

The History of Fire Island Light

It Can't Be a Beacon if Its Light Don't Shine



By Henry R. Bang

To those of our contemporaries who embrace the total comforts of the electronic age, the Fire Island Light is a relic of a past age, like the nickel beer, vaudeville and the open-sided trolley cars.

Those international travelers who sit secure in the staterooms of the great ocean liners or in cabins of the strato jets hurtling through the stratosphere are only dimly aware of the invisible pulses of a far-off radar station reaching out electronic fingers that caress the vessels night and day. They give little thought to the men in the pilot's cabin, or to the officers on the bridge, whose eyes are glued to the impersonal black screen with the cold green light sweeping around in a circle, causing a blip to pinpoint the position of the vessel carrying hundreds, perhaps thousands,

of souls to a far-off destination through the night.

But for those who follow the sea, and those thoughtful romantics that think about man and nature, the lighthouse stands even today as a sturdy symbol of man's enduring strength in his struggle against the forces of nature, of his desire to help his fellow man make his way through the unfriendly darkness of the night.

We suspect that even the veteran sea-going captain, with all his sophisticated radar and radio beams to guide him, must still feel a warming sense of relief, when he makes the Fire Island Light. To those thousands of pleasure boat sailors who have braved the open sea on their way back from Cutty Hunk and Nantucket, or are returning from an ocean adventure to Bermuda or the Caribbean, making a lighthouse on the

return breaks the silent dam of tension.

The far-off pinpoint of light that revolved in the darkness once beamed warmth and welcome. The sight of the lighthouse announces the proximity of home and hearth, it brings a physical comfort that cannot be matched by the cold, electronic blips of the radar screen.

There in the distance, the bright flashing light bespoke a human presence in the night. The lighthouse keeper was on the job, a man and his family nearby, a human being reaching out through the night across the sea to guide you home.

A friendly landmark during the day for the thousands of craft that ply the Great South Bay, and the even harder souls who venture out into the ocean, the Fire Island Light brought the presence of mankind to souls at sea and those seek-

ing their way through the darkness.

The Fire Island Light went dark in 1974, after 148 years of service to those navigating in Long Island waters. Modern technology had made it obsolete. Yet, the gaunt and lonely anachronism still stands as a landmark today, familiar and comforting to boatmen ... and of special significance to those with a sense of history.

In a letter written on June 15, 1825 Jonathan Thompson, the Federal Superintendent of Lighthouses, describes the purchase of the property on the east side of the Fire Island Inlet for the purpose of building a lighthouse:

"Because I was unable to obtain a title to the land by purchase as there was doubt who were, if any person was the owner, therefore, I made application to the State Legislature for a cession of the jurisdiction over it and for Commissioners to approve the value of the land at fifty dollars, which I have paid and have received for the United States a certified copy of the Act and a duplicate of the appraisement, which has been recorded, all of which makes a good and sufficient title to the land."

While the exact dates of construction are not shown in the records, it has been established that work was completed and the Light in operation in late 1826. It is also recorded that while the original appropriation was for \$10,000, the total cost of the lighthouse, the dwelling, the well and the lamps was \$9,999.65. The 35 cents was carried in "surplus

was originally equipped with "eighteen lamps and burnished reflectors," and according to the records, was visible for 27 nautical miles. It was equipped with the "most approved revolving plan," which caused the lamps to make a complete revolution in one minute and thirty seconds. It consisted of a weight attached to a cable that was hand cranked every four hours by the keeper to bring the weight up to the top of the tower. A governor mechanism controlled the revolution of the lamps.

In 1842, the lamp arrangement was changed to 14 lamps and 21 reflectors with visibility reduced to 22 miles. There is no explanation for this, perhaps it was an early governmental economy move.

There is very little material available as to the reason for replacing the original lighthouse, after only 30 years of operation, with the much larger present structure.

Some evidence indicates that the original structure was not tall enough for its beam to be seen far enough to give the required protection to ships at sea. We also know that the first lighthouse did not stand up well to the fierce elements of wind and sea.

Until 1852, the lighthouses were under superintendence of the Fifth Auditor of the Treasury, who had other matters to attend to and who himself was not chosen as an expert in lighthouses, construction or maintenance. Because of the constant complaints about the deficiencies of our lighthouse system, a com-

As a result of their report, a Lighthouse Board was created by an Act of Congress in 1852. This board consisted of two naval officers, one officer of the Engineers Corps, and two civilians with engineering backgrounds. The board was charged with the erection, repair and maintenance of all lighthouses, light ships and buoys, with reducing the navigational risks, and with making American harbors more accessible.

The Lighthouse Board moved quickly to upgrade the light service from one of the worst in the world to one of the best. Congress voted funds for the most modern structures, with the latest improvements in lenses, reflectors and lamps. The whole coastal situation was restudied, and a decision made to provide better coverage on the south shore of Long Island by building the Ponquoque Light at Shinnecock, which went into operation on Jan. 1, 1858, and to rebuilding the Fire Island Light with a much higher structure and a more powerful light.

On March 3, 1857, Congress appropriated \$40,000 for the construction of a new Fire Island lighthouse, to be 168 feet high! It was to have a first-order Fresnel light, which would be visible for at least 21 miles at sea. Construction of the light, which stands today, was started in 1857. It went into operation on November 1, 1858.

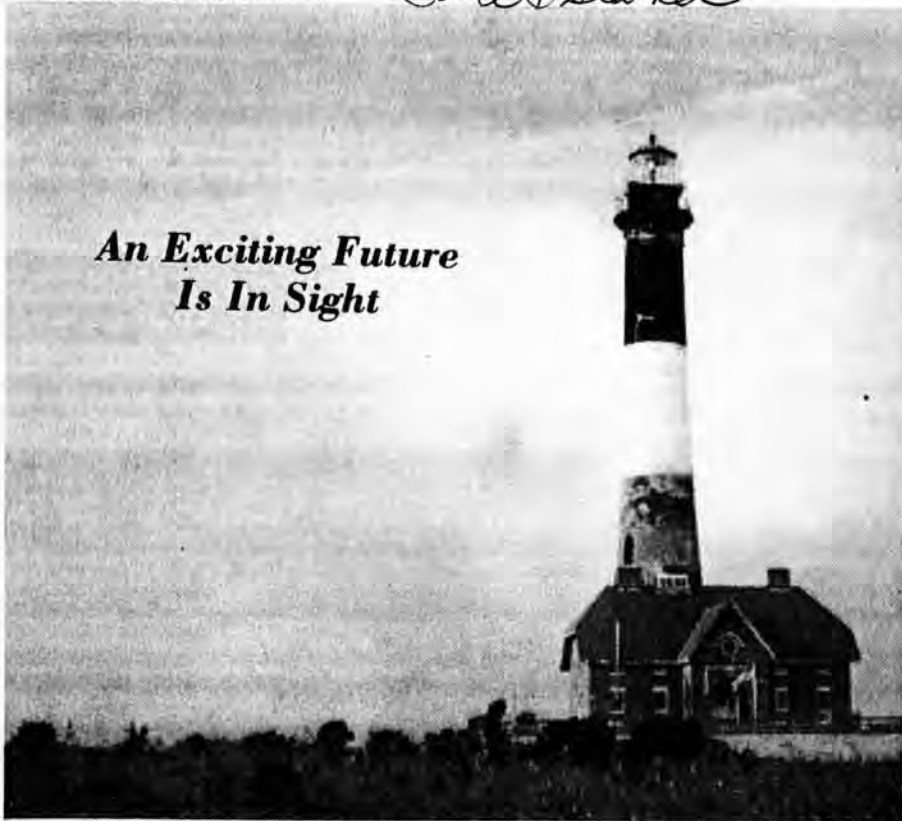
The notice to Mariners, dated July 3, 1858, gave notice that "On the evening of Monday, the 1st day of November next, a first order revolving light will be exhibited for the first time, and on every night thereafter



Can't Be a Beacon

From page 28

An Exciting Future Is In Sight



from sunset to sunrise, from the light-house tower now in course of erection at Fire Island Beach, east side of Fire Island inlet, south side of Long Island, N.Y. The illuminating apparatus is of the first order revolving catadioptric of the system of Fresnel, and will produce a brilliant flash once in every minute, which will not be materially different in appearance from the existing light in the old tower at that place, except in the greater brightness of the flash and increased range of the new light.

