

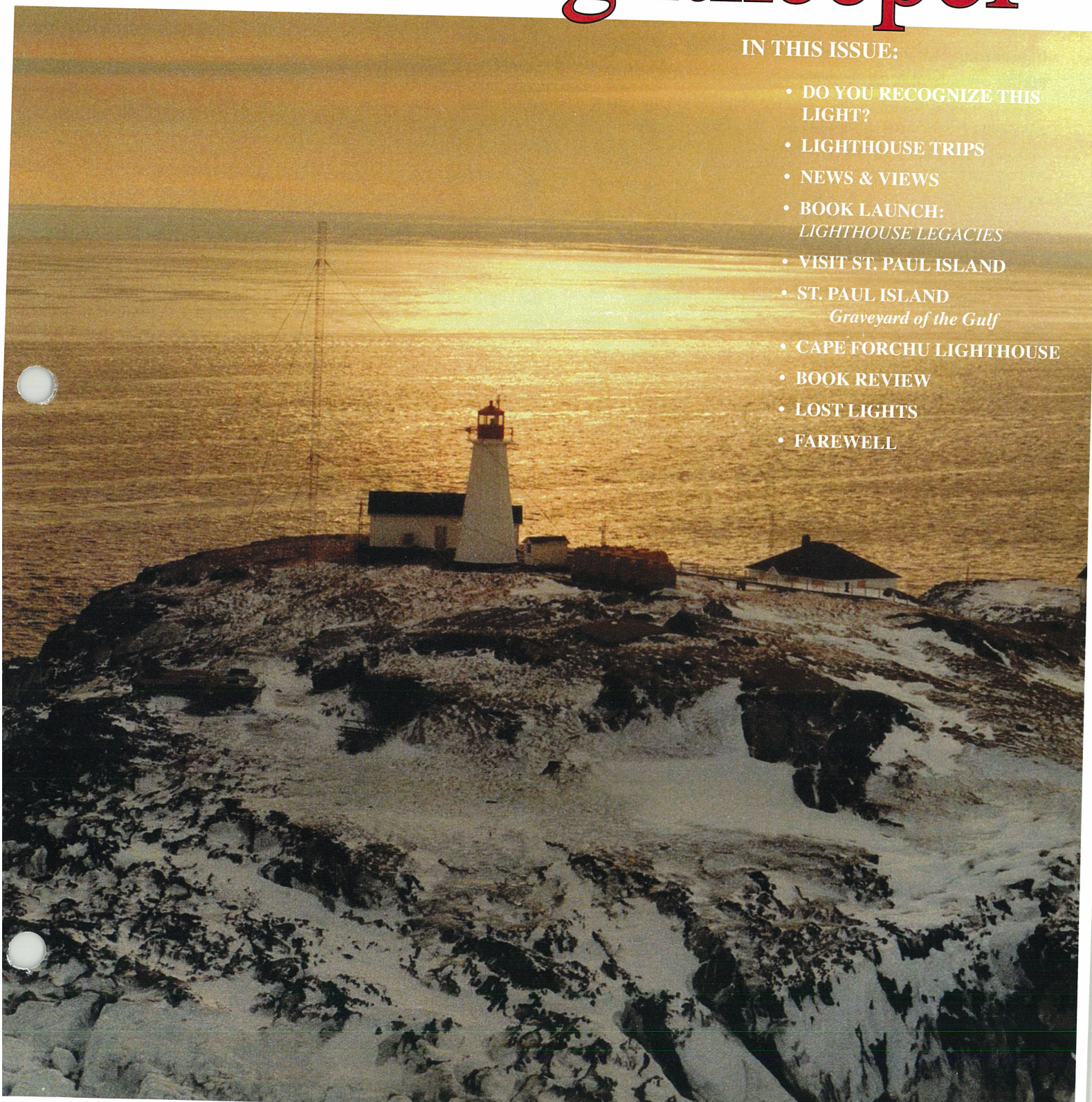


The Nova Scotia Lighthouse Preservation Society  
Vol. 13, No. 2, June 2006

# The Lightkeeper<sup>TM</sup>

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The objectives of the Nova Scotia Lighthouse Preservation Society are: to promote and to support the preservation and awareness of Nova Scotia

lighthouses; to assist community groups in leasing or taking ownership of lighthouse sites; to provide access to written research and photographic documentation, to initiate oral history research and to classify and monitor the status of historic lighthouse sites.

