



THE Lightkeeper

The Nova Scotia Lighthouse Preservation Society

Vol. 2, No. 5, December, 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. Our first project is the preservation of Sambro Island Lighthouse, at the entrance to Halifax Harbour. **Meetings: 7:00 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 July, 1995: Clara Gray, Michael Gray, Dan Conlin, Pat Acheson, Peter Beliveau, the Grant Family, Mrs. Grant, Jean Gaudet, Thomas Tag, Jarvis Darville, Charles Whalen, Sidney Smith, Mary Lynyak, James Woolfrum Jr., Timothy Harrison (Lighthouse Digest), Timothy Churchill, Chapel Hill Historical Society.

MEMBERSHIPS FOR 1996/97 ARE DUE JANUARY 1

Membership Form, Page 10. To keep this issue intact, put name, address, telephone number and amount paid on a separate piece of paper. Send it and your cheque to the address on the form.

Lighthouse News

Lighthouses of the Lighthouse Route Interpretive Drive by Donna Hachey-Hatt

For the past 30 odd years, visitors to Nova Scotia have been invited to travel the lighthouse Route along the South Shore. Of course, you should be able to see lighthouses very easily along this route. This has not been the case, however, and the South Shore Tourism Association is embarking on a project, in cooperation with South Shore communities to develop an interpretation and signage program that will direct travellers to lighthouses and look-offs and offer insights into the history and significance of the lights.

The project has two objectives, one being to direct travellers to the lights so they can learn

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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 Patsy MacDonald, Editor, **The Lightkeeper**, 6085 Shirley Street, Apt. 6, Halifax, NS, B3H 2M9

about and appreciate them, and the other to begin the process of preservation of the Lighthouse sites for future generations. The project will probably take two or more years to complete. The process of establishing communication with the Coast Guard and bringing communities together to look at which sites they would like to see developed has begun. Representatives from the South Shore Tourism Association have begun meeting with Nova Scotia Tourism and other government departments to develop this program as a major tourist attraction for the South Shore and potentially for the rest of Nova Scotia.

The project will incorporate at least 17 sites and potentially more. If anyone in the NSLPS is interested in this project or has information about any of the lights, the South Shore Tourism Association would love to hear from you. Please contact Donna Hatt at 354-5741 or Lynne Perry at 624-6466. We'll keep you up to date with our progress.

Fort Point Light Improvements

The Fort Point Lighthouse at Liverpool is being included in a facelift of this historic port. The existing structure will be improved, an addition to the lighthouse created, and the and the site developed. The designs for the waterfront are in keeping with the town's historic Port of Privateers theme.

From The Editor

This is an extra issue of the *Lightkeeper* because we are changing our publication dates for 1996 to March, June, September, and December. This gives us a better chance to keep you up-to-date on summer activities and events. rather than have a gap in publication from October to March, we decided to add a December issue.

I will be in England and Europe from January to July, 1996. I will be making my contribution to the *Lightkeeper* through the magic of electronic communication. Patsy MacDonald is taking over the details of editing and getting the newsletter into your mailbox. Many thanks to her, and those who will be helping. *Kathy Brown*

See us at the Boat Show

February 22 - 25, Exhibition Park, Halifax.

NSLPS will be part of the Legends Afloat display.

If you'd like to help set up our booth or staff it during the Show, call Bob Pietrzak, 861-1146.

Weekend on Seal Island

by E. Patricia MacDonald

In the early summer of 1993, I, with three others, founded the Nova Scotia Lighthouse Preservation Society during an excursion to Sambro Island. Even though I grew up in Atlantic Canada, it was the first time I had visited a lighthouse in this country. Having worked on a conservation plan for a historic lighthouse in Ireland, I was fortunate to visit a number of the beacons in that country. That day on Sambro, I was delighted to meet others who were as concerned with the preservation of lighthouses as I was. Another of the founding members, who has since left the region for the west coast was lightkeeper Chris Mill. As author of **Vanishing Lights**, he wrote and spoke longingly of

his days on various lights off the coasts of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick; in particular, of Seal Island, where he also spent much of his childhood summers.

