Absecon Lighthouse: An Urban Beacon

By Rich & Elinor Veit

This year the city of Atlantic City is celebrating its 150th anniversary. The city was founded in March 1854, held its first elections in May 1854 and Congress approved the building of Absecon Lighthouse in August of that same year. The property for the lighthouse was purchased from the Camden and Atlantic Land Company by the Federal government in December 1854 for $520 and construction of the lighthouse started almost immediately. Building continued throughout 1855 and 1856 and on the evening of January 15, 1857 the magnificent 1st order Fresnel lens of Absecon Lighthouse lit up the sky over Atlantic City for the first time, sending its light 19.5 nautical miles out to sea. The lens was made especially for Absecon Lighthouse and still bears the original plaque on its pedestal reading:

L. SAUTTER & Cie
CONSTRUCTEURS
A PARIS
1854

Dr. Jonathan Pitney, a local medical doctor, known as the “Father of Atlantic City” is most often credited with the building of Absecon Lighthouse. Before there was an Atlantic City, Pitney was sending his patients to what was then called Absecon Beach for health reasons. However, he was appalled by the numerous shipwrecks in the area and saw the need for a lighthouse on the island. He wrote letters and had petitions signed for twenty years to no avail. Finally the wreck of the ship Powhatan on April 16, 1854 with the loss of more than 300 lives brought Pitney’s “pet project” to the attention of the Lighthouse Board. This must have been a bittersweet victory for Pitney, the medical doctor who dedicated his life to curing illness and giving quality to human lives. Jonathan Pitney remains a local folk hero in Southern New Jersey.

It is hard to separate the history of Absecon Lighthouse from the history of life in 1804. The Somers mansion still stands overlooking the town of Somers Point. The two assistant keepers were James Somers, brother of Leah Ann and John Nixon of nearby Oceanville, married to Caroline Somers, sister to Leah Ann and James. James Somers resigned as assistant keeper almost immediately and his position was passed on to numerous other men. Some of these men are only names in old Lighthouse Service pay records, U.S. Census Records or New Jersey Census (Continued on page 3)
From the Editor’s desk........The Deadline for the September issue of the Beam is July 24, 2004. Don’t be disappointed by having your article not appear in “The Beam” due to missing the deadline.

Plan ahead if you intend to be at the October 2, 2004 meeting. There is so much to see and do in the area, that if you plan to stay overnight, make reservations in advance so your not disappointed. Nautically speaking, sites of interest are the Indian River Life Saving Station, Fenwick Island Lighthouse,The Overfalls Lightship, The Harbor of Refuge Lighthouse and more. Watch for more information in the next issue.

President’s Corner May 2004

Stepping Up To the Plate

By Tom Laverty

Many of our members have answered our pleas over the years to step up to the plate and become more active in the NJLHS. Al Smith has been one of those people. Over the last several years he has worked diligently as a Board member to make a lot of activities happen. Most of you know him from the fantastic job he does at the Sandy Hook Lighthouse managing our volunteer activities there, or from his expert handling of the Society’s annual photography contest. He has also served on countless other committees including Budget and Finance, and the Lighthouse Challenge Committee.

The hard part is to find the words to express our gratitude for all that hard work when someone like Al decides that he needs to step away from that plate. He has decided to resign from the Board of Directors position and will no longer chair the Photography Contest Committee. We are happy to report he has not completely given up his involvement with NJLHS and will continue running the program at Sandy Hook, a job that is demanding all by itself.

The NJLHS Board adopted a resolution at our last meeting thanking Al for all his hard work as a Director. I hope that our members recognize his efforts as well and let him know how much each of you have appreciated his efforts over the years.

Al will be a hard person to replace, but I am pleased to announce that Bob Hudspeth has agreed to an appointment on the Board to serve the rest of Al’s term. Bob has recently been chairperson for the Ways and Means Committee. The Board is pleased to have Bob’s experience in retail management, and welcomes him.

Board member Cindy Mitzen will chair the Photography Contest this year. If the enthusiasm she displayed our last Director’s meeting is any indication of what the Photography Contest will be like, I can promise you it will be a good one. Thank you Cindy.

And thanks to all our members who volunteer their time outside of the Board of Directors. There are many who never receive the recognition they deserve for helping to keep NJLHS a great organization. To all of you who have volunteered over the years and to Al, Bob, and Cindy, thank you for stepping up to the plate. You have hit a home run with us.
Records. Others stayed on as many as forty years and worked their way up to head keeper.

