

# THE Lightkeeper

The Nova Scotia Lighthouse Preservation Society

Vol. 2, No. 3, July, 1995

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**The Nova Scotia Lighthouse Preservation Society** is dedicated to the preservation of Nova Scotia's lighthouses. We aim to create an awareness of our province's lighthouses and our marine heritage, and to work with related groups to ensure the identification and preservation of coastal sites. We are committed, as well, 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 Fourth Wednesday of the month, Maritime Museum of the Atlantic, 1675 Lower Water Street, Halifax.**

## Welcome!

A hearty "Welcome aboard!" to the following people who have joined the Nova Scotia Lighthouse Preservation Society since April, 1995: Roxanne Smith, Peggy Dingle, Charles Marshall, Roy C. Gilkie, Roy Topple, Russell Latimer, Marita Williams, Barrie & Rosalyn MacLeod, Larry Lamont & Margie MacDonald, Reg Clark, Fred Burgess, Carson Spicer, Bill Baker, Kathleen King, Yarmouth County Tourist Association, Cape Sable Historical Society.

## Lighthouse Trips

### *Sambro Work Party*

**Friday, July 28**

**Meet at 0900 am** on the government wharf, Ketch Harbour to board the *Nova Lee*.

**Bring lunch and something to drink!**

This party will clean up the debris left from the work done last fall on the Gas House

Call Graham McBride, 424-6442

### *Sambro Lighthouse Visits*

**Sunday, August 20**

**Sunday, September 17**

**Meet at 1030 am** on the government wharf Ketch Harbour to board the *Nova Lee*.

**Bring lunch and something to drink!**

Round-trip cost: NSLPS members - \$10.00.

Non-members - \$20.00, includes membership.

**NOVA LEE EXCURSIONS LIMITED IS THE OFFICIAL CARRIER FOR NSLPS.** Captain Tony Gillis offers special rates to members for other trips to Sambro Island. Call one week ahead, 868-1212.

**Seal Island** on a weekend in September or October.

We'll go out to the Island with Rip Irwin to see the light, established in 1831 through the efforts of the Hichens and Crowell families. (See P. 6, *Lightkeeper*, April, 1995). Explore, and experience this southernmost point of Nova Scotia! Basic accommodations are available on the island.

Costs will be transportation, food, plus donation to NSLPS. Number of participants will be very limited.

**If you are interested, call Kathy Brown (902) 479-3115 by Friday, August 11.**

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Send news and items for publication to Kathy Brown, Editor, **The Lightkeeper**, 24 Armshore Drive, Halifax, N.S., B3N 1M5.

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## Lighthouse News

The replica of **Burntcoat Head Lighthouse** will be open throughout the summer. See "Accessible Lighthouses," page 7.

At the **Cap d'Or Light**, on the Fundy Shore, the former lightkeepers' houses are a new and unusual bed & breakfast! You can have breakfast or lunch at the Lightkeeper's Kitchen and stay overnight at the Guest House. The two houses are perched on the cliffs near the light, above the entrance to the Minas Basin. The scenery in this area is spectacular, and when conditions are right, the wind and the Fundy tides combine to create a flurry of water and white caps called the D'Ory Rips. Special groups can be accommodated. Carson Spicer and Lillian Ward are the hosts. Call (902) 664-2108. See also page 7.

**Lighthouses of Lunenburg County** is the subject of an exhibit which runs until the end of September at the **Fort Point Museum** on the LaHave River. There is also a binder available with the history of various lights in the County, and copies of historical photographs from the collection of the Public Archives of Nova Scotia. In September, the Museum is open on weekends only.

The **Seal Island Lighthouse Museum** in Barrington is open all summer. It features the original dioptric lens and lantern from the Seal Island light tower, and the main subject of the display is Seal Island (*not* Cape Sable as was indicated in the last issue!)

At **Cape Forchu**, the keepers' houses have been leased to the Yarmouth County Tourist Association. Here you'll find the beginnings of an Interpretation Centre about the Coast Guard, fishing and lighthouses, a canteen, and a gift shop.

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## Spirit of the Light

**A Tribute to the Lighthouses of the Maritimes**

Eptek Centre, Summerside, Prince Edward Island

This exhibit, the result of years of planning and visits to lighthouses in the Maritimes, continues at the Eptek Centre in Summerside until October 1. **We have a print for sale - see page 3.**

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## Lighthouse Items for Sale

Profits from sales go to support the work of your Society.

Nice for yourself - great as a gift for that special person!

**Order from:** Joan Searl, 918 Lawrence Road, RR #2, Porters Lake, NS, B0J 2S0

Please make cheques out to the Nova Scotia Lighthouse Preservation Society.