"The light-house tower which is placed about 200 feet N.E. from the old light-house tower, is built of brick, will be 150 feet in height, of cream or yellow color, and the light will be about 166 feet above the mean level of the sea.

"The old light-house tower and keepers' dwelling will be removed immediately after the exhibition of the light from the new tower. The new light should be seen in ordinary states of the atmosphere, from the deck of a vessel 15 feet above the water, from 21 to 23 nautical miles."

The new light is built on a stone pier that is 100 feet by 150 feet. It is constructed of brick, circular in shape, with the walls at the base almost 11 feet thick, tapering to 2½ feet at the parapet. The staircase and railing are iron, with nine landings. The parapet platform is of granite with an iron railing. The lamps were similar to those used in the original lighthouse and are fourteen in number, with 21 inch re-

flectors. The improvement in the illuminating apparatus was the installation of a first-order Fresnel system, which greatly increased the intensity of the light. The Fresnel system consisted of surrounding the lamp with a series of prismatic rings of glass, all cut mathematically so that all of the rays were bent to go out in one plane.

Construction was started in the early summer of 1857. It was halted in bad weather in early December, after most of the concrete filling of the foundation had been completed. On April 9, 1858, Lieut. J.T. Morton, who had replaced Lieut. Duane, found indications that the concrete used in the foundation was unreliable, and expressed concern that cracking and disfigurement of the tower might occur. To insure against this, Lieut. Morton doubled the number of iron bands which were imbedded in the lower 10 feet of the tower. He felt that these bands would effectively prevent any spreading or cracking of the base and would maintain the integrity of the tower.

Because the tower was constructed of brick, it was necessary to coat the structure with a cement wash, to make it impervious to water. Accordingly, two coats of cream yellow cement wash about 1/8 inch thick were applied. (It was not until August 4, 1891 that it was changed to the present black and white colors, and a notice to Mariners was issued.)

As planned, the new light was exhibited on November 1, 1858.

Nearly 1200 lighthouses manned our national shorelines in 1900, including the one on Fire Island.

Fewer than 100 of them remain in manned service today. Almost a decade ago, the Fire Island Lighthouse was darkened and its functional purposes were abandoned to suffer the chaotic consequences of human neglect and the ravages of wind, sand and storm.

For 116 years the friendly beacon of the Fire Island Lighthouse welcomed ocean-going vessels on their approach to New York Harbor, provided boatmen of the Great South Bay area with a faithful piloting aid and flashed protectively over the beach houses on Fire Island.

The light was the first glimpse of the United States for many immigrants to this country in the early part of this century. In 1974, however, the proud lighthouse lantern was extinguished and replaced with a much weaker light atop a nearby water tower. The historic landmark had begun its shameful path into disrepair and neglect.

Today a new hope to rehabilitate the former glory and usefulness of the lighthouse is spreading. It is anticipated that the lighthouse will be renovated and the 90 acre tract of its location will be developed for an educational, navigational and recreational program that will be launched by the momentous relighting of the great lantern.

In 1976 the management of the darkened navigational tower was transferred to the National Park Service. The 167 foot tower already has suffered massive erosion and structural weakening. It was in obvious need of reinforcement and restoration of its brick exterior with new masonry and finish.

It has been closed to the public for reasons of safety.

Federal funding cutbacks all but eliminated any expectation that the government would restore it.

Despite the discouragements, however, new and exciting plans for the area now have been prepared by the National Park Service and the Fire Island National Seashore. In 1982, those plans took a major step toward materialization when a private group of influential and concerned community leaders chartered the Fire Island Lighthouse Preservation Society as a not-for-profit, tax exempt corporation.

The formation of the society culminated a two-year effort to effect the transfer of the lighthouse and surrounding tract from the Coast Guard to the National Park Service and to have it included in the National Register of Historic Sites. In the summer of 1982 the society entered into cooperative agreements with the Fire Island National Seashore to pursue the restoration goals, one of the first times such a private/public venture has been undertaken to preserve an historic site.

Current plans call for an imaginative, though prudent, reconversion of the whole lighthouse area. The tower itself will be repaired and refurbished. The area will be opened to the public for conducted interpretive tours, each to be limited to 16 visitors per hour within the tower.

The lighthouse keeper's quarters will be converted

into a small maritime museum, an interpretive and information center to inform visitors, including scheduled school classes, about America's nautical heritage and the background and ecology of the seashore area. An important goal is the preservation of the fragile natural resources within the lighthouse tract.

The history of the whaling industry and lifesaving activities of the former U.S. Life Saving Service also will be amply covered in narrations, visual aids and publications. The lighthouse property will provide low density beach use to complement the high density beach activity at Robert Moses State Park.

The Fire Island Lighthouse Preservation Society is currently in the midst of their \$1,100,000 fundraising goal. It's their hope of acquiring the promise of these monies by year's end, so their major goal...that of rekindling the lighthouse beacon in 1984, can become a reality.

To raise this money, help is needed from all areas of Long Island, not just the South Shore and Fire Island areas. Programs can be set up for various clubs, historical societies, museums and youth groups to help raise the funds.

Interested groups, and individuals, should contact the Fire Island Lighthouse Preservation Society, 99 Maple Ave., Bayshore, NY 11706. They may be reached by telephone at 968-8899.

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LOCAL HISTORY
COLLECTION



the
story
of...

the FIRE ISLAND LIGHT

by Henry R. Bang

Henry R. Bang is an historian as well as a widely read author of local histories. "The Story of the Fire Island Light," was first published in March, 1981, with a second printing in November, 1982.

The volume is available at numerous book stores, and at the headquarters of the Fire Island Lighthouse Preservation Society, located at 99 Maple Ave. in Bayshore.

Turning Back The Clock...

Timeline Courtesy of Kthleen A. Vandervelt

1825-1826: The first Fire Island Lighthouse is built (an eight sided granite structure).

1826: The first Lighthouse Keeper hired is Mr. Isaacs. (first name unknown).

1835: Felix Dominy becomes Lighthouse Keeper.

1844: Dominy retires and purchases land east of the Lighthouse to build a home.

1847: The Dominy House is converted to a small inn, the first on Fire Island.

1849: The U.S. Life Saving Service builds the Fire Island Station near the Lighthouse (one of seven stations on Fire Island).

1850: The bark, Elizabeth, is wrecked near Point O' Woods on July 19th. Margaret Fuller, a prominent lady of letters, drowns.

1852: The Lighthouse Board (a federal agency) is formed to improve and upgrade the lighthouse system.

1855: David S.S. Sammis purchases land east of the Lighthouse.

1856: Sammis builds the Surf Hotel, destined to become a popular international resort.

1857: Congress appropriates \$40,000 to build a new Lighthouse.

1857-1858: The second (present) Lighthouse is built. It is a brick structure washed in cement, painted a creamy yellow color. A First Order Fresnel Lens, the largest available, is installed in the lantern room. The original lightkeeper's dwelling is dismantled, the granite slabs are used in the construction of the foundation for the new keeper's dwelling.

1858: The beacon is lit on November 1st, using whale oil as the fuel. The first Fire Island Lighthouse is torn



Shrouded in mist and fog, the lighthouse seems frozen in amber.

down, and the granite stones are used to build the terrace and enlarge the keeper's quarters.

1876: The Western Union Telegraph Tower is built 1/4 mile southeast of the Lighthouse. This tower replaces the facility in the cupola of the Surf Hotel.

1880: The Postal Telegraph Tower is built 3/4 of a mile

southeast of the Lighthouse.

1891: The Lighthouse tower is coated with black tar and white stripes are painted to make it more visible during the day, and to distinguish it from other lighthouses.

