift shop, formerly located in two very small storage rooms in the base of the lighthouse, is enjoying a financial return much greater than in previous seasons. New sale items, attractive displays, and sparkling bright signs greet the lighthouse buff as he enters the gate.

Calls are coming in from local schools for the school enrichment program presented so successfully last year by MAC. Based on the history, current needs and future goals of the Cape May Point Lighthouse, the program is presented as a part of American culture and heritage. Katherine Von Ahnen, who spoke briefly on the success and value of those programs at our June meeting, will present a 10-minute workshop at our September meeting so that other units may include this activity in their areas. A handout will be provided and time allotted for questions and answers.

Chapter News

by Kim M. Ruth

Over the summer we have heard from a great many of you. Many wrote commenting on our new logo and our newsletter; others wrote telling us of their travels, exhibits, and other efforts.

Many sent clippings from various sources of happenings at Barnegat, Jeffries Hook, and other places.

Johanna Trowbridge was at the Great Lakes Lighthouse Keeper’s Association Lake Michigan Conference in late May, and wrote to tell us about that. She also enclosed a brochure on the Wind Point Lighthouse.

Mary Davitt attended the City of New York Landmark Preservation Commission designation of the Little Red Lighthouse (Jeffries Hook) as a City Landmark. She sent us a copy of the program as well as pictures and various newspaper clippings.

Walter Burdett wrote to tell us of a lighthouse display he had in May at the Union Beach Memorial Library. The exhibit featured books available from the Monmouth County Library System as well as lighthouse memorabilia from Walter’s collection. He also reports that Horizon Images, P.O. Box 887, Upper Montclair, N.J. 07043 offered a calendar of "Beautiful Lighthouses," for 1991 and they do plan to do one for 1992.

Rebecca Colesar had a display of her lighthouse memorabilia at the Library Company of Burlington.

Bob Todd sent along numerous clippings about the re-opening of Barnegat Lighthouse.

Bill Geilfuss, dressed in uniform, attended the Barnegat Lighthouse re-opening June 8th, and had the opportunity to present honorary memberships to Governor Florio and wife Lucinda, Scott Weiner - Commissioner of D.E.P., Gregory Marshall - Director of Parks and Forests, Jim Hall - Assistant Director of Parks and Forest, and Owen Brothers - Park Ranger.

Odette Cummings visited Block Island in June and fell in love with the lighthouses. See her article in this issue.

Jack Granger visited some of Michigan’s lighthouses June 6-12.

Letters

We don’t often print letters but sometimes we get one that we feel should be shared. We received this one from Charles M. Crowell.

Dear Kim,

I was pleased to see Jack Granger’s note on Barnegat Light in the June Beam. I enclose a clipping from the Trentonian newspaper indicating that “Old Barney” is now open. The museum mentioned is maintained and operating by the Barnegat Light Historical Society, Jerome Walnut, President. My wife and I are members of the Society. In addition to the Fresnel lens assembly from Barnegat Light, there is a display case devoted to the light. This display, I have loaned to the museum. It is from effects of Keeper Clarance H. Cranmer, my grandfather.

We are proud of the museum. For anyone interested in lighthouses or shore history it is well worth a visit. During the summer it is open 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. daily, no charge. It is located at 5th St. and the Boulevard. There is a nice garden in the rear. The museum is housed in the old one room schoolhouse. This is where my mother and her brothers got their early education.

The case mentioned contains photos, memorabilia, official documents, etc., related to the light.
Yours,

Charles M. Crowell

September Meeting

by Jack Granger

Our Fall meeting is scheduled for 11:00 a.m. on Saturday, September 28, 1991 at Sandy Hook. The meeting will be held in what was formerly the base chapel, which is located at the end of Officers Row. Follow the signs for the Coast Guard Station.

In line with our new meeting format, we will use the two hours from 11:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. to exchange information and inspect memorabilia which members are encouraged to bring with them.

During this period members can eat lunch and tour the facilities at Sandy Hook, which include military fortifications and buildings. We are attempting to work out a program with the Coast Guard to inspect the Sandy Hook Lighthouse.

We are also working with the Park Service in a program where they will give us a live demonstration of life-saving procedures.

Our guest speaker for the day will be Tom Hoffman, Park Historian, who is a fascinating and extremely well-informed speaker. Now all we must hope for is a beautiful day, because that location on a clear Fall day is unbeatable.

Sandy Hook is reached by exiting the Garden State Parkway at Exit 117 and picking up Route 36. Stay on Route 36 to Highlands and look for the Sandy Hook signs.

