



THE Lightkeeper

The Nova Scotia Lighthouse Preservation Society

Vol. 2, No. 1, January, 1995

President - Rip Irwin
Vice-President - Graham McBride
2nd Vice-President - Mike Tilley

Secretary/Treasurer - Patsy MacDonald
Editor, The Lightkeeper - Kathy Brown

The Nova Scotia Lighthouse Preservation Society is dedicated to the preservation of Nova Scotia's lighthouses. Through modernization and automation, many lighthouse structures have been replaced by functional skeleton steel towers which are easier for the Canadian Coast Guard to service and maintain. We aim to create an awareness of our province's remaining lighthouses and our marine heritage, and to work with related groups to ensure the identification and preservation of coastal sites. We are also committed to ongoing lighthouse and related marine research, including the collection of artifacts, lore, photographs and oral history. Our first project is the preservation of Sambro Island Lighthouse, at the entrance to Halifax Harbour.

Meetings:

7:30 pm Last Wednesday of the month

Meeting Room

Maritime Museum of the Atlantic, 1675 Lower Water Street, Halifax.

Enter by the Night Entrance, or ring the bell, to the upper left of the doors.

Next meeting: 7:30 pm, Wed. Feb. 22. All members very welcome!

Welcome!

A hearty "Welcome aboard!" to all those who jointed the Nova Scotia Lighthouse Preservation Society last fall on the occasion of the first ever opening of the Sambro Lighthouse to the public. We hope that you will enjoy this issue of **THE Lightkeeper**. A short outline of the importance of Sambro Island Lighthouse, written by Rip Irwin, is included in this newsletter. In future issues, I propose to include sheets about various aspects of the light - early history, lightkeepers, lighting mechanisms, fog signals and so on - which can be removed and placed in a binder to create a detailed thematic story. I hope, as well, to include sheets on other Nova Scotian lighthouses so that eventually members will have a useful reference at hand when travelling our coasts. It would be great if we could establish an exchange of information, oral history, etc - whatever you are interested in. Send items to

Kathy Brown, Editor, **The Lightkeeper**, 24 Armshore Drive, Halifax, N.S., B3N 1M5.