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## NSLPS Membership Pins



Show you belong! NSLPS logo on a blue background with an eye-catching red and gold lighthouse, and Nova Scotia in bright gold. The sketch doesn't nearly do it justice!  
**\$6.00. (\$5.00 + \$1.00 pack & post)**

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## We Keep a Light -

**Evelyn Richardson's Classic Tale of Bon Portage Island**

The original edition of this fascinating story, by Evelyn Richardson, of family life and lightkeeping on

Bon Portage Island won the Governor General's Award for Non-Fiction after it was published in 1945. It's a Canadian favourite and has also been published in the U.S. and Great Britain. A good read, and a wonderful way to find out about keeping the light during the 1930's and 40's!

Mrs. Richardson's daughter, Betty June, and her husband Sid Smith donated copies of *We Keep a Light* (paperbound) to the NSLPS for fundraising! A bargain at **\$11.00** (\$7.00 + \$4.00 pack & post )

You will find, of course, that Betty June is mentioned often in the book! She and Sid kept the light on Cape Sable Island for many years. We thank them very much for their donation.

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## The Work Crew (On Sambro Island)

From the exhibition *Spirit of the Light*.



This print shows Tony Gillis' boat *Nova Lee*, some of the NSLPS work crew heading toward the Gas House and Sambro Light. A masterful rendering in pastel by Maurice Bernard, full of colour and light. 7" x 10 1/2" image, double-matted to 12 x 15 1/2" & shrink wrapped. **\$29.00, including pack and post**  
**OR for NSLPS members**  
**this print plus NSLPS pin \$30.00**

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## Readers Exchange

**Rete Williams**, Box 828, So. Harpswell, ME 04079, collects lighthouse postcards, old and modern, lighthouse paintings, photos, slides and prints, lighthouse books and posters. She would like to correspond with members of like interest to trade post cards or pictures.

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## Highlights From Recent Meetings

Obtaining a lease for part of Sambro Island was the most important current topic. Certainly, the Coast Guard have been very cooperative in allowing us access and supporting the work on the Gas House. however, we don't feel comfortable about doing more until we have a legal right to work on the island. We're waiting to learn details of the arrangement. Right now the lease rests with the Facilities and Real Property Section of the Coast Guard. We're hoping to have the matter resolved soon so we can really get to work.

At the AGM several new members joined the Executive Board: Joan Searl, Ron Thomas and Brian Donovan. We welcome them and look forward to working with them. If anyone else wants to help, call Graham McBride, 424-6442.

In June we agreed to reciprocal membership with the United States Lighthouse Society. This means that NSLPS will be on their mailing list and receive their mailings, and they will receive from us. If you are interested in an individual membership, the fee is \$35 (US), which includes the quarterly magazine *Keeper's Log*, *The Bulletin* Newsletter, bumper sticker & membership card. Address: U. S. Lighthouse Society, 244 Kearney Street, San Francisco, CA 94108, USA.

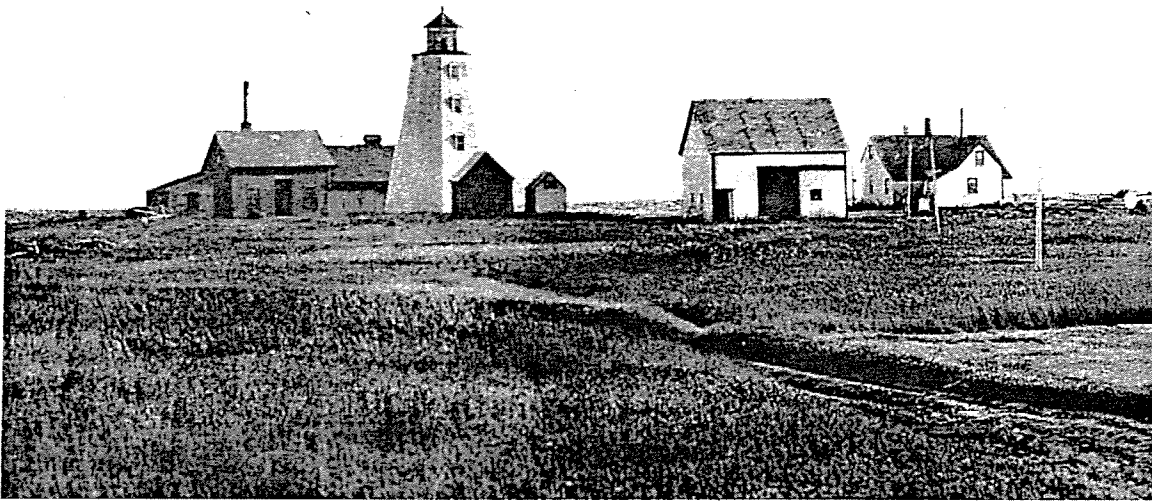
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## Cape Sable Light