Virginia Chapter News

by Jack Granger

On October 19, 1991, the Virginia Chapter is planning a boat trip to see several lights including Smith Point, Point Lookout, Point No Point, Hooper Island, and Solomons Lump. The trip will take six hours. Many of these lights cannot be seen from land so it is a unique opportunity. The fee will be from $50.00 - $75.00 depending on the number of people going. This will include lunch and dinner (I think).

For more information contact the Virginia Chapter - USLHS, Herbert Entwistle, Jr., President, 211 Rose Drive SW, Vienna, VA 22180. Or call (703) 281-9040.

New York Harbor Cruises

by Jack Granger

The New Jersey Chapter had two very successful cruises of New York Harbor on May 25th and June 1st. We had over 30 people on each trip and the weather was cooperative. We cast off at 11:00 a.m. and returned about 3:30 p.m.

We saw Romer Shoal, West Bank, Ford Wadsworth (under Verrazano Bridge), Robbins Reef, and the Statue of Liberty. Next it was up the East River to the South Street Seaport Museum to see the Ambrose Lightship.

We then went around Governor's Island and south past the Coney Island Light. On the June 1st trip we got close enough to see Frank Schubert, who was the last civilian keeper.

NJ Chapter on 1st NY Harbor Cruise - Photo by Bill Geifuss

Returning to the Raritan Bay, we saw the Sandy Hook Lighthouse and then proceeded up the Shrewsbury River to the Navesink Twin Lights.

All in all the trips went very well, and we will be sure to repeat them, with minor changes, at a future date.

From the President’s Desk

by Jack Granger

I am pleased to report that our organization continues to grow and that a few of you are taking the time to send in information that is very valuable. In following up on this material we discover additional information that we will be sharing with you. Please remember to share what you have with us so that we may all benefit. That is the secret of a good organization.

We continue to ask you to tell us what you would like to do as an organization. Our "Activities Sheet" that was passed out at Cape May brought only a few responses which we are considering. The disappointing part is that most of you did not turn them in. We really need your input.

Our quarterly meetings in Finns Point, Sea Girt, Twin Lights, Cape May and Sandy Hook (September 28th) have utilized some of our Jersey lights as well as being a source of local information on the individual lights. We hope the next quarterly meetings will be at
Barnegat, Hereford Inlet and Penns Landing (Barnegat Lightship).

Since there are only four meetings in a year and since the state is rather large making it difficult to get to them all, we are trying to come up with activities between the main meetings. We can use some ideas from you.

The Virginia Chapter is very active and we are working closely with them. Their October activity is covered in this issue. We are attempting to set up a liaison with the Massachusetts Chapter. There is a group called the Great Lakes Lighthouse Keeper’s Association which is not affiliated with the United States Lighthouse Society. They are very active and we have a good rapport with them. Their address is P.O. Box 580, Allen Park, MI 48101.

Concerning 1992 membership dues, we are making the renewal form a part of "The Beam" in order to save postage. If you join mid-year, please ask for back issues.

PLEASE REMEMBER THAT WE WILL NOT BE SENDING A SEPARATE BILL SO WE WOULD APPRECIATE YOUR SENDING YOUR CHECK WITH THE RENEWAL FORM, OR RENEW AT THE SEPTEMBER MEETING. THANK YOU.

Have you Seen?


Lighthouse For Sale

The historic Morgan Point Lighthouse in Noank Connecticut is For Sale. The lighthouse is situated on two acres with waterfront lawns and gardens and featuring spectacular views of Fisher Island Sound. Asking price is $1,295,000. Available through Buffam Reality Inc., 37 West Main Street, Westerly, Rhode Island, 02891. Phone (401) 586-0400 or (203) 535-0725.

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.

Officers
President Jack Granger (908) 255-7484
Vice-President Jim Gowdy (609) 476-4532
Secretary Katie Moser (215) 884-8548
Treasurer Carl Nelson (609) 953-8368

Standing Committees
Memberships Barbara Nelson (609) 953-8368
Historian/Librarian George Feirer (609) 628-2210
Newsletter Editor Kim M. Ruth (609) 386-4296
Activities Chair Pat Paulus (908) 255-8489

Submissions to:
The Beam
Kim M. Ruth, Editor
425 Summer Avenue
Beverly, New Jersey 08010

Memberships to:
USLHS-New Jersey Chapter
c/o Barbara Nelson
50 South Main Street, Unit #2
Medford, NJ 08055