**WEBSITE:** <http://www.nslps.com>

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#### NSLPS EXECUTIVE 2006/07

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Dorothy MacLeod 423-8034

**Director, Member-at-Large -** Tom Roberts

**Director, Member-at-Large -** Denyse Contrasty

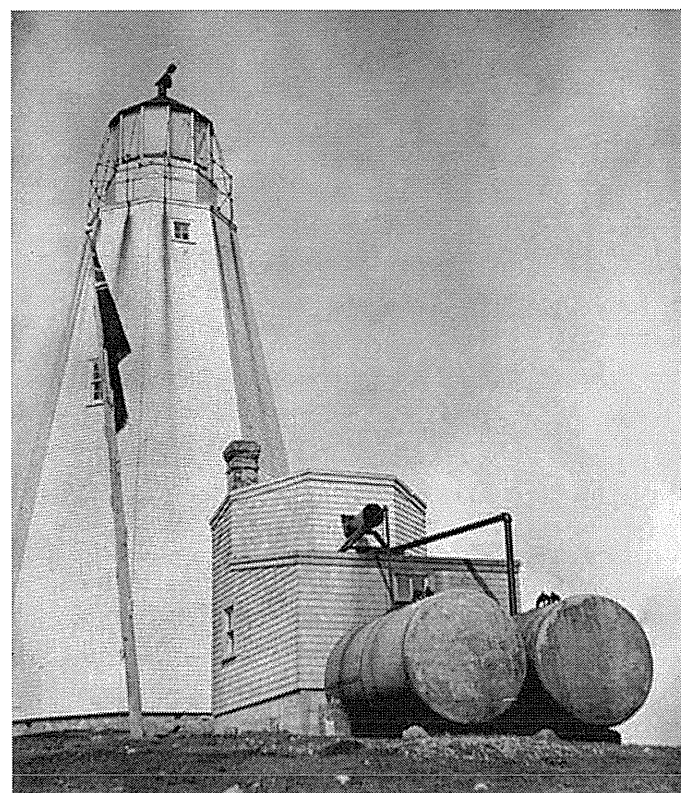
## From the Editorial Staff

During the 2006 - 2007 year, *The Lightkeeper* will be produced by an editorial team of Shawn Connors, Nancy Eisener and Ashley Lohnes. Chris Mills will continue to assist as an advisor and contributor.

Do you have news stories, articles, photos or memories of NS lighthouses and keepers that you would like to share with readers of *The Lightkeeper*? If so, please let us know! Submit material or contact [nancy.eisener@nsc.ca](mailto:nancy.eisener@nsc.ca) or phone 1-902-868-1248 for more information.

## DO YOU RECOGNIZE THIS LIGHT?

In the next few issues of *The Lightkeeper* we will be providing a picture of an 'unknown light' in the hope that some of our readers will recognize the light and be able to provide us with definitive information on its origin. The photos are part of the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic Lighthouse collection and the Museum is partnering with the NSLPS on this project to identify these photos. If you have ideas or information on this light please contact Ashley Lohnes at [portcove@hotmail.com](mailto:portcove@hotmail.com), who will ensure this information is passed on to the museum and shared in the next edition of *The Lightkeeper*.



Unidentified light. Maritime Museum of the Atlantic

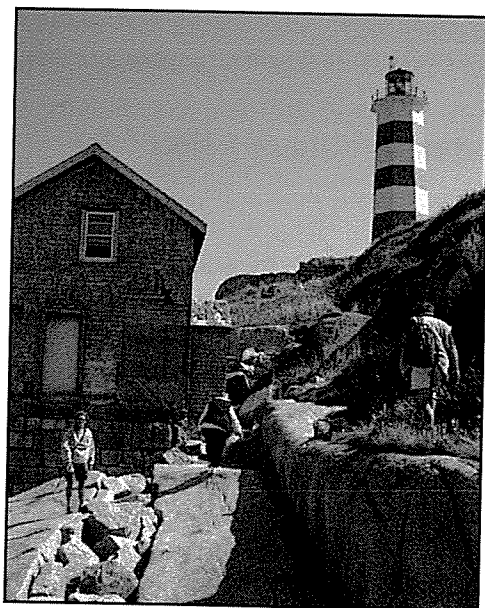
## LIGHTHOUSE TRIPS

### Lighthouses of Halifax Harbour

August 19, 2006

10 am to 4 pm

Join Captain Conrad aboard the *Captains Pride* for an all day guided boat trip. Leaving Fisherman's Cove, Eastern Passage, the trip will proceed past Devils Island to land on Sambro (weather permitting) to see the