In the summer of this year and after a number of trips back out to Sambro Island, the Nova Scotia Lighthouse Preservation Society planned an excursion to Seal Island. The prospect of spending time on this island, which we had all heard so much about, was exciting to say the least. Of course the crossing from Clark's Harbour to the island would be weather permitting, so we waited in anticipation until the last minute wondering if the next telephone ring would be a cancellation!

Editor of the "Lightkeeper" Kathy Brown, her husband Murray, and I set out around 5am on September 23rd. The two and one half hour trip to Barrington took us through darkness, fog, and drizzle, and finally a very slight hint of sunrise on the horizon. The nine lighthouse enthusiasts were greeted at the wharf in Clark's Harbour by Ronnie and Charles Kenney, who assisted us onto their boat, the *R & R*, and sailed us away to the paradise off the southwestern shore of Nova Scotia known as Seal Island. The two hour voyage took us past Bon Portage and Stoddard Islands. Bon Portage is known for its many bird species and is a centre for ornithological research by Acadia University academics.



Participants in the NSLPS trip to Seal Island aboard the *R & R*: L to R: Murray & Kathy Brown, Rip Irwin, Dan Conlon, Pat Acheson, Patsy MacDonald, Samantha Kenney, Linda Christiansen, Alan Ruffman, Graham McBride.

As we approached Seal Island, the sun burst through the clouds and numerous little black seal heads bobbed up and down in the waves off the coast. The rusting shipwreck, the *Fermont*, which came ashore on the eastern side of the island in 1991, provided quite a dramatic foreground to the rocky landscape dotted with small colourful timber dwellings and *many, many* sheep. For a moment I felt that I was in Scotland!

Our accommodations, a cookhouse about one hundred years old, were more than any of us had anticipated. Bunks lined the walls of the upper storey. There were ample cooking and eating

utensils, and a wonderful long dining table that sat everyone quite comfortably. We were all anxious to set out on a trek to see the lighthouse and other points of interests, so no time was wasted in gobbling down lunch. Past President Rip Irwin provided everyone with a map, so there was no chance of losing someone with even the poorest sense of direction.

Being the race-walker that I am, I decided to venture out alone. I had read that it would take about five hours to circumnavigate the island, which at that point was not even a possibility in my mind. The walking was not so easy at the onset. I realized I had taken an alternate route to the lighthouse; one in which I encountered bogs and rocky dikes. The sheep, rabbits and pheasants along the way seemed as though they were used to people being around. The locals, sitting outside their homes, enjoying the fresh sea air, greeted me with a wave as I walked by. About



Wreck of the *Fermont*. (Kathy Brown)

half way 'round the island, I caught up with Alan Ruffman and Linda Christiansen, who were searching for black granite. With my limited knowledge of geology, I was not able to be of much assistance.

I found the northern part of the island to be the most spectacular, with its forest and dramatic coastline. I had wished that I had originated my hike in this direction, because at this point, I was becoming too tired to appreciate everything I should have! I arrived back at the cookhouse three hours from the time I left. Feeling exhilarated and worn out at the same time, we all straggled in after our adventures and had a restful evening, which ended in a pot-luck feast of great food, merriment, and yarn-spinning. We were joined by various island residents throughout the duration of the evening and appreciated their wit, charm, and concern for maintaining their island way of life.

The following morning was filled with glorious sunshine. Again most of us ventured out on yet another journey. The artistic souls of the lot, Rip and Kathy, spent time on endeavours such as photography and sketching, until we finally had to leave for our trip back to the mainland. Alan and Linda never did find any black granite.

We all enjoyed the short trip immensely and some even admitted they did not want to leave. Hopefully, the next time the journey will be longer. It was wonderful to meet new and interesting people, see the relaxed side of the NSLPS executive (!), and finally see for myself what people were talking about when enlightened faces speak of Seal Island.

From Coast to Coast:

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

By Chris Mills

PART TWO - BRITISH COLUMBIA

By the mid 19th century, a comprehensive network of lights and fog signals had begun to emerge in Nova Scotia. After the establishment of major lights on islands like Sambro, Scatarie, Seal, and Cross, the government of the day turned it's attention to the needs of coastal traders and fishermen, who required smaller (but no less important) beacons to guide them into small ports and safe anchorages.

