

THE Lightkeeper

The Nova Scotia Lighthouse Preservation Society

Vol. 2, No. 4, October, 1995

Past-President - Rip Irwin

Acting President - Graham McBride

2nd Vice-President - Ron Thomas

Publicity - Graham McBride

Patrons: Rip Irwin, Dr. Ron Thomas

Corres. Sec. & Treasurer - Patsy MacDonald

Fund Raising - Brian Donovan

The Lightkeeper - Kathy Brown

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 Sambre 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!

The names of those who have joined the Nova Scotia Lighthouse Preservation Society since July, 1995: were not available at press time. They will be included in the December issue.

Lighthouse Trips

McNabs Island

Sunday, October 22

Meet at 10:00 am, Murphy's on the Cable Wharf, *Halifax*. Return at 4:00 pm

We are invited by Friends of McNabs Island Society to join them on this trip.

Bring lunch and something to drink!

Round trip cost: FOMIS members - \$6.00 Non-members - \$8.00

Lighthouse News

Burntcoat Head Lighthouse opening was well attended. Remember that this replica is full-size and built from original plans, so it's about as authentic as you can get, other than the original light. It's been open throughout the summer.

4,487 people visited the lunch room in the former lightkeepers' house at **Cape d'Or Light** this past summer. Many stayed at the guest house at this spectacular site on the Fundy Shore. Carson Spicer says he must have spoken to 5,000 to 6,000 people because some did not go down the hill to the light! If you missed the experience this summer, don't worry, the **Cape D'Or Lightkeeper's Kitchen and Guest House** will be open next year. We'll let you know the dates and times!

Rip Irwin was on hand for the reopening of the **Spencer's Island Lighthouse**, July 15. The 91 year old light is now a Municipal Heritage Building and museum. Between the opening and Labour Day over 1,400 people visited the pictorial display of ships built at Spencer's Island and tools used in their construction. The view from the top of the lighthouse was an extra bonus! The importance of this light

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c/o Maritime Museum of the Atlantic, 1675 Lower Water Street, Halifax, B3J 1S3 Tel. (902) 424-6442, FAX (902) 424-0612

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

was directly opposite its small size, for Spencer's Island was an important anchorage and shipbuilding centre during the Days of Sail. One of the most famous ships built here was the *Mary Celeste* - later found sailing in the Azores with no-one aboard and no sign of foul play!

The lighthouse was saved through the efforts of the community. Money was raised through yard sales, and sales of baked goods and jams and jellies. The proceeds paid for extensive renovations needed to preserve this important example of our smaller lighthouses. Congratulations!

You can visit **Spencer's Island Lighthouse** next summer, on your way to Cape D'Or! We'll list open hours in *The Lightkeeper* next spring

The **Seal Island Lighthouse Museum** in Barrington was open all summer. It features the original 2nd order dioptric lens and the 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!)

The lightkeepers' houses at **Cape Forchu** (Yarmouth) were the Tourist Bureau, a snack bar, and a gift shop. As a result, many more people visited this fine lightstation during the past summer.

Rip Irwin

At our meeting of August 23, 1995, we accepted the resignation of Rip Irwin as President. In his resignation letter, Rip described the founding of our Society as follows: "On July 5, 1993, the determination was made between Patsy MacDonald, Graham McBride, Chris Mills and me, as we stood on the granite rock of Sambro Island, that some sort of society or organization should be formed for the preservation of Nova Scotia's deteriorating lighthouses. Fifteen days later we met with officers of the Canadian Coast Guard and as a result of that meeting our Society was formed."

Over the past ten years Rip has visited and photographed every lighthouse in Nova Scotia. For the past two years, he has worked tirelessly on behalf of the Nova Scotia Lighthouse Preservation Society, often setting aside his own desires to visit lights or work on his research. Now, a firm foundation has been laid and, only two years after our incorporation, both membership and enthusiasm for lighthouse preservation are growing quickly.