Trip participants exploring Sambro Island on a previous NSLPS visit. *Ashley Lohnes*

oldest operating lighthouse in North America, explore the island and eat lunch. The trip will resume past Chebucto Head, Maughers Beach, Georges Island and back to Fisherman's Cove.

The trip will depart from 87 Government Wharf road.

- Cost \$45.00.  
REGISTRATION IS REQUIRED.
- For more details, and to register, call Dorothy MacLeod, 423-8034 after July 15.

### Cape North Lighthouse Trip

September 3, 2006

Join Barry MacDonald on **September 3, 2006** for a guided tour to Nova Scotia's most northeasterly lighthouse. This is not a trip to be attempted by the faint of heart! The visit will showcase some of the most beautiful views Cape Breton has to offer. From the summit of Cape North (1,400 feet above sea level), participants will hike down the old trail once used by the lightkeepers to a beautiful meadow where the ruins of the first lighthouse (built in 1876) can still be seen.

Saint Paul Island's brooding hump is visible in the distance, and although it is 19 km offshore, the island looks so close, you'd think you could reach out and touch it! From the base of the mountain, the hike continues along the meadow to the present lighthouse which was

built in 1980. This is the third lighthouse to be built here and the foundations of the second tower as well as those of the keeper's houses are clearly visible. (The lighthouse was de-staffed in 1987). There are also remnants of the old fog steam whistle as well as the landing where supplies were taken ashore from the supply vessels.

The total (hiking) distance is approx. (5.6 km) over some very rugged terrain. To make this trip, participants should be in good physical condition and come prepared with appropriate footwear and clothing. It will also be necessary to bring along a hearty lunch as well



Looking down the coastal meadows to the Cape North lighthouse. *Barry MacDonald*

as plenty of water! Due to the distance involved, there is no rain date. Participants will be notified in advance of cancellation due to an advance unfavourable weather report.

- Cost: \$10.00 per person.
- For more information, phone Dorothy MacLeod at 423-8034.

### Visit the Brier & Long Island Lights

September 23/24, 2006

A visit to the four lighthouses on Brier & Long Island is being planned for September 23/24. The rain date is September 30th. The trip will be led by Chris Mills who will give a historical overview of the lights and the lightkeepers. He will also provide information on the status of the lights and the upcoming plan for the Coast Guard to divest themselves of these lights. Plans are underway to find accommodations for the evening.

- Cost: \$20.00 (Trip only, no accommodations) Registration required.
- For more information and to register, contact Dorothy MacLeod 423-8034 after August 1st.

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## NEWS AND VIEWS

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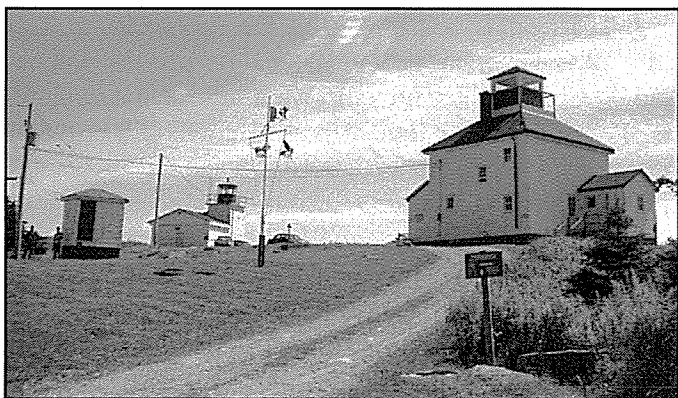
### 2006 Annual General Meeting

**O**n April 26, the NSLPS held its 13th annual general meeting. After the reading of reports from board members, Nancy Knowles of the Friends of the Yarmouth Light gave a presentation about the trials and tribulations of lighthouse preservation at Cape Forchu. See page 10 for details. A small but dedicated crowd attended the meeting, underscoring the need for new blood in the society. A number of long-time members did not re-offer for board positions, and we bid them adieu, with thanks for all the good work they have done for Nova Scotia's lighthouses. The challenge now is to attract new board and general members to help keep the NSLPS instrumental in securing the future of our lights.