Continued on page 19

Timeline from page 2

1892: New York State purchases the Surf Hotel, and uses it as a cholera quarantine station. The State also acquires 120 acres of property east of the Lighthouse.

1896: A steam-generated electric power plant is built adjacent to the Lighthouse to electrify the light. This plant was never used, and was ultimately dismantled. The Lighthouse was to wait forty years for electrification.

1903: The jurisdiction over lighthouses is transferred to the Commerce Department.

1908: The Surf Hotel property becomes the first State Park on Long Island. Surf Hotel buildings are auctioned off, dismantled and taken to the mainland. It is the end of a glorious era.

1909: Fire Island State Park buildings and boardwalks are erected 1/4 mile east of the Lighthouse.

1910: The Bureau of Lighthouses is created, and the Lighthouse Board is abolished.

1912: Reinforcement bands and a new concrete coating is applied to the Lighthouse.

1915: The U.S. Life Saving Service merges with the Revenue Cutter Service to form the United States Coast Guard.

1918: A brush fire from Saltaire spreads and burns westward, destroying the State Park buildings.

1918-1920: The U.S. Navy takes over the Western Union Telegraph Tower.

1920: The Postal Telegraph and Western Union Companies discontinue service.

1922: A U.S. Naval radio station is built 1/4 mile southeast of the Lighthouse.

1924: The Long Island State Parks Commission is formed with Robert Moses as Commissioner. Five miles of beach has built up west of the Fire Island Lighthouse, and these lands are acquired by the Long Island State Parks Commission.

1926: "Camp Cheerful" is built 1/2 mile east of the Lighthouse by the New York City Rotary Club working in cooperation with the State Park.

1931: A severe storm causes Moriches Inlets to break through and form Fire Island's east end. This storm destroys the Western Union Tower and many other buildings.

1938: Hurricane of September 21st destroys the State Park buildings, Camp Cheerful, the Postal Telegraph Tower, Saltaire and devastates many other communities. Later in the year Robert Moses proposes a Fire Island Parkway. Residents protest and the idea is shelved.

1939: The first electric beacon is installed in the Lighthouse using a clamshell lens. The First Order Fresnel Lens is sent for display to the Franklin Institute in Philadelphia. The U.S. Lighthouse Service is incorporated into the Coast Guard.

1940: Fire Island State Park headquarters is rebuilt with the location moved 2/12 miles west of the Lighthouse (located at present day Robert Moses State Park: Parking Field Three).

1952: The "Connector", a tunnel joining the Lighthouse to the Keeper's dwelling, is torn down.

1959: The Robert Moses Causeway and Bridge are built.

1962: Robert Moses again proposes a Fire Island Parkway, once again meets with resident disapproval, and the Parkway is not built.

1964: Fire Island National Seashore is established by the National Park Service, Department of the Interior, to preserve and protect Fire Island.

1974: The light goes out. The Fire Island Lighthouse is extinguished because the tower is in an advanced state of disrepair. This same year the Coast Guard abandons operation of the lighthouse site. In its place a strobe light is placed atop the water tower at Robert Moses State Park.

1979: Application is filed to have management of the Lighthouse transferred from the Coast Guard to the

National Park Service.

1981: The Lighthouse is declared unrepairable, and is slated for demolition. The light is about to go out forever.

1982: The Fire Island Lighthouse Preservation Society is incorporated to raise funds for the restoration of the Lighthouse.

1983: The Coast Guard officially transfers management of the Lighthouse site to the National Park Service.

1985: Fire Island National Seashore acquires the 120 acres east of the Lighthouse (where the Surf Hotel once stood) from New York State, trading park land near Montauk Point for the Fire Island property.

1985-1986: The Lighthouse site is improved with two miles of boardwalks, and the renovation of the Navy Radio Station as a Park Ranger residence. The Lighthouse Keeper Dwelling is remodeled into a Visitor Information and Exhibit Center.

1986: The Coast Guard installs a new beacon atop the Fire Island Lighthouse which is lit on May 25th, at 9:00 P.M. A large crowd gathers to enjoy the rekindling ceremonies. The Lighthouse Visitor Center is dedicated and opened to the public.

1989: U.S. Lighthouse Service Bicentennial celebrated. Congress declares August 7th as "National Lighthouse Day". The Fire Island Lighthouse tower is open to the public for tours for the first time.

1990: The Fire Island Lighthouse Preservation Society continues to raise money for ongoing maintenance, educational programs and to keep the site open to the public.

1991: Society restructured to raise funds and promote partnerships.

Society takes over gift shop in Keepers' Quarters. First annual Earth Day Project. Fifth annual Barefoot/Blacktie Gala nets \$10,000, over 500 attend. Keepers' Quarters plaque unveiled. Lighthouse opened for school groups, and workshops held with teachers, children and Fire Island National Seashore Rangers.



Fire Island Light

SPRING 1996

THE QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE FIRE ISLAND LIGHTHOUSE PRESERVATION SOCIETY
FIRE ISLAND LIGHTHOUSE PRESERVATION SOCIETY, INC. • 4640 CAPTREE ISLAND, CAPTREE ISLAND, NY 11702-4601

VOLUME 1, NO. 2

Created To Educate Our Community About Its Maritime Heritage!

Relighting Was An Enchanting Evening

*Reprinted from the
Fire Island Light,
August 1986*

It was an evening of evenings—a touchstone against which all who were there would measure future evenings. And the jewel in the touchstone was the Fire Island Light.

The tower stood against a dramatic sky of cloud formations and dying sunlight, like some giant chess piece, worn from play. Exposed were the original bricks, kilned nearby on the island to the curved shapes needed, laid in 1856 by masons long buried.

Crumbling stucco made incomplete its distinctive black-white stripes that identify it as OUR light.

To the south, the freshly red-shingled Keepers' Quarters had just been dedicated by legislators, officials from the Coast Guard, the Department of the Interior and the National Seashore. Congratulations were read from

President Reagan recalling that "the first sight of the United States from ships carrying millions of immigrants from 1850 to 1920 was the Fire Island Lighthouse."

And of course members of the Fire Island Lighthouse Preservation Society, stalwart dreamers, had planned the

Relighting event. After four previous attempts to "get up a group to do something," this group did it. Norma Ervin of Saltaire, a former President of the Fire Island Association gave the last energy of her life to the cause. The new Visitor Information and Exhibit Center was dedicated to her memory by her husband, and master lighthouse supporters, the Arthur Ortenbergs.

Inside the spanking new interior, guests saw professional exhibits

STORY CONTINUED ON PAGE 4



Preservation Society President's Message

I've been a member of the Fire Island Lighthouse Preservation Society for eight years and President for five. It's been tremendously time consuming and a lot of hard work, but the rewards are multiplied by the hours invested. Getting to know people who have an interest in light-houses is a constant source of inspiration. You have inspired me to expand the Society's horizons on Long Island, which is yet to be discovered by hundreds of thousands of people living on Long Island, in other parts of New York State and the country. We need a wake up call, and the 10th Anniversary Year of the Relighting Celebration is the time to make it.

Five events are currently being planned by the Board of Directors with the help of an Advisory Council. Two joint meetings for the Board and Council members were held at the Melville Marriott during the '95-'96 fiscal year to start the ball rolling.

In this issue of the *Fire Island Light* you will read about the first two events, which have taken months of planning to insure successful results this

spring. We want to see you and your families and friends engaged in what promises to be a good time for everyone. If you have a good time, the Society's membership will grow to the numbers needed for survival. Funds raised will be used to repaint the lighthouse in the early spring and for new exhibits and programs planned for the general public, schools and other interested groups. We can and we will do it with your help and financial support.