**Sid and Betty June Smith, and Rip Irwin**

Cape Sable itself is a low, sandy islet about 3 miles long, lying just offshore from Cape Sable Island at the extreme SW corner of Nova Scotia. The Mi'kmaq name for the island was "Kespoogwitik" which meant "where the land ends." As early as 1554, Portuguese cartographers called the area Beusablom, "a sandy bay." French explorer Champlain used the French version of that name, "Cap de Sable," and when New England settlers occupied the land in 1761, the name became Cape Sable.

Ledges and shoals run seaward south and west of Cape Sable for 4 1/2 miles, hazardous to all shipping from the start of exploration here. Though vessels and lives were lost, petitions for a light at Cape Sable were set aside until after the loss of the SS *Hungarian* on February 20, 1860, her crew, and her passengers - 205 souls.



The original octagonal light tower on Cape Sable. From a post card mailed in 1909. Courtesy Betty June (Richardson) Smith

The first light tower was built of wood in 1861 close to the southern seawall. On November 12 the first lightkeeper, John Hervey Doane, lit the lamps atop the 65 foot octagonal tower. Because more lives and property had been lost at Cape Sable than on any other part of the coast, the installation of a white light of the first order was recommended. (The lens from the Sambro Light, now in the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic, is a first-order lens. Ed.). However, the decision was made to provide a red light on the cape. This red light, with nineteen lamps, was by far the most expensive to operate of any on the coast. On a clear night, it could not be seen over a distance of eight miles! Four-sevenths of the power of the light was lost through the thick red glazing of the lantern. In 1869, the lantern glazing was changed to clear with ruby chimneys on the lamps to show a red light. This greatly improved the range.

Recommendations were made to have two lighthouses on Cape Sable, both showing a white light. These would not only serve to distinguish this point from any other on the South Shore, but they could be arrayed as to guide the mariner clear of the dangerous shoals lying to the west of Cape Sable. In 1870 a clockwork mechanism was installed and on 15 July, the light was changed to flashing white. On 1 July, 1902, installation of a 3rd order Fresnel lens was completed.

A fog alarm building and steam-whistle came in 1876. In 1897 a 16 foot lifeboat was placed at Cape Sable. Lightkeeper Isaac Doane was coxwain, but he had no organized crew. In 1900, this was abandoned in favour of a new lifeboat stationed at Clark's Harbour, on Cape Sable Island.

On its low land-base, the light was not visible far enough to seaward. In 1923/24 a new tower of

reinforced concrete, 101 feet from base to vane, was constructed nearby. This is the tallest lighthouse in Nova Scotia.

The station was de-staffed in 1986, and was remotely monitored from Cape Forchu, Yarmouth. Currently, the light is monitored from Letete, New Brunswick. A variety of buildings and dwellings were erected over the years; today, only the concrete tower remains. On July 28, 1989, the Federal Heritage Building Review Office designated the Cape Sable Light tower a Classified Building, providing it with the highest level of on-going protection. (*Joan Mattie, FHBRO report.*)



The second, and current light tower, Cape Sable. The keepers's house - a duplex is to the left, and then the first two storeys of the first light, which were used to store coal. On the far left is the equipment building for the fog horn. You can see the resonator for the diaphone protruding from it. None of the buildings remain. Courtesy Betty June (Richardson) Smith

Rights to the two-storey remains of the octagonal timber-framed original light tower were obtained in 1991 by a group called "The Hungarian Revival Association," named after the shipwreck which had lead to the light being established. It was torn down, piece-by-piece, and transported to Yarmouth. In May, 1992, it lay in a couple of tangled heaps on the Yarmouth waterfront.

### Lightkeepers

1861-1871	Hervey Doane	1945-1952	Albert Smith
1871-1902	Isaac Doane	1952-1970	B.F. Smith
1902-1916	Arthur H. Cunningham	1970-1979	Sidney F. Smith
1916-1927	Albert Wise	1979-1982	Reg Smith
1927-1931	H.L. Johnson	1982-1986	Andy Dugandzic
1931-1945	Benjamin F. Smith		

At 1600 on 26 May, 1986, Mr Degandzic transferred to Gannet Rock and Cape Sable Light became unwatched.

The Cape Sable Light can be viewed from the beach at The Hawk, Cape Sable Island. It's well worth the drive out the Island to get a view of this magnificent example of a concrete tower.