THE Lightkeeper is published quarterly by

THE NOVA SCOTIA LIGHTHOUSE PRESERVATION SOCIETY

Founded 20 July, 1993 Incorporated 31 August, 1994

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OPEN FOR VISITORS

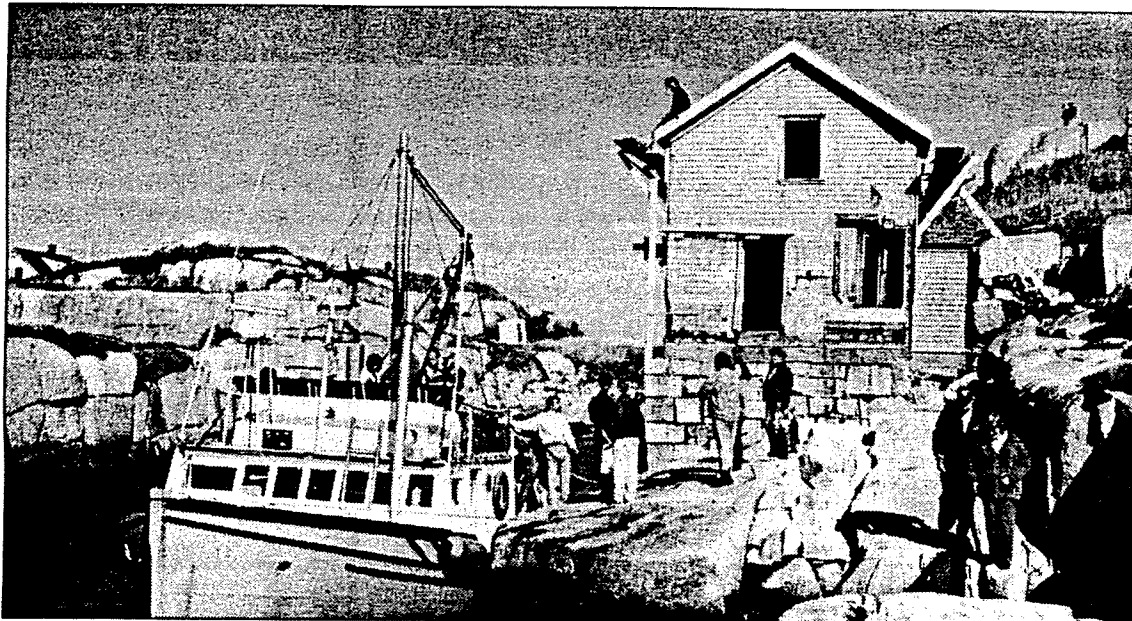
A very personal account by Kathy Brown

Friday morning, October 7, 1994 was quite ordinary until I answered the telephone at about 9:15. "Hi, this is Janet, I just heard on the CBC that the Sambro Light is open for visitors this week end!" My whoop of delight was heard across the office. "Who's doing it? How do I get out there?" My questions followed thick and fast. Janet didn't know, but in the next 24 hours I learned more and arranged to drive out to Ketch Harbour on Sunday with my friend Lynn.

Sunday dawned foggy; Saturday had been sunny. Maybe we should have gone then. For years I had sailed past Sambro, in fine and foggy weather, watched for the gleam of the light at night, seen the red and white finger grow larger on the horizon, beckoning us home. Had I missed my opportunity to climb the tower I'd admired for so long?

At noon, Lynn and I drove off. The fog was lighter - would it lift? As we drove out to Ketch, our hearts rose as the fog began to thin and at Ketch became scattered whips and finally a hazy memory.

We climbed onto the *Nova Lee*. "Where shall we sit?" asked Lynn. "Up top, in front!" I answered. I had my camera and took the first of over 50 shots as we left the harbour. Sambro was blue in the mist ahead as we headed out. We passed Splitnose Point, and soon I was closer to Sambro island than I had ever been before. "I think were going outside the island!" I murmured in great surprise - and we did, and pulled into a cut between the rocks and tied up before the Gas House.



Ketch Harbour's Nova Lee Pulls into Sambro Island

Photograph courtesy *The Shoreline News*

Rip Irwin gave us a warm greeting, and told us he'd meet us at the top of the lighthouse. Lynn and I walked around first - I think we wanted to put off the climb, savouring our excitement.

You never really understand a place until you've been there. I really knew on October 9 that Sambro island is granite, that the waves lash it on the seaward side removing soil and vegetation almost up to the light itself, that the soil is thin and peaty, that the lighthouse is massive, but not tall. I'd read that the light keepers were gone, but the empty homes drove that point home.

Finally we waited at the bottom of the light house, for only a few at a time could fit up top! We began to climb. We both must have thought of the thousands of steps taken by lightkeepers up those wooden steps inside the thick granite walls. We could see the pattern of the stones under the whitewash, and the wear of many footsteps on the stairs. We passed the wooden ceiling that marks the top of the original lighthouse (It was heightened in 1906). Suddenly, we were on top, and there was the light (a rotating airport beacon). Impressed on its face were the same rings you see in the original dioptric lens at the Maritime Museum. A new light, but old physics makes it work!

Rip answered our questions, and recounted history, but the real impact came for me when we went outside onto the walkway around the lantern. I'd never thought to wonder how anyone got out there! Now I found that a panel in the bottom of the lantern opens and you bend over and stoop low to exit. My memory is of wind lashing us, and the sunlight, and of looking up the coast to Chebucto Head and down to Betty's Island from a height I'd never experienced before. I realized how valuable the watch of the lighthouse keepers had been on this rocky coast. I felt exhilaration, wildness, and a deep respect for the men who serviced this light through rain and wind and storm to keep mariners safe before the days of electronic navigation.

Too soon our visit was over. Sambo was in my thoughts for days after. I'm a painter. I'd begun to as I call it 'circle around' a lighthouse theme. I have past notes and sketches about Sambro, but now I have real memories and experience to draw on. Thank you, to the Canadian Coast Guard and to Rip Irwin, and to Tony Gillis, Captain of the Nova Lea, for an unforgettable experience!

FUTURE TOURS

Over 150 people were ferried out to the Island by Tony Gillis last Thanksgiving weekend.. Kids (future NSLPS members!) travelled free, and adults for the price of a membership! 71 people joined NSLPS, bringing our membership to 96. Many thanks to Tony for transportation, his wife Sharon, who headed-up the 'shore station', and Rip Irwin. They all worked very hard on this project. Thanks to the Coast Guard for all their cooperation. Everything came together in a spectacular event for participants!