It amazes me that Long Islanders today do not recognize the economic importance of the Island's geographic location, which accounts for millions of immigrants entering this country through Long

Island's waterways to reach Ellis Island in search of freedom. Stories and artifacts found in the archives of Long Island's maritime museums, Lighthouse Keepers' Quarters, the National Park Service (Patchogue), and art galleries can teach us so much about our own nautical heritage. The problem I see is a lack of coordinated efforts to pull it all together for Long Island, although the lighthouse folks are giving it their best try. Imagine the possibilities of linking our past to maritime adventures in all parts of Long Island, especially on the South Shore, with the Long Island Convention and Visitors Bureau. Perhaps it's time to revive the

Long Island Maritime Festival, held in the early 80's.

An idea recently discussed at a Long Island Convention and Visitors Bureau meeting is the notion of creating a South Shore Waterways Trail. If the North Shore Promotion Alliance can boost tourism and the economy by developing a North Shore Heritage Trail, it seems logical that folks on the South Shore can follow the lead. We can learn from our past to educate the now and future generations by teaming up for the benefit of all. We need only to "lead, partner, or get out of the way." If interested, call (516) 422-4213.

*Your President,
Gayle Haines, Ed.D.*

VOLUNTEERS WANTED!

Adults being recruited for the 1996 season. Must be able to work at least one day during the week. Duties include greeting visitors, working in sales area or assisting with tower tours and/or Park Ranger with school groups.

OPPORTUNITIES NOW!

Part-time work for creative person with writing skills and knowledge of Pagemaker (MAC). Strong oral communication skills a must. Send resume to 4640 Captree Island, Captree Island, NY 11702-4601, or Fax 516-321-7033

Advisory Council Plans Upcoming Festivities

by Carolyn Ortiz

On January 8, 1996 the Fire Island Lighthouse Preservation Society Advisory Council met for the second time at the Melville Marriott Hotel. Members of the council contributed to planning for the Long Island Parks Run & Walk on Sunday, April 21; the Tenth Anniversary of the Relighting on Sunday, May 26; the Barefoot Blacktie

on August 3 and the Tenth Anniversary Gala, scheduled for October.

Council members had the opportunity to view the gingerbread replica of the Fire Island Lighthouse, which was on display at the meeting. The replica was constructed by Babylon High School junior Nicole Thompson under the guidance of Home and Career teacher, Mrs. Evelyn Johnson. It was donated to the Nassau County Cerebral Palsy Society as a competitive entry in the Festival of Trees held at SUNY Old Westbury on November 25 and 26,

1995. The gingerbread lighthouse earned first place in the competition. Because Babylon seventh grade students have adopted the Fire Island Lighthouse for their community service project, and as part of the project raised funds to purchase the replica from the Cerebral Palsy Society, the gingerbread lighthouse is now on display at the Melville Marriott Hotel. The seventh graders donated it to the Fire Island Lighthouse "with the belief that such a representation and unique artwork should be preserved for all to see."



Gingerbread replica of the Fire Island Lighthouse on display at the Melville Marriott Hotel. Photo by Carolyn Ortiz

CALENDAR • SPRING 1996

APRIL 1996						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

MAY 1996						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
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- APRIL 21:** Run/Walk For Parks
- MAY 1-31:** Fire Island Lighthouse Exhibit in month of May at the L.I. Children's Museum
- MAY 11&18:** Upcoming Special Events at L.I. Children's Museum
- MAY 26:** 10th Anniversary Celebration Cruise aboard: "Evening Star"—Flagship "Lauren Kristy"—Sister ship
- JULY:** Lighthouse Art Show
- AUG 3:** Barefoot Blacktie Gala

For more information on any Fire Island Lighthouse Preservation Society event, please call 516-321-7028. Ask for Janice.

Relighting Was An Enchanting Evening...

STORY CONTINUED FROM COVER

designed, prepared and installed by Society Board Member, Carole Mackler.

Outside in the twilight was a spectacle never before seen on the Bay. A Relighting Regatta had been formed under the direction of the late U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary Vice-Captain, Roy Wesley. Yacht clubbers, private boaters and the Captree Boatmans' Association, hundreds of boats, large and small, historic and new, were "dressed" with lights and pennants. The sunset sparkled as darkness fell.

Musical salutes flowed across the water from the U.S. Marines-sponsored "New Image" Drum and Bugle Corps aboard the moored vessel, *Vagabond*.

Along the bay beach, on boardwalks and sandy paths near the lighthouse, people stood in eager anticipation. Offshore in the ocean, the liner *Americus* shone like an anchored city, also in waiting.

Up in the tower were Coast Guards, joined by Frank Mina who had restored the original antique lantern on display

in the Exhibit Center below. A new, state-of-the-art beacon had been installed in the lantern room, ready to beam out 24 miles, when the switch would be thrown at 9:00 PM. Batteries and generators stood by in case there were problems.

On the flagship, hundreds of guests who had been with the restoration effort through the years looked in awe at the scene—the floodlit tower, the twinkling boats, the changing tints of the sky and clusters of figures lining the shore.

At the railing, with fingers on the handle of an old-fashioned ceremonial blade-switch, were Tom Roberts, founder and President of the Society, historian Henry Bang who documented the Light's history, and 14-year-old John Peter Nappi, descendent of the first Fire Island lightkeeper.

At 8:58 the floodlights went out, accentuating the darkness and at 8:59 the countdown started.

In the crowds assembled on Captree Island, Luis Bejarano, Jr. proudly announced:



Pictured from left to right are: Luis Bejarano, Thomas Roberts, Marilyn Roberts, Frank Muria, Mary Grover, Jack Hauptman, Henry Bang, Frank Braynard, Jim Grover, Harry Traegarthen. (model by Ali Beqaj)

"Come on everyone, count! My Dad's been working years for this."

Luis E. Bejarano, Executive Director of the Preservation Society and emcee on the flagship led the count on board. And, with transistor radios tuned to the simulcast, the voices of spectators everywhere on the boats and beaches joined in shouting...five, four, three, two, ONE!

The surge of power climbed the new cable to the top and, with a flicker as people held their breaths, went from Emergency to Online. The mighty beacon shone out and started to revolve!

Shouts, horns, whistles, blasts from all the musical instruments made a cacophony of joy. Not a few eyes watching filled with tears. *She was back!*

Celebration of Relighting Anniversary

To mark the tenth anniversary of the momentous relighting, big Memorial Day Weekend plans are being made for 1996.

The night of the Relighting, May 25, 1986, was the largest gathering of people and boats in the history of Long Island as

the *Evening Star* brought officials and celebrants to the Lighthouse dock. The Keepers' Quarters was dedicated as a Visitor Center, displaying artifacts and pictures tracing the history of the Lighthouse.

Then, reboarding the *Evening Star*, celebrants

awaited the countdown until 9:00 PM when the beacon, dark for twelve years, went on and started to revolve. Cheers and shouts from crowds lining the shore accompanied by horns from nearly 500 boats enthusiastically greeted the beloved light once more.

The Society plans to reenact this scene and ceremony and invites those interested in Long Island's maritime heritage to join the May 26 celebration.

"It is necessary to start planning now and reserve the date of Sunday, May 26 of Memorial Day weekend," said Jean Wood, a member of the Tenth Anniversary Activities Planning Committee. "We hope to have new friends and all the old friends of the Lighthouse who worked so hard on the restoration join us either on the dinner cruise or on individual boat parties." Space is limited on the *Evening Star* and the *Lauren Kristy*. Reservations are being taken on a first-come, first-served basis.

For further information about participation in

various events surrounding the celebration or to become a member of the Society, call the Fire Island Lighthouse Preservation Society at 516-321-7028.

L.I. Kids Can Join In The 10th Anniversary Celebration of the Relighting

The Long Island Children's Museum wants to help celebrate the 10th Anniversary of the Relighting by showcasing children's art in May. The Museum, at 550 Stewart Avenue in Garden City, is looking for children's original art with a lighthouse theme drawn on paper approximately 11" by 17". If you know a child who would like to submit a piece of art for the exhibit, have her/him send the entry to the Fire Island Lighthouse Preservation Society, 4640 Captree Island, Captree Island, NY 11702-4601 by April 15.

Each entrant will have a lighthouse brick adopted in

STORY CONTINUED ON BACK PAGE

Fire Island Lighthouse History Presents...