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## Summers on Cape Sable

**Roxanne Smith**

I am the granddaughter of Benjamin F. Smith, and the niece of Betty June and Sid Smith. I almost grew up on Cape Sable, for when his father retired, my father thought long and hard about becoming the lightkeeper here.

It is difficult for me to put into words how I feel about this small island. Each summer, our family headed to where our father grew up and our parents fell in love. Those couple of weeks were the highlight of our year. It is more than the place that hold our hearts so closely, it is the wind, sand, sea, the lighthouse, and the people who called all this "home."



L to R: Karen, Jeff and Roxanne Smith at a picnic on the seawall (a barrier of loose stones thrown up by the ocean on the seaward side of the island).



Riding the hay wagon on Cape Sable.  
(Both photographs courtesy Roxanne Smith)

Fog, tides, and weather rule here, and all of our daily activities, beginning with the trip across the channel between the islands, were organized accordingly. It would have been very difficult to make this trip easily at any tide less than full. I would position myself on the small boat so that I could look through the water to the sea floor, watching how it dropped to great depths and then, suddenly, a sand bar would appear, just below the surface.

Our activities while visiting consisted of participating in and watching the typical chores performed on small farm: milking the cow and skimming the milk through cloth; feeding the chickens and collecting eggs; and haying, my favourite chore. This we did "loose style" using pitch forks and rakes. Stowing the hay into the loft, alone, took a full day. When this was done, the reward was a long nap in the fresh hay, watching the barn swallows only a few feet above me.

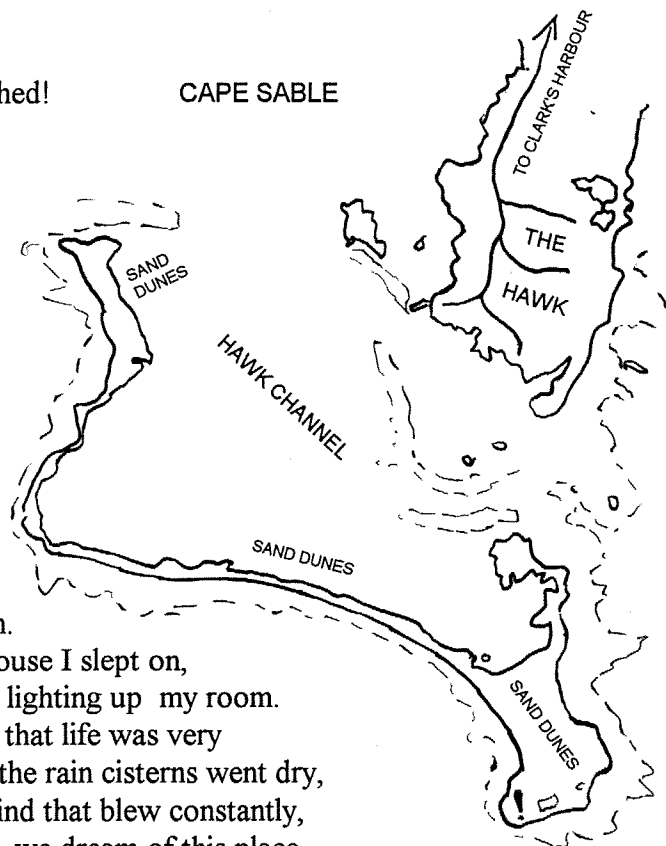
When the chores were done, the island was waiting to be explored. Expeditions away from the light station depended upon the fog and the watch schedule, especially for the long trip to the sand dunes at the opposite end of the island. This was our favourite trip, the landscape was so diverse, so subtle: the broad sand beaches at low tide which changed character completely at high tide, shrinking next to the loose stone seawall; the low salt flat in the central sheltered "harbour" area; the large broad stones at black-rock beach, where the packed sand was mixed with soil that allowed grass to grow; and the sand dunes, beach grass and flat beaches at the furthest end of the island. Usually the long up-island trip was made on the seaward side and the return trip on the sheltered shoreward side of the island. Once, after walking the length of the island in a rather leisurely fashion, we were hit with a major rain storm. We

made it back to the station in record time, drenched!

Another favourite activity was the picnics held on the seawall beside the light station, when my uncle Sid was on watch, and otherwise partway up the beach. We always had a huge fire made with the driftwood we children had collected earlier in the afternoon. Hot Dogs, kayaks (salt gaspereau) marshmallows and strawberry shortcakes were the main fare at these suppers. When picnics lasted until after dark, the light's beacon guided us back home.