In contrast, the western coastline of Britain's North American empire was in virtual darkness. Although the American government had constructed several lights along their own Pacific coast during the 1850s, there were no guiding beacons on British Columbia's rugged shores. Finally in 1860 the colonial government established the first 'Canadian' light on the west coast, on Fisgard Island at the entrance to Esquimalt Harbour. For the next century, hundreds of major and minor lights and fog signals were constructed around Vancouver Island and along the practically uninhabited north west coast of the province. These lights formed the basis of a vital safety service for all mariners, through the efforts of the lightkeepers who kept the lights shining and pulled shipwrecked victims from stormy seas. In 1960



the federal government built the last Green Island, B.C. (Chris Mills)
staffed lightstation in Canada at

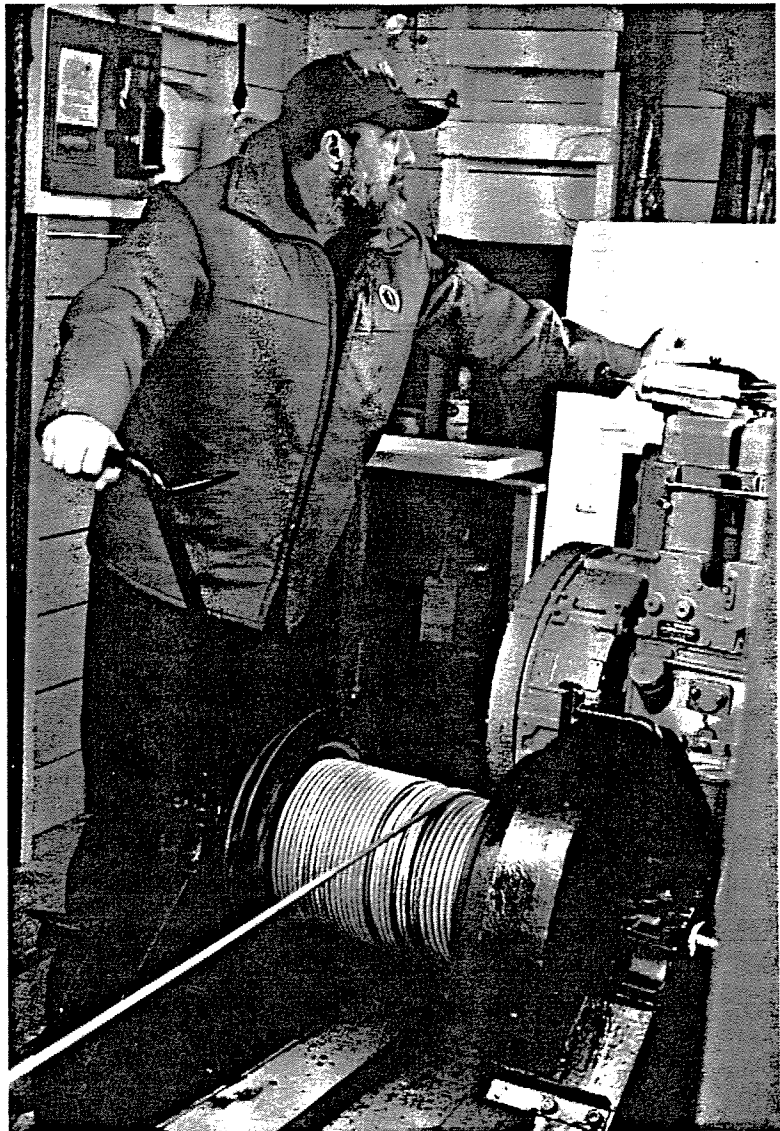
Bonilla Island in B.C.'s Hecate Strait, and although recent improvements in navigation equipment have made sea travel safer than ever for mariners, the lightkeeper remains an important part of the marine safety network.