Rip has found it difficult to work at a distance of over 100 km from the other executive members and after much deliberation decided to resign. There are rumours that he will begin working on a book about Nova Scotia Lighthouses - a publication which all of us would welcome with great enthusiasm. He remains as Past-President and contact with the Coast Guard and will continue to contribute to the success of our endeavour.

Thanks, Rip!

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

NSLPS News

Lease for Sambro: The Coast Guard has informed us that they have all the information they need to go ahead with the lease, and they will be sending it to us shortly. The lease will allow us to undertake further work on the Sambro Island in the Spring and to make concrete plans for its use.

Heritage Review: Information has been sent to Ottawa Coast Guard headquarters by the Coast Guard in Dartmouth.

Work party: A very successful work party held on Sambro in July, cleaning up the debris from last year's work on the gas house and doing some tidying up on the Island. Much work is needed if we are to make the island truly accessible to the public. Walkways must be cleared and the sanitary facilities need to be upgraded. The light tower itself needs work on the exterior cladding and the concrete platform. The Coast Guard was unable to undertake this in 1995. We trust work will begin in 1996 before this heritage site becomes threatened!

Seal Island Lighthouse Visit: Nine NSLPS members and friends enjoyed a weekend visit on September 23 and 24. **Watch for a full report in the December issue.**

Halifax Boat Show '96

This winter's Halifax Boat Show will once again feature *Legends Afloat*. Sponsored by the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic, *Legends Afloat* will highlight Nova Scotia's long link with boat building and activities of the sea. The Nova Scotia Lighthouse Preservation Society has applied for a booth in the show *as a non-profit organization*. We intend to increase exposure, sell memberships, pins and other novelties to generate operating funds. **Volunteers are needed!**

If you would like to help design or tend our booth, call Bob Pietrzak at 861-1146.

Publishing Dates for The Lightkeeper were changed at our September Meeting. You will receive another Lightkeeper in December. In 1996, we will publish in March, June, September, and December.

Book Review

Life on the Tusket Islands

(Norwood Publishing, Westport, Nova Scotia, 1994)

The Tusket Islands are a cluster that lie off the southwestern Nova Scotia mainland communities of Little River and Wedgeport, about 10 to 15 miles north of Seal Island. The main navigation channel through the islands is appropriately named *Schooner Passage*. It is narrow, with tidal currents that run at rates of up to 4 knots. Peases Island lies at the SE end of the passage, with Candlebox Island at the NW. Both islands have lighthouses and fog horns which have now become fully automated. Anyone fortunate enough to have sailed through the islands can easily identify with the nature and sheer wonder of the area. Once home to thriving fishing communities, the islands are now mostly quiet and inhabited by sheep.

Caroline Norwood has written a number of short stories of the people and places of the Tusket Islands. She describes her family's experiences as lightkeepers on Candlebox Island, and chronicles the events of the lighthouse automation, a family Christmas, buying groceries, the passing of winter storms, and tragedies of local fishermen. Though the journals of lightkeeping make up most of the book, there are other stories about the way of life that once existed among the islands. The dwellings that once housed lightkeepers have been destroyed, many of the wharves once used for fishing have collapsed, and the fishery, once the base of these communities, itself has an uncertain future. Visiting an island having a lighthouse has that certain allure - to which the author acknowledges a possible future for these Tusket Islands. A good read, it will make a perfect Christmas gift for lighthouse enthusiasts.

Lightshop

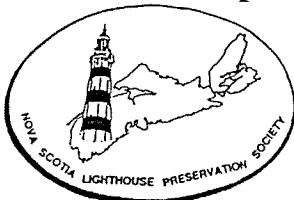
Great stuff for Christmas gifts (or for yourself) and the museum.

Order from: Brian Donovan, 6278 Cork Street, Halifax, NS, B3L 1Y9

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

1675 Lower Water Street, Halifax, N.S. Canada B3L 1S3

NSLPS Membership Pins



A beautiful pin! NSLPS logo on a blue background with an eye-catching red and gold lighthouse, and Nova Scotia in bright gold.