Each night we were lulled to sleep by the breakers on the seawall around the station. Depending on the weather, and the side of the house I slept on, I could hear the fog alarm and watch the beacon lighting up my room.

As idyllic as we found this place, I know that life was very difficult, with shortages of drinking water when the rain cisterns went dry, the inability to leave in winter, the harsh cold wind that blew constantly, threatening storms, isolation and loneliness. Still, we dream of this place and reminisce when we get together. My immediate family is now scattered across the country. It is very difficult for my brother and sister in Saskatchewan to come here, and also for my sister in Ontario, but they always talk about coming with their families to introduce their children to this unique place.



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## Accessible Lights

Summer travels in Nova Scotia take us down rural roads to places that we may be in absolutely no hurry to go. Leisure travel. Here are some of the lighthouses that are worth the diversion from the beaten track to your destination. A note of **CAUTION** if you visit: many light stations have fog signals too! These are located close to the light structures and operate by sensors. When triggered, the subsequent blast is **VERY LOUD** and can easily damage hearing.

### Cape Breton:

Louisbourg - on west side of the harbour opposite the Fortress. Good access by road. Nice view! Access road marked "Lighthouse Point". Small interpretive display. Highway 22 SSE of Sydney.

Gabarus - small white lighthouse, fantastic setting with a great beach and rocky shore. Scarcely populated and a great place for picnics! Route 327, 37 km south of Sydney.

Jerome Point - on the shores of a provincial park with picnic and overnight camping. Lovely setting near town of St. Peters. Watch marine traffic - mostly pleasure boaters which enter and exit the Bras d'Or Lake system. Access by road into the provincial park just east of the canal bridge on highway 4.

Sydney Range - two lights near one another on good paved road. Nice view of North Sydney and Marine Atlantic ferries operating to Newfoundland. Route 239 off Sydney by-pass Highway 125.



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## Accessible Lights

### On the way to New Brunswick:

Cape D'Or - Magnificent setting, rugged drive in on. Great view of tidal currents, Minas Channel, Ile Haute, and the coast north of the valley - New Brunswick too! Route 209, about 45 km west of Parrsboro.

Burntcoat Head - Boasts the highest recored tide in the world. Replica light, walking trails, picnic ground, interpretation. Lots of parking. High tide visit to watch swirling water recommended. Curator on site from 10 am till 8 pm until September 1. Route 354 (Beaverbank Road) north from Sackville, or route 215 off Highways 101 or 102. Watch for signs.

### Digby Neck, Long Island and Brier Island

Road travel Southwest of Digby along route 217. Two self-propelled ferries, the *Joshua Slocum* crossing Petite Passage and the *Spray* crossing Grand Passage are necessary parts of the journey making it all the more interesting. (Westport and the Spray were used in the film Delores Clayborne to resemble a make believe town in Maine). It could be a busy spot - Brier Island is gaining a reputation for eco-tours, especially whales and birds of the Fundy ecosystem. The first ferry is 53 km SW of Digby, the second a further 18 km.

Boars Head - a neat place to visit. Incredible tidal currents. Head north from the first ferry at Tiverton.

Brier Island (NE end of the island) - Officially called "Grand Passage". Great tidal runs through the passage with plenty of swirling water. Turn north off the second ferry at Westport.

Brier Island (SW end of the island) - Fabulous view of the Bay of Fundy. Tidal rips, marine activity, birds, maybe whales too! Can be foggy and cool. Very isolated. At the end of an unpaved road from Westport.

### West of Digby Neck:

Cape Forchu - at entrance to Yarmouth Harbour. A tourist destination. At certain times parking may be such that a small walk is necessary. Great for sunsets into the Gulf of Maine. Also good vantage point for ferries Maine to Yarmouth ferries. Lots of fishing traffic, especially during the lobster season. Dangerous during storms. Easy to find.

Seal Island Lighthouse Museum - In Barrington. High and dry, but an excellent view of Barrington Bay from the lighthouse tower. On Highway 3 just off the 103.

### More in next issue! We are interested in receiving tips & comments!

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**MEMBERSHIP FORM** January 1, 1995 - December 31, 1995

**NOVA SCOTIA LIGHTHOUSE PRESERVATION SOCIETY**

**Single - \$10.00 (or more!)` Family - \$20.00` Institution/Group - \$30.00` Patron - \$100.00`**

Amount enclosed \$ \_\_\_\_\_

NEW ☐

RENEWAL ☐

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_ POSTAL CODE \_\_\_\_\_

Family names for extra card(s): \_\_\_\_\_

I can volunteer time to work on Sambro Island \_\_\_\_\_

I can help in another way. Give details \_\_\_\_\_

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