Qualifications of a Western Union Observer From Western Union News, October, 1915

In the early part of the century, Western Union maintained several observatories along the coast of Long Island in order to sight and report vessels approaching the port of New York. One of the observatories was the Western Union Marine Tower at Fire Island, located a short distance from the Fire Island Light.

According to Western Union News, "Telegraphy is the least important of the qualifications of a Western Union observer. It requires keen sight and long experience to distinguish vessels many miles away. The use of a telescope is an art in itself and involves a

knowledge of the appearance of things at a distance, which varies greatly from the appearance of the same objects near by, particularly under the varying atmospheric conditions. The observers are so expert that they can often name a ship the hull of which is below the horizon, or one which is so far distant that to the ordinary person it would appear only as a blur on the horizon. Both J. Doughty, the observer in charge, and his assistant H. Boyeson, followed the sea for a number of years and both hold certificates qualifying them to act as officers either on a ship or steamer."

Descendents of Mr. Doughty's sister visited the Lighthouse in October, 1995, bringing memories of the observatory and lighthouse with them.

Observers at the

Western Union Marine Tower possessed unique skills. in the form of an

audio tape containing reminiscences recorded by their mother.

Lifesavers Needed to Preserve Our Maritime Heritage

Fire Island was once home to seven U.S. Life Saving Service Stations. In the days when sail and steam-powered ships trafficked to and from New York harbor, Long Island and Fire Island saw many shipwrecks. From the 1870's through 1915, when its function was absorbed by the newly formed U.S. Coast Guard, a federal government agency called the U.S. Life Saving Service rescued thousands of mariners, passengers and cargo from ships in distress. Before power motors and radio, brave surfmen stood watch in small lifesaving stations along the shorelines of the Atlantic, Pacific and Great Lakes. Each Life Saving Station practiced the same rescue techniques throughout the Service. Either the surfmen would row out to the stranded ship, or they would utilize an ingenious and effective rescue technique with beach apparatus. The use of beach apparatus, once so crucial

for ship-to-shore rescues, was a vital facet of maritime community life, but it is almost forgotten today. In weekly drills, the Life Saving Stations became proficient at the techniques which would serve them in real emergencies. Beach apparatus consisted of a Lyle gun, a rope and pulley system and rescue devices of breeches buoy and lifecar.

Fire Island National Seashore and the Fire Island Lighthouse Preservation Society want to recreate these exciting drills for public viewing. They are recruiting volunteers to participate in Beach Apparatus Drills. Volunteers would be trained by the National Park Service to reenact the U.S. Life Saving Service Beach Apparatus Drill in costume. Volunteers must be over 18, physically fit with no back problems, and available to participate in several practice drills and at least four demonstrations at the Fire Island Light Station during the late spring and summer months. The public demonstrations will take

STORY CONTINUED ON BACK PAGE

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Networking For L.I. Lighthouse Safaris

by Gayle Haines

Representatives from Long Island Lighthouses and small business owners interested in the promotion and preservation of our maritime heritage have been meeting throughout the fall of '95 and winter of '96 to do more for less. The idea was first discussed two years ago at two joint meetings inside the Horton's Point Lighthouse (Southold). At that time, however, no one was able to represent the Montauk Lighthouse due to a shortage of administrative staff. The situation changed in the fall of '95 when Trish Wood was hired to assist Dana Brancado, Montauk's Lighthouse Director. We met at Hofstra University in a workshop sponsored by the Long Island Convention and Visitors Bureau in October. Since then our group energies



(Back, from left) Donald Bayles, Southold Historical Society; Ed Eschmann, Fire Island Hotel & Resort; Mike Eagan, South Bay Cruises; Frank Madden, American Phoenix Line, Glen Cove; Bob LaRosa, FILPS; Cliff Benfield, Horton's Point Lighthouse. (Front, from left) Dr. Carol Blum, Plum Island Lighthouse and Okeanos; Dr. Gayle Haines, FILPS; Jennifer Ackerson, LICVB; Trish Wood, Montauk Lighthouse and Historical Society.

have set the wheels in motion to collaborate, educate and share the excitement of learning about our nautical past.

Recently, businesses lending support for group meetings have included the Baron's Cove Motel (Sag Harbor), Okeanos and the Town Hall (Riverhead), Radisson Islandia (Hauppauge) and the

Whaling Museum (Cold Spring Harbor).

Lighthouses are important because of the stories they tell of our past. They teach us where we were, where we are and where we're headed.

Few people know there were 27 lighthouses on Long Island in the 17th and 18th centuries. Today 18 can still be seen by

boat, and some by land. Public visitations to the lighthouses on Fire Island, Montauk Point, Horton's Point and Eaton's Neck can be arranged as early as April along with visits to Long Island's maritime museums, galleries, restaurants, gift shops and special attractions. For more information, call (516) 321-4213.

Fire Island Lighthouse Preservation Society Membership Form

From October 1, 1995 to September 30, 1996

Name _____ Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Type of membership: () Individual \$25 () Family \$40 () Keeper \$150
() Saver \$300 () Corporate \$500

CHECK ONE: () New Member () Renewal I would like to: Volunteer () YES () NO Join Advisory Council () YES () NO

VISA or MASTERCARD # _____ Exp. Date _____ or call 516-321-7028 with your registration.

Please make checks payable to FILPS and send to: 4640 Captree Island, Captree Island, NY 11702-4601.

WE NEED HELP! WITHOUT MEMBERSHIP, WE CAN'T SURVIVE. BUT WITH YOUR FINANCIAL SUPPORT WE CAN AND WE WILL. HELP KEEP LONG ISLAND'S MARITIME HERITAGE ALIVE WITH YOUR MEMBERSHIP IN THE FIRE ISLAND LIGHTHOUSE PRESERVATION SOCIETY.

PLEASE CUT & RETURN

FILPS 7

Fire Island Light

Published Quarterly by the Fire Island Lighthouse Preservation Society, Inc.

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Monday-Friday
10 AM - 4 PM

Kids Can Join In Lighthouse Anniversary...

STORY CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

his/her name, and those works that are selected will be displayed in the Museum during the month of May. In addition to the exhibits of children's lighthouse art, two special Fire Island Lighthouse events are planned. On Saturday, May 11 at 2 p.m., Vivian Farrell, author of "Robert's Tall Friend: A Story of the Fire Island Lighthouse," will present a dramatic narration of the book's story. The next Saturday, May 18, a Park Ranger from the Fire Island National Seashore will give several 30-minute presentations about the Fire Island Light.

Lifesavers Needed...

STORY CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

place on Sundays.

The Beach Apparatus Drill performed at Fire

Island National Seashore will be a historically accurate reenactment which will directly influence the audience's sense of national and local maritime history. Viewers will get a glimpse of maritime life when ship traffic was the main venue of commerce and travel and when navigation depended upon the captain's wits against the forces of nature.

Volunteers should know in advance that a significant commitment will be needed. The Beach Apparatus Drill demonstration cannot take place without the presence of the entire trained crew. In exchange for their commitment, participants will share an enjoyable and enlightening experience with others who are similarly motivated to help the Seashore fulfill its educational mission.

Interested in volunteering? Call the National Seashore headquarters at (516) 289-4810.

FILPS Hosts 1,000

One thousand people attended the Fire Island Lighthouse Open House sponsored by F.I.L.P.S. on Saturday, November 26, 1995. Guests were transported to the Lighthouse from Robert Moses State Park Field 5 by a shuttle bus donated by Inter County Motor Coach in Babylon. F.I.L.P.S. thanks Inter County for helping to make the open house a resounding success.

In Memoriam

Janet Buckholz

December 17, 1995

Janet taught fourth grade at McKenna Elementary School in Massapequa and was the driving force in developing the McKenna School Discovery Center, an extracurricular science program. She was an enthusiastic supporter of the Fire Island National Seashore and the Lighthouse. We will miss her.