\$6.00. (\$5.00 + \$1.00 pack & post)

We Keep a Light - Evelyn Richardson's Classic Tale of Bon Portage Island

Donated by Mrs. Richardson's daughters, Anne Wickens and Betty June, and her Betty June's husband Sid Smith

This is a wonderful way to find out about lightkeeping during the 1930's and 40's, and a good read too. Evelyn Richardson and her family staffed the light on Bon Portage Island, (off the South Shore) for over 25 years. **A bargain at \$7.00 or by post at \$11.00 (\$3.00 shipping).**

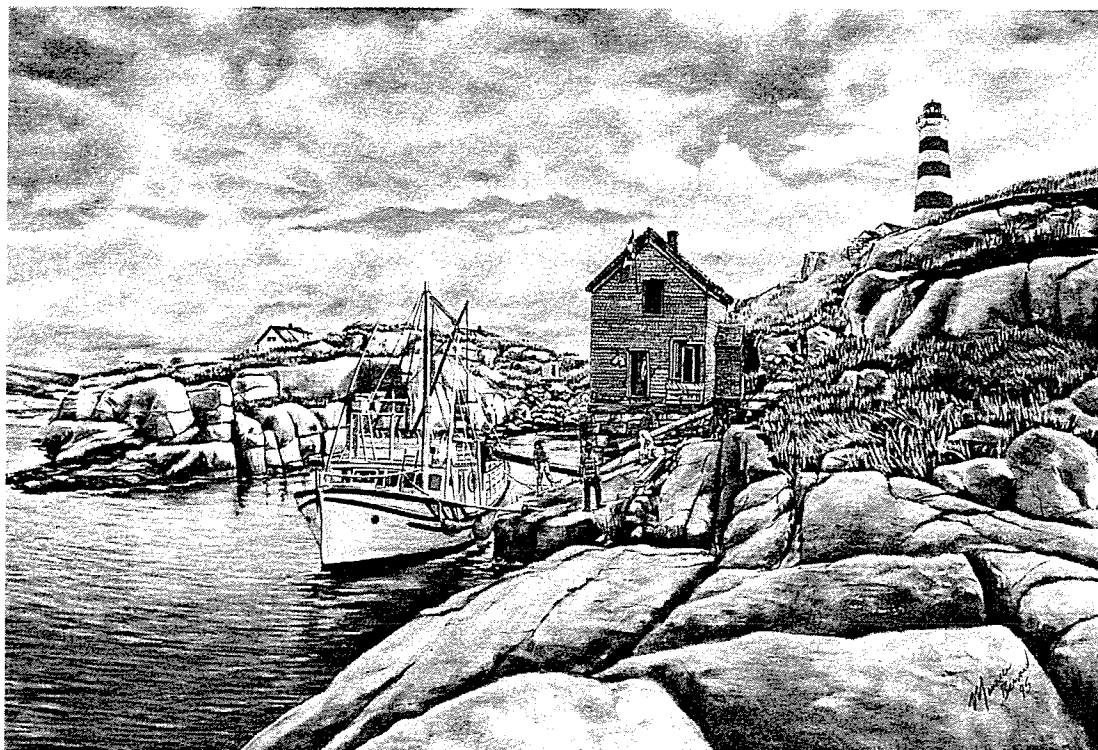
Vanishing Lights

Donated by the author, Chris Mills

Chris is a founding member of NSLPS, and one of Canada's last lightkeeper's. This book is about four unique islands: Seal, Cross, Machias Seal, and Gannet Rock. It's a personal account of his passion for lighthouses, of life on isolated islands, of fogs, of storms, and of the last days of staffed lights in Atlantic Canada. There's lots of history here, too, plus mysteries, shipwrecks and ghosts. **A must for every lighthouse enthusiast! \$10.00 or by post \$13.00 (\$3.00 shipping).**

The Work Crew

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.**



Louisbourg Light

Canada's First Light

History concludes that the lighthouse constructed by the French at Louisbourg was the first established in Canada, and the second on the North American continent. (The first was lit on September 14, 1716 on Little Brewster Island in Boston Harbour). Louisbourg, built near the northeast corner of Cape Breton Island, was the base from which the French planned to hold New France against the English. The Fortress was dependant upon ships from France to supply most of its needs. Safe entrance to the harbour at the end of the long voyage became a concern.