The NSLPS plans more tours in the future, as well as opportunities for members to visit the Island. Of course, having the Lighthouse open depends on the Coast Guard, but we hope that this can be arranged, too, from time to time.

THE SAMBRO ISLAND PROJECT

The Sambro Island Light shines from the oldest operating lighthouse in North America! The original granite structure which underlies the red and white protective shingle exterior, was erected in 1758. Sambro Light has welcomed thousands of vessels great and small to Halifax over its 236 year history. Thousands of refugees and immigrants have gazed on Sambro as their first glimpse of their new home. The NSLPS project aims to ensure the restoration, protection and continued maintenance of the lighthouse and the grounds, and to open this important historic site to the public. Because of its lengthy history, the story of Sambro Lighthouse can illuminate many of the important developments in lighthouse technology.

Sambro is the first project of the NSLPS, because of its historic importance, not only to Nova Scotia, but also to the rest of Canada. Sambro is reasonably accessible by boat from Ketch Harbour, so even though it is really in the open ocean, it is possible for volunteers to carry out work by the day. The light tower is in reasonable shape, but needs constant maintenance which has been hard for the Coast Guard to carry out since the withdrawal of the lightkeeper. The Island is wildly beautiful, but, again, it needs some care

Current priorities:

1. **To get the Sambro Island Lighthouse registered as a heritage building.** Surprisingly, Sambro Lighthouse is not on the list of Registered Federal Heritage Buildings. Our president, Rip Irwin, met with Terry Smythe, Chief, Federal Heritage Buildings Review Office, Ottawa, in May. He outlined in detail the importance of Sambro and the NSLPS plans. Mr. Smythe stated that he supports us and he hoped to speed up the heritage assessment for the buildings on Sambro and to have them classified and registered. He was surprised that an evaluation of Sambro had never been done. Rip followed up his visit with a letter, and he was informed by the Coast Guard in Dartmouth that a request for an evaluation has been made. To date, we have heard no more. If you wish to write letters of support or inquiry as to the current situation, here's the address:

Mr. Terry Smythe
Chief, Federal Heritage Buildings Review Office
Jules Legere Building
25 Eddy Street, 5th Floor
Hull, QC
K1A 0H3

2. **Gas House:** This building (formerly known as the "Fish House" constructed c. 1911) was constructed for manufacturing acetylene gas for use in the lighting apparatus. It is basically solid but needed immediate attention because the roof was rotten. It would be a shame to lose it because of its interesting history and its proximity to the light tower. When repaired, it can serve as a bunkhouse for NSLHPS official work parties, and might eventually serve as an Interpretation Centre.

Clean up interior - Completed

Total roof replacement, and make building tight to winter weather - Completed
We also need to clean up the surrounding area, build a deck for the entrance, install doors and windows, as necessary and re-shingle the outside walls, and outfit the upstairs room with bunks, cupboards, table and chairs, stove etc.

Schedule of Work Sept. 24 - Nov. 6, 1994

In this short time, the roof of the Gas House was replaced. Volunteers from the NSLPS carried out much of the work. Tony Gillis of Ketch Harbour provided transportation to the Island in his boat and a generator for electricity for the power tools. He made many trips with the work crew to the Island. At times, Rip Irwin arrived in his Zodiac! Rip often stayed on the Island overnight. In total, 267.5 hours of volunteer labour were invested in cleaning up the interior, putting up new rafters and shingling the roof. We hired help for 54 hours only! This work on the Gas House, carried out over a very short period, is a great start to our improvements! Tony Gillis, Ivan Blades, and Rip Irwin were volunteers for this project. Three cheers to them!

3. **Privy:** Level, repair, install window and door.

THE SPIRIT OF THE LIGHT PROJECT

An exhibit of some 50 works of art about lighthouses of the Maritimes

Eptek Centre, Summerside, Prince Edward Island

Opening Sunday, June 18, 1995

A group from P. E. I., including Allan Savidant and Maurice Bernard, members of NSLPS, is organizing this exhibit. They have visited and painted many lighthouses including Black Rock, Louisbourg, Neil's Harbour, Cheticamp, Seal Island, Western Head, Escuminac, Shippegan and Sambro. They have also been carrying out research. Information about the lights depicted and some of the people and events surrounding the light stations will be included in the display. As well as paintings and drawings, the exhibit will include stained glass, wood carvings, of sea mammals and shore birds, and a few actual light towers!