Fire Island Lighthouse Preservation Society, Inc.
4640 Captree Island
Captree Island, NY 11702-4601

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BABYLON PUBLIC LIBRARY Adult Collection
Vertical File

Lighthouses, L.I.

Fire Island Lighthouse To Get A Facelift

Page 11 - BEACON - Thursday, August 12, 1982

Cooperation between the National Park Service and a group of Long Islanders will result in the rehabilitation and relighting of the historic lighthouse at Fire Island.

With the signing of documents on Friday (Aug. 6) the National Park Service and the Fire Island Lighthouse Preservation Society Inc. formally began the process which will lead to the lighthouse becoming operative once more, said Jack Hauptman, superintendent of Fire Island National Seashore which maintains the 124-year-old structure.

Thomas F. Roberts III, a senior vice president of Seaman's Bank for Savings and president of the Lighthouse Preservation Society, said that signing of the agreement on Friday will mark the start of a fund-raising campaign.

"Our first goal is to fund the required historical and architectural surveys and then to pay for the cost of restoring the lighthouse and lightkeeper's cottage and rekindling the light. When the project is completed, visitors will be allowed to climb the lighthouse tower," he said.

Supt. Hauptman continued that when the project is completed, the lightkeeper's cottage will be used for exhibits and educational displays for the public.

"Our society believes the relighting of the lighthouse will be a considerable impact on navigational as well as the nostalgic environment of Great South Bay. The present light is visible only at sea. Thus, a lit and well maintained beacon sweeping the bay will contribute to the convenience of piloting on the water," Mr. Roberts added.

Referring to the cooperative agreement between the National Park Service and the preservation Society, Supt. Hauptman noted that it is an example of the federal government and the private sector working together for the public good. "I am proud and happy to accept the cooperation of our neighbors," he said.

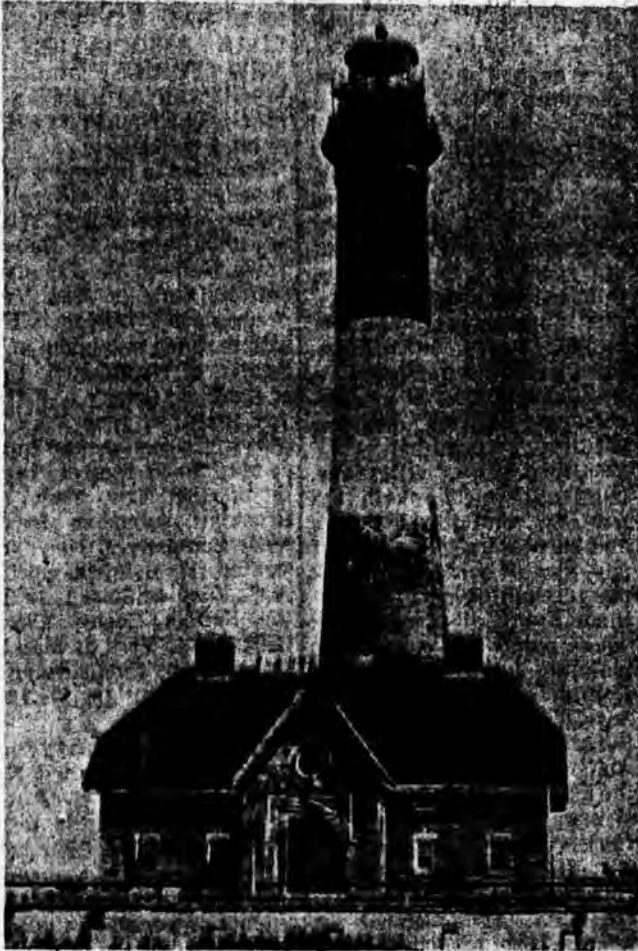
The Preservation Society's fund-raising efforts have met with enthusiasm. Initial funding will be used for architectural and historical surveys of the building to determine the structures' physical properties. Actual restoration of the lighthouse and cottage and rekindling of the light will follow.

It is expected that rehabilitation of the structure will coincide with the 1983 Suffolk County Tercentenary Celebration.

The first Fire Island lighthouse was completed by 1826 at a cost of \$10,000. It was replaced by the present structure in 1858. Total construction cost was \$40,000. The Fire Island Light was important to shipping as trans-Atlantic ship captains bound for New York aimed for it. Furthermore, since a Western Union telegraph station was operated nearby, incoming ships were sighted and reported by telegraph to New York City so that preparations could be made for the ships' arrivals in port.

In 1906 the Navy established an experimental radio direction finder station east of the lighthouse. This was turned over to the Coast Guard in 1941. After World War II, attempts were made to broadcast the Voice of America from the site but these plans were discontinued.

Over the years, various means of lighting the beacon were



used, including whale oil, lard oil, kerosene, incandescent oil and finally electricity. In 1974, when a beacon atop the Robert Moses State Park Water Tower took over the task of signalling passers-by, the lighthouse beacon was turned off and the lighthouse was transferred by the Coast Guard to the National Park Service.

"Because of the role the lighthouse has played in this region's history, and the significance of the lighthouse and the lightkeeper's cottage, we are hopeful that a small maritime museum at the site will convey to future and present generations the lighthouse's role in maritime safety and commerce," Supt. Hauptman concluded.

The Lighthouse Preservation Society's Board members include: Roberts, a resident of West Islip; James Grover Jr., former Congressman from Babylon; Everett Seidenberg of Babylon; Dr. John Ruppe of Bay Shore; Henry Bang of West Islip; Frank O. Braynard; Gregory Dean; Norma Ervin; A. Beecher Greenman; Robert L. Paterson and Harry Tregarthen.

The Beacon 8/12/82

LOCAL HISTORY COLLECTION

During working hours, lighthouse keepers wore dungarees — durable work pants and shirts. When visitors came, or the Lighthouse Inspector was due, keepers put on handsome wool uniforms like the one at right. Lighthouse keepers were very proud of their work, and many liked to be photographed in uniform. Beginning in the 1870s, the Lighthouse Service became very much like a military organization. There were ranks, regulations, and inspections. The keepers received promotions, awards for excellent work, and wore their rank on uniforms. Below are sketches of cap and collar devices and the pretty brass buttons of the wool dress coat.



Three-fourths inch

Wreath
Gold

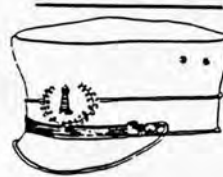


CAP ORNAMENT

LIGHT KEEPERS



One-half inch



CAP



One inch

3rd Ass^t
Keeper



CHIEF
KEEPER



SHIELD

The letter or number inside of the border showing rank of Keepers:

- K for Chief Keeper.
- 1 " 1st Ass^t Keeper.
- 2 " 2nd " " "
- 3 " 3^d " " "
- 4 " 4th " " "



CAP DEVICE

**LOCAL HISTORY
COLLECTION**



THE
FIRE ISLAND
LIGHTHOUSE
PRESERVATION
SOCIETY, INC.

Fire Island
Spring 1996

Fire Island National Seashore/PO Box 301/Brightwaters, New York 11718 • Tel. (516) 669-1710

CONTACT: ROBERT L. PATERSON

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

SYNOPSIS -- Restoration of the historic Fire Island Lighthouse and rekindling of its beacon is the goal of a private organization, The Fire Island Lighthouse Preservation Society, which is working cooperatively with the Fire Island National Seashore. The Society is seeking donations to accomplish the task.

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FIRE ISLAND, NY -- Rekindling the historic Fire Island Light is the goal of a private group which has been working closely with the Fire Island National Seashore division of the National Parks Service since early 1982, according to an announcement by Thomas F. Roberts III, president of the Fire Island Lighthouse Preservation Society, and Jack Hauptman, superintendent of the Seashore.

The Society is embarking on a fund-raising campaign, first to fund the required historical/architectural survey of the buildings to determine their original physical properties and then to fund the cost of restoring the lighthouse and lightkeeper's cottage and rekindling the light. When the project is completed, visitors will be permitted to climb the tower, and the cottage will be the scene of exhibits and educational surveys.