The initial plan to build a tower and light was made in late 1727, though the formal decision to build was not made until spring of 1729, after one of the King's ships, *Le Profond* nearly met its end in the harbour which was marked only by a navigational cross, and, periodically, a bonfire.

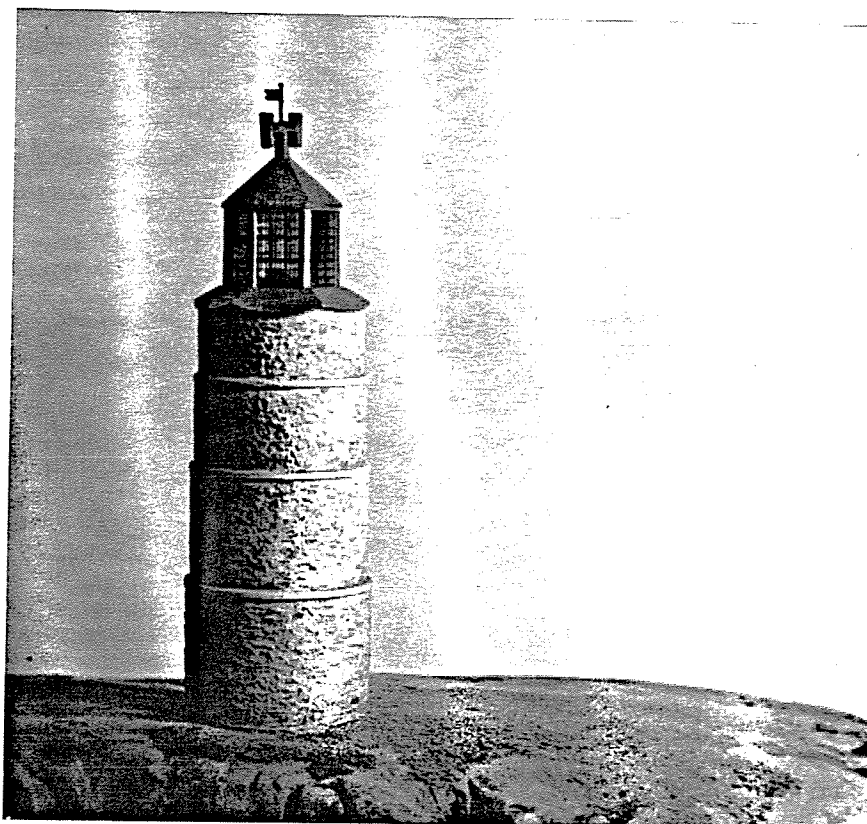
Construction began in August of 1731. The c. 70 foot circular tower made of coursed rubble was completed two years later. The first lighting of the sperm oil lantern was not made until the first of April in 1734. This was due to a delay in the arrival of some 400 small lantern panes from France - the first ones sent were the wrong size and new ones could not be shipped until the next spring. The actual light was a circle of oil-fed wicks set in a copper ring mounted on cork floats. This light was said to be visible for 18 nautical miles, an

impressive distance for those times. A small duty was levied on vessels using Louisbourg Harbour to cover the expense of construction and upkeep - including the lightkeepers salary. This was, indeed, a profitable light, since the duty covered the cost of building it, and more.