Unlike Nova Scotia, much of British Columbia's coastline (especially in the northwest) remains largely unpopulated, yet widely travelled by cargo, fishing and pleasure vessels. One of the busiest seaways in the north is the Inside Passage. It has been said that along this corridor of water, between the north end of Vancouver Island and Prince Rupert, "lighthouses outnumber communities". With such a great amount of marine and aviation traffic bound to and from Prince Rupert and Alaska,

lighthouses and their keepers play a daily role in safe navigation by providing aviation weather observations, marine and synoptic weathers, and sea water sampling. At selected stations seismographs are used to record earthquake activity as far away as Japan. In total, more than 70 British Columbia lightkeepers and their families provide these and many other services, from Race Rocks in the Strait of Juan de Fuca to Green Island, just below the Alaska Panhandle.

My own experience as a west coast lightkeeper began in January of 1994. After learning of a competition for new lightkeepers, I left Halifax early in the month, flying to warm and rainy Vancouver. Upon arriving at the Canadian Coast Guard Base in Victoria I was told that there might be a job for me, although it could be a number of months before a position became available. Within four days though, a call came from the Lightstation Services Officer, with an offer for three months "but likely more" on the northernmost lightstation of all, Green Island. Traditionally Green has been viewed as a proving ground for new keepers, who often stay a year or less in its harsh winter and spring weather conditions. Frigid Arctic outflow winds batter the treeless island, confining the keepers to their houses for weeks on end. Nonetheless, late spring brings the relief of warmer temperatures and light winds, and Green Island becomes a lush oasis in the sea, carpeted with deep green lawns and beautiful wildflowers.

Green Island's winter reputation notwithstanding, I jumped at the opportunity to work on the station. By the end of January I had travelled a thousand kilometres by bus and ferry to the north coast city of Prince Rupert. At the Coast Guard base I boarded a large Sikorsky helicopter with my few belongings and within 20 minutes we had touched down on Green Island. In some ways I felt I had returned in time 15 years to a Nova Scotia lightstation, as I took in the sight of the white lighthouse in the midst of the cluster of houses, engine room and sheds, and the maple leaf snapping in the breeze. With most of the B.C. lights tended by resident families, I sensed once again the way of life that was traditionally integral to lightkeeping on the east coast. On many stations the carefully tended gardens, greenhouses, rock walls and pristine lawns spoke of the pride of the



Rene Kitson operating a 'highline,' Ivory Island B.C. (Chris Mills)

entire lighthouse family. I became aware of the number of duties performed by B.C. lightkeepers- the weather observations, maintenance of station boats, aerial derricks and hydraulic winches, oil and filter changes and construction projects and search and rescue assistance. Although many of these tasks had passed out of the hands of Nova Scotia keepers almost two decades ago, they were still very much part of the job here.

Along with the traditions of keeper and family involvement, many of the conventional air powered fog signals have survived on B.C. lightstations, including the venerable diaphone. During a visit to Lennard Island (off Tofino, on the west coast of Vancouver Island) in June 1995 I stood by the engine room as two incredibly deep and powerful blasts sent 15 cubic feet of air per second through the large horn. Although most lighthouses on the northwest coast have electrically operated fog signals, several stations still have the traditional hand operated fog horns tucked away in light towers and dusty attics; these same horns were used on Nova Scotia stations in the 1930s and 40s. The old bellows horn at Boat Bluff Lightstation, where I worked during Christmas 1994, was manufactured by Powers Brothers Ltd., in Lunenburg, Nova Scotia.

By July 1994, with five months on Green Island under my belt, I had the opportunity to do some relief work on Langara Island, at the north west tip of the Queen Charlotte Islands. Langara boasts one of three remaining Fresnel lenses in use in the province, and still has the original clockwork as a backup for the electric motor that rotates the huge lens assembly (manufactured by Chance Brothers in Birmingham and installed in 1913). Langara Point is also important as a Tsunami (seismic sea wave) recording station. Although the lighthouse is located on the top of a 130' cliff, the tide recording instruments located near sea level were washed away when huge waves driven by 85 mph winds hit the station in 1972. In October 1994 while I was relieving on Bonilla Island a Tsunami wave warning was issued by the Pacific Tsunami Warning Centre in Honolulu. At the Coast Guard Base in Victoria arrangements were made to evacuate low lying stations if necessary. The wave was estimated to reach Langara



Light tower with first order Fresnel lens, Langara Point, BC. (Chris Mills)