### Port Bickerton and Area Planning Association granted 2006 Craig Harding Award

**D**uring the AGM, the NSLPS was proud to present the Port Bickerton and Area Planning Association with the Craig Harding Award for the great community spirit they demonstrated in the acquisition, restoration and preservation of the two Port Bickerton lighthouses and surrounding area. This ground-breaking association played an important role when they became one of the first community groups in Nova Scotia to take possession of their local lights. The award was accepted by the Reverend David Curry who was instrumental in this process. There are two lighthouses located on this site. The current light tower is a square white concrete building. The second and oldest lighthouse has been restored and opened to the public as The Nova Scotia Lighthouse Interpretive Centre.

This award, established by NSLPS in 2002, honours one of Nova Scotia's biggest supporters of lighthouses. Craig Harding fought long and hard to save the



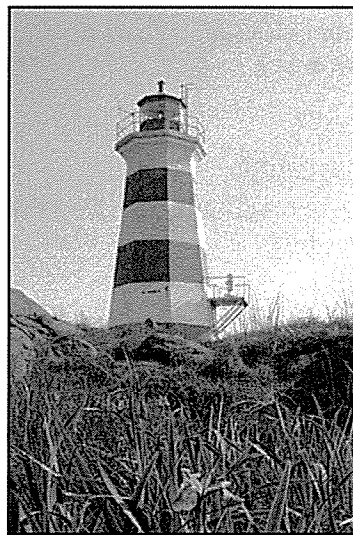
Nova Scotia Lighthouse Interpretive Centre. *Kathy Brown*

historic Cape Forchu lighthouse in Yarmouth, but lost his battle with cancer just a few months after the municipality officially took possession of the lighthouse. It was Craig's interest in the Cape Forchu lighthouse that revealed the depth of his passion for the beacons that guide ships at sea. Craig's interest, tenacity and dedication showed that Nova Scotia lighthouses can be saved. In his honour and as a permanent "Thank you!" the Nova Scotia Lighthouse Preservation Society hands out the "Craig Harding Award," annually to a group or individual who has made an outstanding contribution to saving Nova Scotia's lighthouses. The award consists of a plaque and a cash prize of \$250.

### Brier Island area lighthouses slated for divestiture?

**I**n April, reports from residents of Westport, Brier Island indicated that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans planned to divest themselves of four lighthouses in the Brier Island Area. The lights said to be slated for divestiture were Boar's Head (established 1864); Grand Passage (established 1901); Peter Island (established in 1850); and the Brier Island Lighthouse -- known locally as Western Light (established in 1809).

During a conversation with Wally and Joyce deVries (of the R.E. Robicheau general store in Westport) in late April, Chris Mills learned that the govern-



Western Light. *Ashley Lohnes*

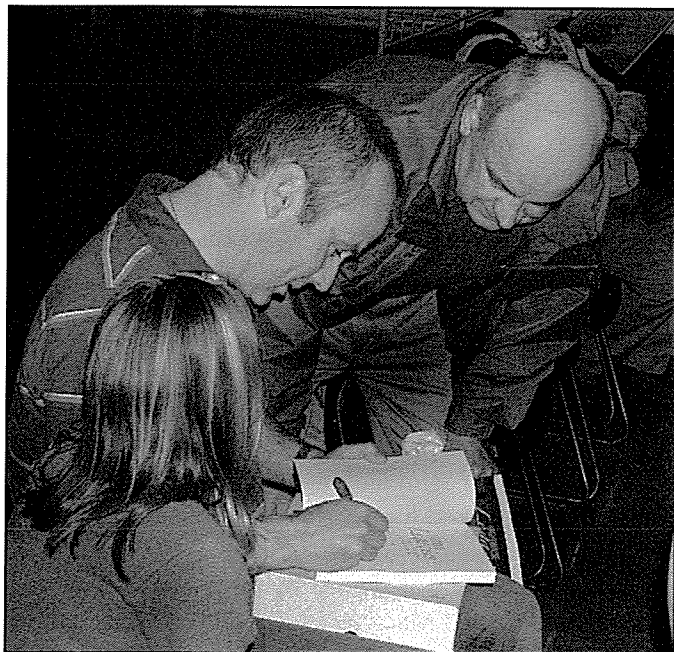
ment reportedly has no immediate plans to divest these lights. However, community members are concerned about the poor condition of the towers and the deVries expressed interest in holding a meeting about the situation with the help of the NSLPS. Chris Mills and president Barry MacDonald will set up a date to meet with concerned residents in the area.