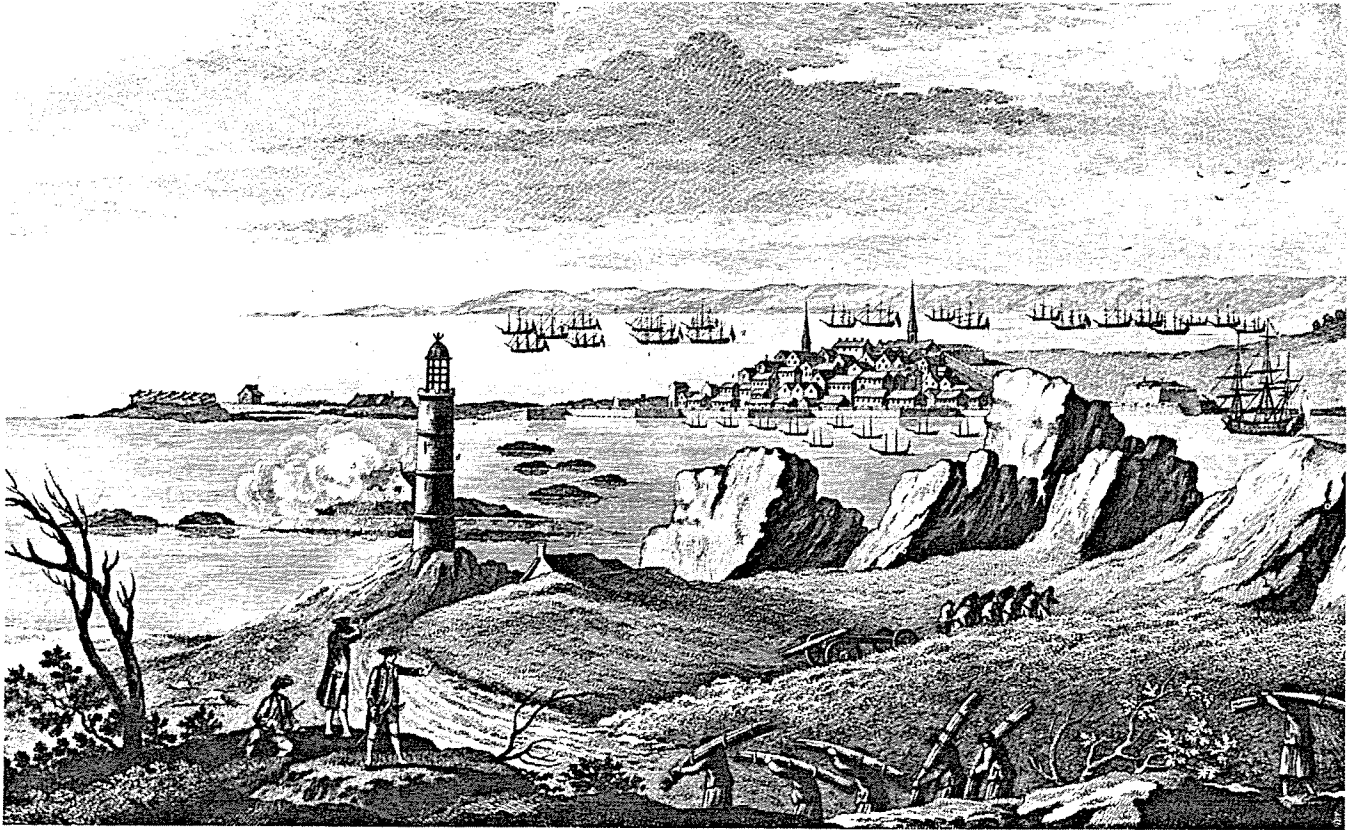
The Fire

As in all these early open-flame lights, much heat was generated inside the lantern. The lantern design proved faulty, for the wood had no protection from the high temperatures, resulting in the gutting of the lantern by fire, during the night of September 11, 1736. The stone tower survived, and a light on top of it, burning coal and wood, was quickly re-established.

The reconstructed lantern was designed to prevent a similar occurrence. The project engineer used a larger reservoir, placed in a water jacket to dissipate the heat, and with wicks spaced further apart so that the heat generated would be less intense. The entire lantern was designed with six stone pillars surmounted by a vault-shaped brick roof covered with lead, with vents fitted into each of the 6 faces, and



Model of the first light at Louisbourg, (PANS Collection)



Print of the siege of Louisbourg showing the original tower surmounted by the new lantern. (Public Archives of Canada)

a chimney. The "new" light was completed in July, 1738. Reflectors were added in 1751 to focus the light from the thirty-two lamp wicks.