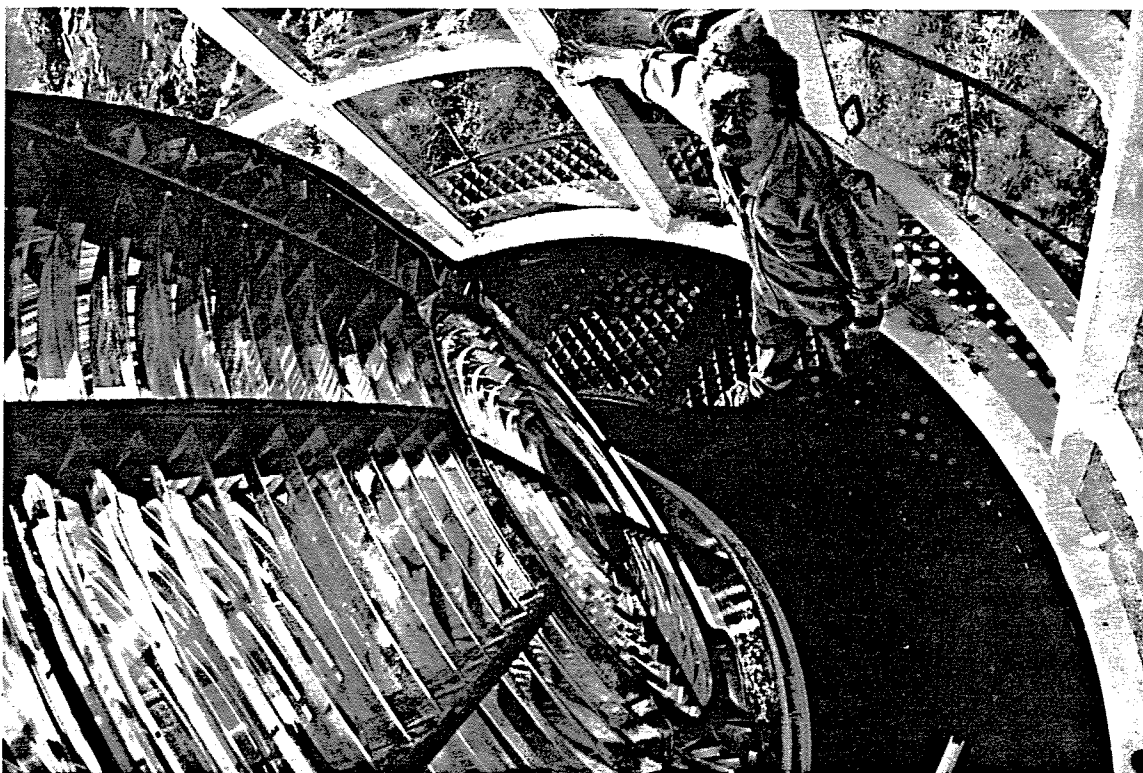
Island in the afternoon, and when it was finally measured by sensors in Alaska it was found to be less than one foot high. On other occasions severe waves have caused structural damage and loss of life on the Pacific coast; in 1967 a monstrous wave almost entirely destroyed the Pine Island lightstation in Queen Charlotte Strait. The keepers escaped to higher ground.

After my short stint at Langara, I decided to transfer to Ivory Island from Green, as a position for assistant keeper had become available. At times there is a high turn over rate of lightkeeping positions, with keepers transferring or being promoted to other stations. I found this to be unlike the traditional lightkeeping situation in the Maritimes, where families often spent 25 to 30 years on one station. With many remote stations on the west and northwest coasts of British Columbia, some keepers with families have felt the need to move to stations closer to towns and cities, while others have enjoyed the variety afforded by transfers from station to station.