There were only six men who held the position of Principal Keeper at Absecon Lighthouse during its seventy-seven years as an active aid to navigation. They were: Daniel Scull, William Bartlett, John Nixon, Abraham Wolf, Thomas Bills and Knud Hanson. Only two of these men, John Nixon and Knud Hanson, worked their way up from assistant keepers. However, at least twenty other men and one woman held the title of Assistant Keeper of Absecon Lighthouse. The last principal keeper, Knud Hanson, started as Second Assistant Keeper, then First Assistant and finally to Head Keeper in 1914 and held that title until July 11, 1933 when the light was decommissioned. He stayed on for several more years as caretaker. He moved from the lighthouse in 1936, but stayed in Atlantic City. Both he and his wife, like many of the past keepers, are buried in local cemeteries. While Absecon was an active light station at least eight children were born there, six keepers or their wives died there and weddings took place there.

Some of the children of the keepers also left their mark on Atlantic City. They are recorded in the city's history as serving in such positions as surf men, fire fighters, Health Department workers, businessmen and bankers. At least one son of Captain Hanson also served in the U.S. Navy.

When Captain Hanson left in 1936, the property began to deteriorate. In 1939 when lighthouses were placed under the Coast Guard, the Guard took over the whole property. They were already in charge of the Life-Saving Station that stood on the Northeast corner of the station. When the Coast Guard built facilities at another location in the city, the property, with the exception of the Weather Bureau, was abandoned.

After WWII the old lighthouse property was taken over by the city of Atlantic City. The deteriorating keeper's houses and the life-saving station were torn down, leaving only the tower and the oil storage house as historic reminders of the once active light station. There were a number of brave attempts to restore the lighthouse and open it to the public. The beacon was relit briefly in both 1954 and 1963. In the 1960s a white picket fence was erected around the property and three dozen gas lamps were installed to illuminate the park and its walkways. However, as the city fell on hard times, the lighthouse did too. Fewer people visited the resort and nightclubs and restaurants closed. The beaches and boardwalk were all but deserted. The tourists went elsewhere for summer vacations.

In 1966 the State of New Jersey purchased the lighthouse property, minus the 50' X 100' section where the Weather Bureau stood, from Atlantic City for one dollar. On September 11, 1970 Absecon Lighthouse was placed on the New Jersey's Register of Historic Places. On January 25, 1971 it was placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

In 1978 when casino gambling came to Atlantic City, a renaissance was started. One by one casinos opened, first along the boardwalk, then in the marina section of the city. The gamblers came to try their luck and the tourists once more flocked to the beach and boardwalk and casino.

In 1983 the Inlet Public/Private Association (IPPA) was formed to advocate for the redevelopment of the Inlet section of the city, which at one time was the upscale section of town. The IPPA immediately adopted the lighthouse as its logo. In 1993 the IPPA started to look into the possibility of restoring the old light station. With a $50,000 grant from the city of Atlantic City the Historical Structure Report was drawn up. The lighthouse still belongs to the State of New Jersey, Department of Environmental Protection, Division of Parks and Forestry, however, it has been leased by the IPPA for the restoration project. In 1995 the IPPA hired Sara Curen as Executive Director of Absecon Lighthouse, filling the position of Lighthouse Keeper for the first time since 1933.

In 1997 the restoration of the tower of Absecon Lighthouse was started. The period of interpretation selected was 1925 when the beacon was electrified to 1933 when it was decommissioned as an aid to (Continued on page 6)
**Tote Bags**
Small 10"H X 13" W  
$12.00 & $3.00 Shipping  
Large 13" H X 21" W  
$15.00 & $4.00 Shipping

**Society Cloth Patch**  
$4.00 & $1.00 Shipping  
**Society Pin**  
(Same Design)  
$3.00 & $1.00 Shipping

**Society Hats**  
Fully adjustable rear band.  
Bill comes in green, blue or black  
$12.00 & $3.00 Shipping

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**Also available:**

**Books:**  
Lighthouses of the United States, $8.00 & $2.00 Shipping  
Sentinels of the Shore, $13.00 & $2.00 Shipping  
List of all Existing U.S. Lighthouses, $10.00 & $2.00 Shipping

**Maps:**  
$5.00 & $1.00 Shipping (each)  
Florida, Maine, Massachusetts and Southeast

**Video:**  
Eye of the Mariner, VHS Video, $20.00 & $3.00 Shipping

**Society License Plate Frame**  
White plastic with black letters “NJ Lighthouse Society”, $4.00 & $2.00 Shipping

**Sweat Shirts and T's**  
are still available in limited sizes. See last issue of The Beam for design. Call for sizes and prices.