Destruction

During the second British siege of Louisbourg, the tower was heavily damaged, particularly so on the evening of June 9, 1758, when British batteries and naval vessels opened a heavy bombardment on Louisbourg. The light was deemed beyond repair and left to disintegrate.

Louisbourg's Second Light

During the 19th century, maritime officials took steps to reduce the many navigational risks and ship wrecks along the Atlantic coast. One of the new lighthouses built was the second for Louisbourg, completed in 1842. It was a 2 1/2 storey wooden building that also served as a residence for the keeper. Painted white, it had black vertical stripes. The structure was erected on a massive cut-stone foundation that lay upon the bedrock. There was a full basement in which archaeologists found a wrought iron tank that was identified as being manufactured for the British Navy for holding water or oil. Fire destroyed this building in 1922.

The present light

This was completed a year later in 1923, a white concrete octagonal tower, 55 feet high. Several modifications have been made to the characteristic of the light over time.

From Coast to Coast:

Lightkeeping in the Maritimes & B.C. at the End of an Era

Chris Mills

PART ONE - THE MARITIMES



Chris with his first lighthouse.

Photo: Seanna Brackett

I built my first lighthouse when I was six years old. It was a rather crude affair, constructed from sun bleached wood from old lobster traps, and topped with a trouble light containing a red 40 watt light bulb. I had a fog horn too; a shiny chrome bicycle horn with a black rubber bulb, mounted on a stick adjacent to the 'lighthouse'. In my young mind, this light and its attendant horn performed crucial tasks in guiding fishing boats to safety in St. Mary's Bay, on the southwest coast of Nova Scotia. Just down the road, at the Brier Island lightstation, a real light and fog horn did the very same thing, through the efforts of the three keepers and families who lived there. My fascination with lighthouses was no doubt sparked by my family's summer visits with the assistant keeper and his wife, and their stories of life on the lights. With the construction of a companion light to the red and white striped tower down the dirt road, my commitment to lightkeeping was firmly established.

Not long after my driftwood beacon was built, the Canadian government began implementing a program designed to remove lightkeepers from all lighthouses between the Strait of Belle Isle in Newfoundland to the north west coast of British Columbia. It was

an ambitious project, based primarily on the belief that lightkeepers could be replaced by cheaper, automated equipment controlled and monitored from a central location. Out came the old generators and compressors, and in went automated Lister diesels with extended running kits and fancy monitoring systems. The time-tested diaphone fog horn, with its deep 'blast and grunt', was replaced by stacks of electronic emitters-not nearly as effective as the old horns, but easily maintained and serviced by itinerant technicians. Videograph fog detectors took care of the keepers' constant vigilance for fog, and the mainlights at major installations were left to turn and flash 24 hours a day. With the growing use of radar, decca and loran by small boats, it was perceived by the government that the lighthouse and fog horn would assume a position of secondary importance to electronic navigational aids. This was the beginning of the end of lightkeeping in Canada.

Almost 20 years later, lighthouses were still being closed, although the bulk of destaffing in the Great Lakes, Laurentian and Maritimes Regions had already taken place. It was in this climate that I began working as a lightkeeper in Nova Scotia, 18 years after I'd built my driftwood lighthouse. In 1989, with less than a dozen staffed lights in the Maritimes, it seemed unlikely that this was a wise career move, but at the same time it would undoubtedly be my final chance to find work on the lights. Ironically, the very process that was removing families from the lightstations made it possible for me to find work as a keeper- with many full time keepers retired or re deployed, it was necessary for the Coast Guard to fill in the gaps until the station could be closed. As a result, I spent almost five years on various stations ranging from Cross Island at the mouth of Lunenburg Harbour to wave washed Gannet Rock in New Brunswick's

half of the turbulent Bay of Fundy.