"The Society believes the relighting of the Lighthouse will have a considerable impact on the navigational as well as the nostalgic environment of Great South Bay," Roberts said. "The present light is visible only at sea. Thus a privately maintained beacon sweeping the Bay will contribute to the safety of pilotage on the water. The Coast Guard has been very encouraging with assurances that there will be no problem in meeting their requirements for operating the light.

In our fund raising efforts thus far, we are meeting with enthusiasm and generosity from individual members of the public. Our first donations are being used to fund the survey of the buildings. Following this will come the actual restoration of the structures and the rekindling of the light," Roberts concluded.

The Society was formed in 1982 as a result of a two-year effort on the part of Roberts, who was concerned with the future of the historic lighthouse, was instrumental in urging its ownership be transferred from the Coast Guard to the National Parks Service, its inclusion in the National Register of Historic Sites, and was responsible for the formation of the Society.

This private organization is a not-for-profit, tax-exempt corporation chartered by New York State. It has entered into agreements with the Fire Island National Seashore to cooperatively pursue the restoration goals, marking one of the first times such a private/public venture has been undertaken to preserve an historic site.

Officers of the Society are: Thomas F. Roberts III, West

LOCAL HISTORY COLLECTION

Islip, president, a senior vice president of the Seamen's Bank for Savings; James R. Grover, Jr., Babylon, vice president, former U.S. Congressman and an attorney; Everett F. Seidenberg, Babylon, secretary a businessman and past commodore of the South Bay Cruising Club; Dr. John Ruppe, Jr., Bay Shore, Treasurer, a past commodore of the Bayberry Yacht Club.

Board members are: Henry R. Bang, East Islip, historian and author of "The Story of the Fire Island Light". Luis E. Bejarano, Lynbrook, an educator, historian and program specialist for public and private interest. Founder and president of Luis E. Bejarano Associates and the Long Island Nautical Festival; Frank O. Braynard, Sea Cliff, marine artist and writer and organizer of the 1976 "Operation Sail" for the tall ships; Norma Ervin, Saltaire, president of the Fire Island Association; A. Beecher Greenman, Babylon, an engineer; Robert V. Guido, Huntington, counsel to the Society; Robert L. Paterson, a public relations practitioner and secretary of the Babylon Yacht Club; Henry R. Tregarthern, Bay Shore, a business man and past president of the Bay Shore Tuna Club and Francis X. Mina, President of Fire Island Ferries, Inc., the Long Island Tourism Commission, and the South Shore Ferry Operators Association.

The first Fire Island lighthouse was completed in 1826 at a cost of \$10,000. It was replaced by the present structure in 1858 at a construction cost of \$40,000. The Fire Island Light was important to shipping as trans-Atlantic ship captains bound for New York aimed for it. Furthermore, since a Western Union telegraph station was operated nearby, incoming ships were sighted and reported by telegraph to New York City so that preparations could be made for the ships' arrival in port.

In 1906 the Navy established an experimental radio direction finder station east of the lighthouse. This was turned over to the Coast Guard in 1941. After World War II, attempts were made to broadcast the Voice of America from the site, but these plans were discontinued.

**LOCAL HISTORY
COLLECTION**

Over the years, various means of lighting the beacon were used, including whale oil, lard oil, kerosene, incandescent oil and finally electricity. In 1974, when a beacon atop the Robert Moses State Park Tower took over the task of signaling passers-by, the lighthouse beacon was turned off and the lighthouse was subsequently transferred by the Coast Guard to the National Park Service in late 1981.

"Because of the role the lighthouse has played in this region's history, and the significance of the lighthouse and the lightkeeper's cottage, we are hopeful that maritime exhibits at the site will convey to present and future generations the lighthouse's role in maritime safety and commerce," Supt. Hauptman concluded.

#

LOCAL HISTORY COLLECTION
BABYLON PUBLIC LIBRARY

Fire Island



Fire Island Lighthouse - 1858

Fire Island National Seashore - New York

A FUND-RAISING EFFORT IS BEING CONDUCTED BY THE FIRE ISLAND LIGHTHOUSE PRESERVATION SOCIETY TO RESTORE THE LIGHTHOUSE AND REKINDLE ITS BEACON.

FIRE ISLAND LIGHTHOUSE

At the time the first Fire Island Lighthouse was built in 1827, it was on the western tip of the island, just east of the dangerous Fire Island Inlet. In the brief 150 years since that time, the ocean's longshore current has transported sand from Long Island's eastern tip to Fire Island's western tip, creating an additional 4.5 miles of island from lighthouse to jetty. Numerous shipwrecks on the offshore shoal prompted the Federal Government to acquire land for the construction of a lighthouse as a warning of impending danger to mariners. It was these wrecks, in fact, that helped set the stage for a host of theories about the origin of the name "Fire Island."

One favorite was that professional wreckers took advantage of the dangerous waters by luring boats into the inlet--guiding them by fires--and looting them as they came ashore. Another theory was that Indians built fires inside the inlet to boil their whale blubber (or "try" it), so as to separate the whale oil from impurities. A very probable origin, however, is not as exciting and has nothing to do with fires. A translation from Dutch to English on old marine charts turned "Five Islands" into "Fire Island."

HISTORY

The first lighthouse and keeper's quarters cost about \$10,000 to build. The lighthouse was 74 feet high and was fitted with 18 lamps and 15-inch reflectors that flashed once every 90 seconds. These particular lamps were recommended by the Superintendent of Lighthouses, and were not the type customarily used along the Atlantic Coast at that time. Since they burned more oil than those normally used, the Superintendent literally had to pay for his own recommendation. The money to buy the excess oil came from his own pocket!

By 1835 the lighthouse was in deplorable condition, and in 1852 a new one was recommended. A taller one fitted with better lamps was needed, and in 1858, \$40,000 went into the building of the new lighthouse, 200 feet northeast of the old one. It was fitted with a first-order Fresnel lens (named for the Frenchman who invented it), with a focal plane of 168 feet above sea level. The lantern,

9'9" high by 11' in diameter, flashed once every minute from sunset to sunrise.

OTHER AGENCIES ASSOCIATED WITH THE LIGHTHOUSE

The Fire Island Light was truly an important one, as trans-Atlantic steamers bound for New York aimed for it, and it was generally the first one they saw. An added plus for these ships was the Western Union telegraph station situated near the lighthouse. They sighted incoming ships and telegraphed the news to New York City, so that preparations could be made for the ships' arrivals in port. The station was operational from 1868 to 1929, and was completely demolished in the severe hurricane of 1938.

The U.S. Coast Guard had early beginnings near the lighthouse. By the year 1853, a small un-manned shelter called a lifeboat house had been built, probably east of the lighthouse. It was stocked with rescue equipment and provisions for survivors of wrecked or stranded vessels. In 1878 the U.S. Life-Saving Service was established, ultimately building seven manned stations on Fire Island, one of which was located near the lighthouse. These stations, built to provide active patrols and rescues, were operative until 1915, when the Life-Saving Service was incorporated into the Coast Guard. The first Coast Guard Station, built 900 feet southwest of the lighthouse, also met its demise in the 1938 hurricane. The Coast Guard now has a station near the water tower in Robert Moses State Park.

In 1906, the Navy established an experimental radio direction finder station, east of the lighthouse, which was turned over to the Coast Guard in 1941. After World War II, attempts were made to broadcast the Voice of America, but were discontinued because of Federal Communications Commission objections.

Currently bordered on both the east and the west by Robert Moses State Park, the lighthouse has other interesting stories to tell. The 120 acres immediately to its east were acquired by New York State in the early 1890s as a result of a cholera scare. The famous Surf Hotel situated there was purchased for use as a quarantine station, and was relinquished to the State Park System in 1908.

Since the Federal Government had control over the lighthouse tract, lands added to the tract by the natural erosion-deposition process were controlled by it, too. It had no use for the land, so it became part of the first state park on Long Island in 1924, when the Long Island State Park Commission gained control over that 600 acres of land to the west.