Marion & Bob Hudspeth, 609-877-1393

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**YOUR PURCHASES SUPPORT THE GOALS OF THE SOCIETY**

**NJLHS ORDER FORM:**

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MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO:

Mail check and order form to:  
(Retain a copy of your order)
Thanks to Edd Mathisen and Ted Skeen, the 2004 Photo Contest was a success. I think that we all came away with some new ideas and techniques to make our photos better.

In spite of the ‘lighting problem’ Ted’s slides certainly were enough to ‘stir the imagination’. We thank them for sharing their knowledge of photography with us. They certainly have made a difference in the quality of the entries in the photo contest over the last few years. Thanks also to Ted and Edd for the Kodak film awarded to the winners giving them new opportunities to improve their skills.

Speaking of the quality of the photos, here are the winners!

**NEW JERSEY 5X7 & SMALLER**

1st Place – Harry Kraponick – East Point – Path to Restoration
2nd Place – Beverlee Robbins – Flagship of Atlantic City
3rd Place – Judy McCann – Sandy Hook in Winter
Honorable Mention:
Katie Moser – A View from the Garden – Hereford Inlet Lighthouse
Linda Pierson – New Light in the Tower

**NEW JERSEY LARGER THAN 5X7**

1st Place – Al Pochek – Hereford Inlet, NJ
2nd Place – Al Pochek – Barnegat, NJ
3rd Place – Lucinda Holsinger – Barnegat in Bloom
Honorable Mention:
Jan Keenecke – The Eaves of Twin Towers

**OTHER LIGHTS LARGER THAN 5X7**

1st Place – Donna Bishop – Trees framing North Head Light
2nd Place – Steve Casler – Portland Head
3rd Place – Elvin A. Veit – Hillsboro Inlet Lighthouse, Florida
Honorable Mention:
Al Pochek – Race Rock, NY
Steve Casler – Spring Point Ledge.

**The Winner’s Circle**

1st Place – Lillian Fulde – Coquille River Lighthouse
2nd Place – Lillian Fulde – Guardian Light
3rd place – Roland Fulde – Landing at Peggy’s Cove

**And the BEST OF SHOW is**

Robert & Florence Libby - East Point, NJ.

**CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL THE WINNERS!**

I hope that all of you have enjoyed the photo contest as much as I have enjoyed bringing it to you over the past 6 or 7 years.

Unfortunately, I have noticed that the number of entries has declined steadily over the past few years; to the point that only about 40-45 people have entries this year (and over 150 to as many as 200 people attending). That translates to about 100 pictures. I think that there may be a need for change as interest seems to be waning. I think there are ANY number of people out there who may have NEW and BETTER ideas for the Photo Contest and for that reason I am stepping down as photo contest chairperson. All the equipment and supplies are here; just waiting for idea that will rekindle interest in the contest. GO FOR IT!

I’d like to thank all the folks who have helped out over the years; without your help the day of the contest would have been impossible, THANK YOU! Thanks to Yvonne Miller, Program Chair, for her help also and to the most important person, my wife, Betty (ok, BJ), without her nothing happens for me.

There will be some changes to the photo contest. The master’s category will remain the same, but there will be changes to the other 4 categories. The categories will be:

1) New Jersey Lighthouses any size.
2) New Jersey Lighthouses collage, be creative.
3) National / International Lighthouses any size.
4) Lighthouses with flowers any size.
5) Other

Please remember this is an amateur’s contest. If there are enough pro’s out there, let me know and a category can be arranged. Thanks to Al Smith for a great job.

By Cindy Mitzen
Challenge Boosters
Those wishing to help support our Lighthouse Challenge 2004, financially, can do so by sending your donation for a newsletter booster. Send your donation of a one dollar minimum, per name to have your names printed in the September issue of "The Beam".

Send your donation and the names (Printed clearly) to:

The Beam
PO Box 4582
Highland Park, NJ 08904-4582
Make checks payable to:
New Jersey Lighthouse Society

(Continued from page 3)

navigation. The tower was painted yellow and black, the day mark, the lighthouse was painted for more than thirty years. This was the seventh change in color for the lighthouse. In 1998 with the restoration of the tower nearing completion, the rebuilding of the principal lighthouse keeper’s house was begun. In the early hours of July 6, 1998 a fire destroyed the nearly completed house. The IPPA opened the tower to the public on April 8, 1999. The lost keeper’s dwelling was once more rebuilt and opened to visitors in October 2001.