My expectations of 'lighthouse life' may have been high. The face of lightkeeping had changed more between 1970 and 1989 than it had in over two centuries since the French laid the first stone for the great light at Louisbourg. With the first phase of "semi-automation" in the early 1970s there were great reductions in the responsibilities of the remaining lightkeepers; with the more technical aspects of equipment maintenance now performed by visiting technicians, the work of the keeper shifted primarily to the basic chores of station upkeep- mowing, painting and visual monitoring of the new, automated machinery. This change in the focus of lightkeeping was due as much to government policy as it was to the changes inherent in 'progress' and technology; although lightkeepers were capable of all tasks required to run a lightstation, save perhaps the more involved electronic repairs, the new system stressed a "hands off" policy. If something went wrong with the equipment, it must be now dealt with by the technician, and not the keeper. Some stations formerly tended by families were converted to rotational 'bachelor' status, and so on the remaining Maritime lights, lightkeeping became less a way of life than a job.



Cross Island Lightstation, Nova Scotia, 1989. Photo: Chris Mills

I arrived on Cross Island in February 1989, for a three week term as assistant keeper. I later returned for two months in the summer, and as I met the people who had for many years depended on the light and horn, and the watchful eye of Head Keeper George Locke, I began to understand the importance of the lightstation in Nova Scotia marine history. It was more than the spotless white and red tower and the manicured lawns on the cliffs above the sea. It was George and the many keepers before him who towed broken down boats to safety, reported distress flares to Coast Guard Radio and acted as guardians of their island home. With the installation of the INTRAC 2000 remote monitoring system as part of the Lighthouse Monitoring Program (LMP) this was set to end though, as the Coast Guard prepared to replace the lightkeeper with a VHF link to monitor all of the automated equipment installed almost 20 years before. There wasn't much else to do but mow the lawns and keep the station clean. On the morning of the 10th of July, a Canadian Coast Guard helicopter removed the last of the George Locke's furniture and belongings, unceremoniously ending 150 years of lightkeeping history on Cross Island.

October saw me in the Canadian Employment Centre in Shelburne; one of several hopeful applicants for the temporary position of assistant keeper on Seal Island, 18 miles west of Cape Sable Island. This was a place I knew well. As a child and teenager I had spent countless summer holidays there with my bird watching parents, and I was fascinated by its long history of shipwrecks and by the lightkeeping tradition begun by the first families to settle on the low, windswept island. Between 1831 and 1941, members of the Hichens and Crowell families and their descendants kept the light and in 1989



Seal Island Lightstation, Nova Scotia, 1990 Photo: Chris Mills

the husband of the great grandniece of Mary Hichens was an assistant keeper at the station. I spent a year travelling between my mainland home and the island, working 28 day shifts at the light. During the spring of 1990, following the installation of the INTRAC system in the newly constructed engine room, partner Brian Stoddard and I began to clean up the station grounds. Throughout the summer we opened the lighthouse to visitors, giving people a last view of the historic structure and it's keepers. On October 17 the final shift crew closed up the massive timber tower and for the first time in 159 years, the Seal Island light was unattended.