Rip Irwin, our President will be opening the exhibition. If you visit P.E.I. this summer, drop in to Summerside and see the show - sounds like a good one!

MEMBERSHIP FORM

I wish to join the Nova Scotia Lighthouse Preservation Society.

NAME _____ TELEPHONE _____

ADDRESS _____ POSTAL CODE _____

I can volunteer time to work on Sambro Island _____

I can help in another way. Give details _____

Membership (April 1, 1995 - March 31, 1996) - \$10.00

Please make cheque payable to The Nova Scotia Lighthouse Preservation Society

Mail to: THE NOVA SCOTIA LIGHTHOUSE PRESERVATION SOCIETY

c/o Maritime Museum of the Atlantic, 1675 Lower Water Street, Halifax, B3J 1S3

Louisbourg Lighthouse

Taken from a plaque at the site of the present day lighthouse;

Here are the ruins of Louisbourg's first light , the earliest to be erected in Canada and the second in North America. Lit in 1734, it was badly damaged by fire two years later, then quickly repaired. The replacement lantern was designed to be fireproof, with brick vaults, a lead-sheathed roof, and a water cooled oil lamp.

Until the siege of Louisbourg in 1758, this harbour was one of the busiest in the new world with the lighthouse offering guidance to thousands of approaching mariners. The operating costs of the service, including the keepers salary, were paid for by a toll levied on incoming vessels. After 1758, however, the lighthouse was probably no longer used. It is shown in ruins in a 1798 plan. When the present light was being constructed , during the 1920s, local historical enthusiasts lobbied to have these ruins preserved. In 1926 the Historic Site and Monuments Board of Canada unveiled the bronze plaque to your left.

The current lighthouse was built in 1923 of reinforced concrete. 55' high, base to vane, an octagonal tower surmounted by red octagonal lantern. A mercury vapour lamp casts a white flashing light from 105' above high water, through a 4th order lens, a distance of 17 nautical miles. A 2 second flash every 9 seconds.

SAMBRO ISLAND LIGHTHOUSE, NOVA SCOTIA

Sambro Island is twenty-five acres of granite situated at the entrance to Halifax Harbour. At the highest elevation of 72' stands a red and white banded octagonal lighthouse tower, the oldest extant in North America, 82' high with stone walls 5½' thick at the base, tapering to 3½' at the top. All framed, boarded over and shingled on the outside.

From 1906 until 1967 the 1st order cast iron lantern housed a 9' tall, 1st order Fresnel lens which was made in Paris, France, by the firm of Barbeau, Benard and Turenne, flashing its light a distance of 17 miles out over the sea every five seconds. In 1967 the lantern was replaced with one of aluminum and the lens replaced with a DCB-36 rotating airport beacon.

I am personally intrigued, in the historic sense, that the legendary Captain James Cooke was but a 30 year old Petty Officer in the Royal Navy the year this lighthouse was built. Four years later, in 1762, we find he makes reference to Sambro Island Lighthouse in his directions for entering Halifax Harbour.

This lighthouse could very well have been the last of Halifax seen by General Wolfe in May of 1759 when he sailed away to his destiny on the Plains of Abraham at Quebec City, and may well have been the first of Halifax seen by some of the 12,000 Loyalists who landed here in 1783. The lighthouse was 109 years old at the time of Confederation.