FUTURE PLANS

The lighthouse spans many generations and has a long interesting history to tell. Its lighting arrangements alone paint some of the picture. Whale oil, lard oil, kerosene, incandescent oil vapor, and finally electricity illuminated the flashing lamps until 1974, when a beacon atop the Robert Moses State Park water tower took over the task of signalling passers-by, and the lighthouse was turned off. In 1976, the Coast Guard transferred management to the National Park Service.

The Park Service plans to restore the lighthouse and open it to the public. The Keeper's quarters currently house employees. They will be converted to a small maritime museum, with emphasis on the many vessels wrecked or grounded in Fire Island waters, and the Lighthouse and Life-Saving Services' roles in maritime safety. Plans include limited dock space and boardwalks, with visitors parking in the state park. A nature trail and environmental education facilities are also planned.

In 1982 a private group, The Fire Island Lighthouse Preservation Society, was chartered as a not-for-profit, tax-deductible corporation dedicated to assisting the National Park Service in rehabilitating and preserving the lighthouse and the lightkeeper's cottage through the raising of funds among interested members of the public.

Primary among the Society's goals are the relighting of the Fire Island Light and the establishing of educational programs pertaining to its history and environment. The Society works cooperatively with the Fire Island National Seashore to accomplish their mutual objectives.

Tax-deductible gifts are being accepted by The Fire Island Lighthouse Preservation Society, Inc., c/o Fire Island National Seashore, West District Ranger Station, P.O. Box 301, Brightwaters, N.Y. 11718, (516) 669-1710



THE
FIRE ISLAND
LIGHTHOUSE
PRESERVATION
SOCIETY, INC.



The Lighthouse property is administered by: Park Superintendent Fire Island National Seashore, 120 Laurel Street, Patchogue, New York 11772

Printing Courtesy of Fire Island Lighthouse Preservation Society, Inc.

*Fire
Island*



KEEPERS OF THE FIRE ISLAND LIGHTHOUSE (rev. 11/87)

.....First lighthouse began operation in 1826.

? Isaacs - appointed 1826 - died on the job in 1835.
Felix Dominy - appointed 17 MAY 1835 - through 1844
Eleiphalet Smith -
Benjamin Smith - appointed 29 APR 1853 - resigned 12
APR 1861

.....Second lighthouse began operation on November
1, 1858.

C.W. Fordham - appointed 12 APR 1861 - resigned 19 JAN 1864
David L. Baldwin - appointed 19 JAN 1864 - removed 26 MAR 1865
Samuel L. Hulse - appointed 26 MAY 1865 - removed 4 MAY 1869
Perry S. Wicks - appointed 4 MAY 1869 - removed 19 AUG 1870
Henry French - appointed 28 AUG 1870 - mentioned in letter of 28 NOV 1871
Warren F. Clock - recommended for appointment in letter of 28 NOV 1871 -
referred to as "retiring keeper" in letter of 9 JAN 1873
Seth R. Hubbard - mentioned in letter of 31 DEC 1875 and newspaper of 11 FEB 1882
George W. Ruland - his son born at lighthouse on 25 MAY 1885
Ezra S. Mott - appointed 23 JUL 1888 - mentioned in letter of 23 SEP 1909
William F. Aichele - appointed 1 OCT 1909 - stayed through MAR 1917
George J. Thomas - appointed MAR 1917 - mentioned in letter of 30 AUG 1918
Isaac Karlin - from at least 1923 to 1928, possibly longer
Adrien J. Boisvert - from at least 1935 - mentioned in letter of 3 NOV 1938

.....Lighthouse transferred to operation by U.S. Coast Guard in 1939. From then
on two men shared duties and responsibilities.

Roy Wood - approximately 1940 to 1942
Shelbert Payne - for 1 1/2 years starting in 1945
Robert Hodges - 17 MAR 1947 to 5 OCT 1956
Gottfried Mahler - from 1948 to 1954
Robert Fetters - at least 1963
Gene L. Michaels - at least 1963
Duane Butler - from 1965 to 1969

FIRST ASSISTANT KEEPERS OF THE FIRE ISLAND LIGHTHOUSE

Willett Smith - probably worked for Benjamin Smith
Stephen Fordham - probably worked for C.W. Fordham
Stephen Griffin - appointed 14 NOV 1862 - resigned 29 MAR 1864
Frank Wright - appointed 29 MAR 1864 - removed 18 OCT 1864
Richard Aldridge - appointed 28 MAR 1864 - resigned 2 MAR 1869
Aaron Burr - appointed 18 OCT 1864 - resigned 11 NOV 1865
David S. Baldwin - appointed 11 NOV 1865 - resigned 5 JAN 1869
Edward Hulse - appointed 2 MAR 1869 - resigned 5 JUN 1869

1st Assistant Keepers - continued)

Ampton Sands - appointed 4 JUN 1869 - resigned 13 SEP 1869
 Thomas Thorne - appointed 5 JUN 1869 - resigned same day
 J.R. Hubbard - appointed 5 JUN 1869 - resigned 23 MAR 1870
 Thomas Hawkins - appointed 13 SEP - resigned 25 MAR 1870
 Charles Brown - appointed 23 MAR 1870 - resigned 23 JUN 1871
 Arthur Ketcham - appointed 25 MAR 1870 - resigned 6 AUG 1870
 Uriah Brown - appointed 6 JUN 1870 - removed 23 JUL 1870
 Edwin Ruland - appointed 24 AUG 1870 - resigned 8 AUG 1871
 Joseph Haynes - appointed 23 JUN 1871
 Hugh Walsh - appointed 8 AUG 1871 - worked through 1874
 John S. Jayne - requested transfer on 28 JUN 1874 - resigned 11 APR 1875
 Lorenzo D. Smith - mentioned in letter of 26 OCT 1879
 C.A. Blydenburgh - mentioned in newspaper of 11 FEB 1882 - promoted out of this position 10 JUL 1883
 George E. Abrams - appointed acting 10 JUL 1883, confirmed 17 DEC 1883
 ? Chichester - mentioned in newspaper of DEC 1886
 Howard Poe - appointed 9 APR 1892
 William Lake, Jr. - appointed 25 SEP 1901
 Henry Burkhardt - appointed 19 MAY 1908
 James B. Hawkins - appointed 1 MAY 1909
 Andrew Nelson - appointed 22 MAY 1910
 Hans Chr. Anderssen - appointed 10 SEP 1910
 George Doige - appointed 27 AUG 1910
 Randolph C. Howell - appointed 21 NOV 1911
 Jesse Orton - appointed 6 MAY 1912
 George J. Thomas - circa SEP 1914
 Norman Devine - AUG 1925
 Arthur Miller - mentioned in newspaper articles from 1929 to 1935

SECOND ASSISTANT KEEPERS OF THE FIRE ISLAND LIGHTHOUSE

J.J. Squires - resigned
 David Baldwin - appointed 21 APR 1862
 A.D. Buckley - requested transfer in letter of 29 JUN 1874
 C.A. Blydenburgh - appointed 21 OCT 1879
 Francis Box - removed 2 JUL 1883
 George E. Abrams - appointed 2 JUL 1883
 S.M. Smith - appointed 19 MAR 1889
 William Lake, Jr. - appointed 21 AUG 1896
 Theodore M. Brewer - appointed 8 OCT 1901
 Thomas J. Murray - appointed 10 OCT 1903
 Ino. Morgan - appointed 21 MAY 1907
 Walter W. Way - 3 JUN 1908
 C.M. Frost - 18 MAY 1909
 Francis G. Howe - 16 JUL 1909
 Randolph G. Howell - 1 OCT 1910
 George L. Costello - 5 DEC 1911
 William H. Wilcox - 16 MAR 1912
 George J. Thomas - from MAR 1913 to around SEP 1914
 Chester B. Harper - 6 MAR 1912 - dismissed 17 SEP 1914
 Stephen Holm - AUG 1925
 Gus Axelson - mentioned in newspaper of 1935

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