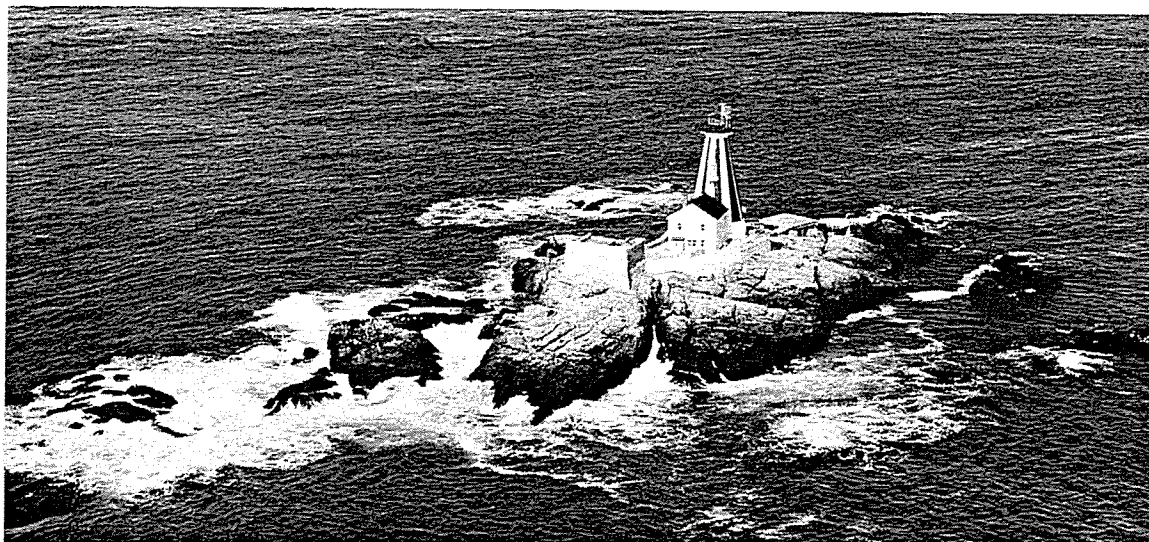
Automation pushed me further on. For the next three years I worked in New Brunswick on Machias Seal Island and Gannet Rock, two specks of land set amidst the powerful tides of the Bay of



Machias Seal Island Lightstation, New Brunswick, 1990. Photo: Chris Mills

Fundy. Machias Seal Island's 12 acres of rock and turf are home to large nesting colonies of Atlantic Puffins, Arctic Terns and Razorbill Auks. The island is also the centre of a sovereignty dispute between the United States and Canada; although a lighthouse was established in 1832 by the colonial government, proponents of American ownership claim that the island lies within U.S. territorial waters. As a result, the Canadian Coast Guard has proposed that the station remain staffed indefinitely, in support of Canada's claim to the island and its sensitive breeding grounds. In the mid- 1980s the last families were moved off Machias Seal; now, two rotational crews of two keepers work alternating 28 day shifts on the grassy island.

Fourteen miles to the east, the black and white vertically striped tower on Gannet Rock sends out a warning flash every six seconds, guiding vessels away from the dangerous Murr Ledges south of Grand Manan. First lit on Christmas Eve 1831, it is the second oldest wooden light tower in use in Canada.



Gannet Rock, New Brunswick, 1991. Photo: Chris Mills

The 75 foot tall structure is set on a base of cut granite and guyed to the bare rock with heavy cables. Even so, the tower trembles and sways in heavy winds. Accounts of Gannet Rock's size vary from an acre to a quarter of an acre- depending on the weather and the state of the tide the rock can be awash in the fierce storms of winter and spring, or on calm days, laden with dripping rockweed and dulse around a myriad of tide pools. Since the 1950s bachelor crews have shared living quarters- a two story concrete house attached to the south side of the lighthouse- for four week shifts. Today the keepers provide regular weather observations for Environment Canada, as well as answer hundreds of requests for weather conditions from local fishermen. I spent two and a half years on Gannet, and although life there was often confining and tedious, it remains for me the quintessential lighthouse experience .

By the summer of 1993 opportunities for lighthouse work in the Maritimes had begun to decrease further. The closure of the Cape Forchu Light and monitoring station marked the end of the era of lighthouse keepers in Nova Scotia, and left the number of staffed lights in the Maritimes at three, all in the Bay of Fundy area. During a fall shift on Machias Seal Island I decided that given my interest in continuing to work as a lightkeeper, I would attempt to find employment on the lights in Newfoundland or British Columbia. Although there were no job prospects in Newfoundland at the time, the Coast Guard was still hiring keepers on the west coast where the automation process was on hold. I decided to move to B.C., and although it was difficult for me to leave the east coast lights, the decision would have been made for me had I waited any longer.

-To be continued in the next issue-