With a relatively small amount of personal gear, my move was effected quickly, once again in the Sikorsky helicopter which supplies all of the north coast lights from the Coast Guard base in Prince Rupert. Ivory Island is an hour and a half's flight from the base, with the nearest settlement being at Bella Bella, 15 miles to the south east. The lighthouse was established in 1898 and marks the junction of Seaforth Channel and Milbanke Sound. In the summer thousands of sailboats and cruise ships pass the station, alongside fishing boats and tugs towing massive cargo barges. The main part of the island is about 50 acres, with the lightstation situated on a small islet on it's south west side. The present lighthouse is an open steel tower constructed in 1957, although it was rebuilt in 1983 after a storm toppled the tower and tore the fog horns from their concrete base. As recently as 1989 large seas have inundated the station, damaging buildings and seawalls. As on other stations, Ivory's keepers are well aware of the power of the Pacific Ocean.

In contrast to Ivory Island, the light at Boat Bluff escapes the fury of the open Pacific. Located at the south end of Sarah Island on the Inside Passage, the station clings to a steep slope facing Tolmie Channel. The area is notorious for high rainfall; sometimes up to 130 mm (more than five inches) in a 12 hour period. I spent two months as relief assistant keeper here between November 1994 and January 1995. While off duty, I was able to explore the area by boat and on foot. One walk took me a thousand feet above sea level to a lake which provides hydro power for the nearby native settlement at Klemtu. There is a strong association between the lightstation and inhabitants of Klemtu, who rely on the keepers' weather observations to assist the float planes which regularly bring supplies and medical services to the community. In addition, Boat Bluff and Klemtu have formed an informal search and rescue alliance which is important to the many vessels travelling and fishing the area.

After a year and a half spent on six west coast lighthouses, the role of the lightkeeper in the marine navigation system has taken on a new meaning for me. The sheer volume of marine and aviation traffic all the way from Vancouver to Prince Rupert means that incidents at sea can happen frequently, and it is often lightkeepers who are available to proceed to the scene or provide radio assistance to Coast Guard Radio operations. I feel privileged to have seen so much of a coastline that differs greatly from that of the east coast of Canada, with massive cedar and spruce trees set against the breathtaking backdrop of snow topped mountains. It has been gratifying for me to continue to work as a lightkeeper, and to experience elements of the way lightkeeping was in the Maritimes before automation sent keepers ashore and left stations abandoned to the elements. In addition to being a necessary aid to navigation, the lighthouse is an important part of Canadian maritime culture; through the work of the Coast Guard, remaining lightkeepers and a concerned public it must be preserved for the future.



Principal Keeper Gordon Schweers, Langara Point, B.C. with First Order Fresnel Lens manufactured by Chance Brothers near Birmingham, England. This is the same size of lens as that from the Sambro Light which is on exhibit at the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic in Halifax. (Chris Mills)

NOTE: Canada has 70 staffed lighthouses; 35 in British Columbia, 3 in New Brunswick and 32 in Newfoundland. On August 02, 1995 during a tele-conference call to all B.C. lightkeepers, the Associate Director General of the Western Region of the Canadian Coast Guard announced that 18 lighthouses in Canada would be de-staffed by August 1996; eight in Newfoundland (Camp Islands, Cape Bauld, Cape Pine, Cape Spear, Peckford Island, Point Amour, Northwest Head, Sagona Island) two in New Brunswick (Gannet Rock and Letite Light and monitoring station) and eight in British Columbia (Active Pass, Ballenas Islands, Discovery Island, Point Atkinson, Porlier Pass, Race Rocks, Saturna Island, Sisters Islets). According to the Coast Guard, the remaining 27 lights in B.C. will be de-staffed only when issues concerning weather observing, scientific data collection, Coast Guard communications and search and rescue assistance have been addressed.

Chris Mills is one of the founders of the Nova Scotia Lighthouse Preservation Society. He is a lightkeeper currently working in British Columbia. He has also worked in the Maritimes at Cross Island, Seal Island, Machias Seal Island and Gannet Rock. He attributes his fascination for lights and lighthouses to summers spent as a child on Seal Island. He is the author of *Vanishing Lights*, a fascinating account of lightkeeping on the Nova Scotia and Bay of Fundy coasts. (To purchase *Vanishing Lights* see Page 10.)

Lightshop

Great stuff for gifts (or for yourself) and the profits go to support your society!

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

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

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.**

MEMBERSHIP FORM January 1, 1996 - December 31, 1996

NOVA SCOTIA LIGHTHOUSE PRESERVATION SOCIETY

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

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