Recently Atlantic City adopted the slogan “Always Turned On.” When the sun sets on Absecon Island, the bright casino lights along the boardwalk and the marina section of Atlantic City light up the night sky.

When night falls on Atlantic City, the magnificent 1st order Fresnel lens of Absecon Lighthouse once more lights up the sky over Absecon Inlet.
Program Signals: 
By Yvonne Miller

June 19, 2004 Summer Meeting:

Do you remember last December when we were going to have the Holiday Social at Absecon Lighthouse and we were bringing Lighthouse Christmas Decorations for the Christmas tree? Well, we are going to Absecon for Christmas in June. The Christmas Tree will be up so that we can bring our Lighthouse Tree ornaments!

The Summer Picnic meeting on June 19, 2004 is set for the Absecon Lighthouse at 31 Rhode Island Avenue, Atlantic City. The meeting is scheduled to start at 11AM preceded by Hospitality at 10:30AM. Because of being outside, hospitality will be handled differently this meeting. If you are planning on bringing goodies for hospitality please let Connie Miller know so she can plan. Connie can be reached at 609 953 0832. The meeting will be held under a tent on the lighthouse grounds. Since this is the Anniversary Picnic, members are encouraged to bring their own Picnic Lunch, there will be lemonade, ice tea and watermelon. A new member Terry Webb recently published a children’s lighthouse book “Manning the Light”. The book will be available at the NJLHS Sales Table and Terry Webb will be available for signing the books. If you already have the book, feel free to bring it with you to be signed. The drawing of the Preservation Raffle winners will also take place at this meeting. Parking is on street around the lighthouse. Membership badge or card will be required for climbing the lighthouse free of charge without exception.

Directions:

From North, and South take the Garden State Parkway to Rt 30. Follow Rt 30 East until Pacific Avenue in Atlantic City, in front of the Show Boat Casino. Turn left onto Pacific Avenue to Rhode Island or Vermont Avenues. Parking on Street.

October 2, 2004 Fall Meeting

Plans are underway for a meeting down in the Lewes, Delaware area. The meeting will be held at the Lewes Presbyterian Fellowship Hall. Since they celebrate an annual festival in Lewes on that weekend, you might want to make arrangements for a place to stay now. The Lewes, Rehoboth Beach area would be in close proximity to the meeting. Arrangements to see several lighthouse related sites are in the works. Stay tuned!!

After visiting the Lewes/Rehoboth area this past weekend (5/1&2) I decided to give you all a heads up about accommodations for the October meeting. There will be several "special events" happening in the area. The plans for this meeting could encompass the whole weekend. Therefore, I would recommend that you make arrangements as soon as possible if you plan to stay down for the weekend. There are several hotels right in Lewes but booking should be made NOW.

Contact:
Lewes Chamber of Commerce and Visitors Bureau at 877 465 3937 Web site www.lewes-chamber.com
Rehoboth Beach Chamber of Commerce: 800-441-1329 Web www.beach-fun.com
Ocean City, MD. (Close by) Ocean City Visitors Guide 800-626-2326 Web www.ococeane.com

In addition all the major hotel chains are in the above areas. Call any of their 800 numbers and ask for Rehoboth Beach or Ocean City. Milford, DE is twenty minutes north of Lewes on Rte 1/113; there is a Super 8.

This information is supplied for members convenience, NJLHS is not endorsing any one hotel or area.

December 4, 2004, Winter Meeting: To be announced.

March Meeting Recap:

162 members and guests attended and enjoyed the Photo Contest, the presentation and lunch. Hospitality was served by the new Hospitality Committee with a wonderful selection of "goodies." Thank you to all who volunteered to make the meeting a success.

Membership

To update your mailing or email address please call the membership chairperson listed on page two or email her at: NJLHSmember1@aol.com
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RAFFLE TIME

Once again it is time to sell or buy your raffle tickets to support our "Preservation Fund".

The tickets were sent out on May 20, 2004 to all active members. If you did not receive your tickets or would like a few more books to sell please contact us at (609) 652-1876 or Email us at ELRIVEIT@msn.com.

The raffle will be pulled at the meeting June 19, 2004 at the Absecon Lighthouse.

There are some exciting prizes being offered this year but you can’t win if you don’t buy a ticket.

Rich Veit & The Committee