The January/February 2006 edition of *The Lightkeeper* reported on the alarming deterioration of these lights and the efforts by local residence to have repairs undertaken by the Coast Guard. This effort was to no avail and instead, in early May, community members rallied and held their first meeting designed to develop a plan to save the lights.



## CHRIS MILLS LAUNCHES NEW BOOK *Lighthouse Legacies*

**O**n May 9th 2006, more than 150 people gathered at the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic to congratulate Chris Mills on the launch of his latest book, *Lighthouse Legacies – Stories of Nova Scotia's Light-keeping Families*. Chris treated the gathering to photos and stories about the people he interviewed for the book—



Chris Mills autographs *Lighthouse Legacies*. Ashley Lohnes

many of whom were in the audience. The book brings to life the sights and sounds and the joys and frustrations of the “men and woman who eked out a living as best they could, raising their children on isolated coasts and tiny islands, ever toiling at the service of the mariner”. The event was truly a ‘lightkeeper’s social’ as lightkeepers, their families and friends feted Chris and caught up on stories – old and new. *Lighthouse Legacies* is published



Book launch patrons at Museum of Atlantic gift shop. Ashley Lohnes

by Nimbus Publishing and available at local bookstores and the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic gift shop.

## VISIT ST. PAUL ISLAND\*

This August, you can see some of the most remote and inaccessible lighthouses of Nova Scotia and visit the location of many shipwrecks on an excursion organized by Procom Diving Services.

### Dates:

Wednesday August 9 (no weather alternate)

Saturday August 12 (weather alternate day August 13)

### Trip includes:

- Boat transportation to and from the island with a landing on the island (weather and conditions permitting) by zodiac or dory.
- Lunch and hot drinks.
- Cost is \$98 per person (\$49 for children 12 and under traveling with family). Participation will be limited, reserve early to take part in this rare adventure opportunity.

Participants should enjoy sufficient health and mobility to allow for travel to the island (about 2 hours each way), negotiating boats and landing craft, and accessing the island via a small rock ledge with a rope and assistance. Proper clothing (heavier waterproof coat for boat trip out, layers to allow for varying weather conditions, dry shoes and socks should feet get wet landing on the island) will be needed by participants, as well as seasick medicine if required.

Visitors should be prepared for delay or rescheduling of trip due to weather conditions. Further details will be provided when available. Participation will be limited, so please contact Duane Traver as soon as possible if interested in the trip. Please e-mail at [wv2b@juno.com](mailto:wv2b@juno.com).

### Your hosts will be:

**Rob Rondeau:** One of the foremost shipwreck explorers in Canada Marine Archeologist.

**Duane Traver:** 5 time Amateur Radio expeditioner to St. Paul Island.

**Billy Budge:** Author of the book “Memoirs of a Lightkeepers Son”. Billy grew up on St. Paul Island while his father was a lightkeeper.

For information visit the website: <http://www.stpaulisland.net/visitsstpaul.html>. \*Trip is offered by Procom Diving Services at [www.procomdiving.com](http://www.procomdiving.com).

## ST. PAUL ISLAND: "THE GRAVEYARD OF THE GULF"

By Duane Traver

Although St. Paul is just a small island, it has a big history. Hence it's nickname "The Graveyard of the Gulf". Even after the establishment of humane stations and lighthouses, the island continued to build on its reputation by claiming ships and men right down until April 28, 1953 when the *Victoria*, a French fishing trawler, became the last official shipwreck on St. Paul.