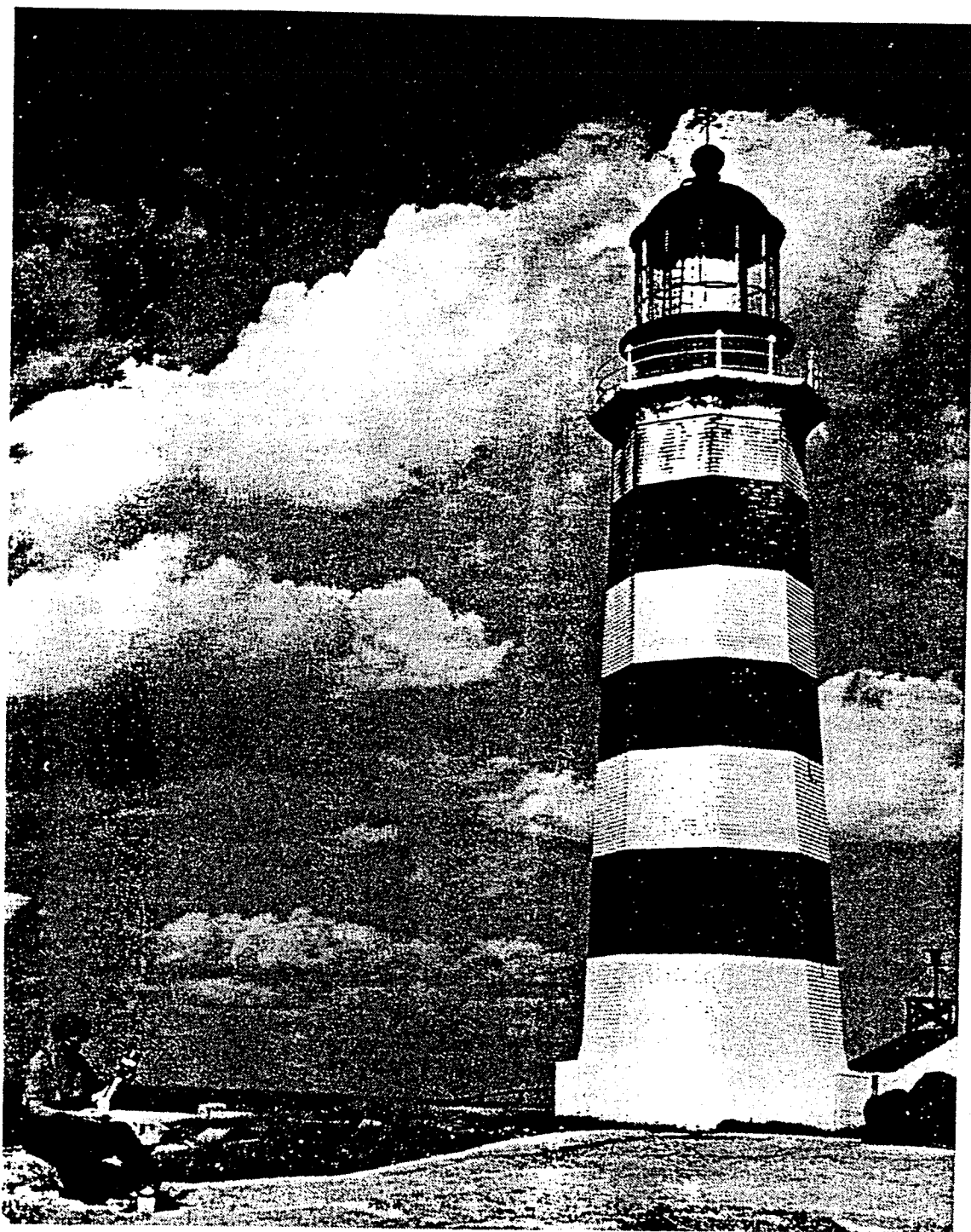
John Fairservice and his family, the last keepers of Sambro Island, kept the light from 1968 until it was automated on 28 March 1988. When they came ashore that final day, it was the first time in 230 years there was no human presence on Sambro. Rob Matthews, an editor with The Halifax Herald aptly described it at that time as a "Light without a heart"

I think it is absolutely imperative that we should do everything in our power to restore this historic structure and maintain it for the benefit of generations to come. Sambro Island lighthouse must not be allowed to slip into the hands of time.



E. H. IRWIN

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The Sambro Light in the 1930's. The lightkeeper, Warren Smith, is seated on the left cleaning a burner. At that time the light tower was crowned with a First Order Lantern, painted red. The lens, now in the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic, is covered by a cloth curtain because the optical power could start a fire! First order dioptrioc lenses, such as the one used at Sambro, are among the most powerful lenses in the world, only exceeded by the huge twelve-foot high hyper-radial lenses such as that in the Cape Race Light, Newfoundland. In 1966, the lens at Sambro was replaced by a revolving airport beacon.

Photograph courtesy of Roy Gilkie.