St. Paul Island lies in the Cabot Strait and has been a hazard to ships for centuries. *Duane Traver*

This 4.5 km long by 1.6 km wide island, about 19 km from the northern tip of Cape Breton, came to be named St. Paul (or St. Paul's) island in the year 1497 by the explorer John Cabot. Earlier it had been referred to as "Round Island" by the Indians and as the "Island of Monego" by the Portuguese.

One of the earliest known shipwrecks was the



Wreck of the *Adalia* on St. Paul Island in 1872. *Canada Department of Transport/Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management*

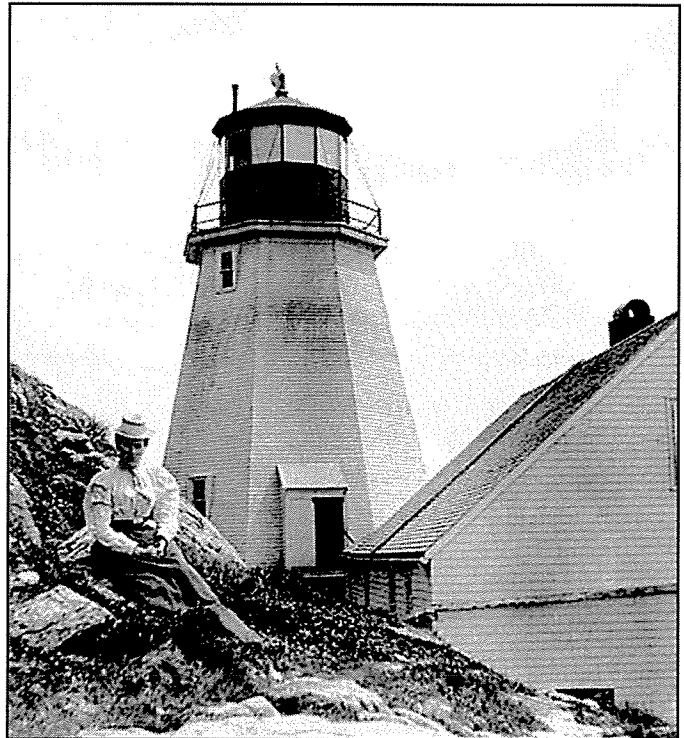


Main station landing St. Paul Island with schooner pulled up in 1937. *Canada Department of Transport/ Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management*

*Jupiter*, which was wrecked in May of 1767. Undoubtedly there were many wrecks in these early years. Diver Terry Dwyer has reported discovering "Cannons, cannon balls, bronze spikes, dead eyes, and other pieces of old wooden wrecks from the 1700s".

Despite mounting losses to shipping, nothing was done to relieve the situation since the island was not claimed by any province. However, around 1817 the provinces finally began looking into the situation. Action was finally provoked by the wreck of the *Jessie* on January 1, 1824.

The *Jessie* was owned by a prominent businessman named Donald MacKay from Prince Edward Island. Mr. MacKay was aboard his boat when she wrecked on the



St. Paul Island Southwest Light in 1900. *Canada Department of Transport/Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management*



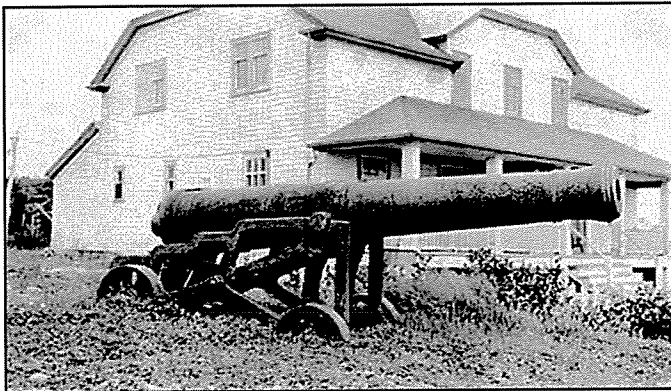


Aerial view of the Northeast Island. Duane Traver

southwest end of St. Paul in a blinding snowstorm. There were a number of survivors, including Mr. MacKay, who were able to build crude shelters and save some supplies from the ship. Mr. MacKay kept a journal of the ordeal. The last entry was made by Mr. MacKay on March 17, 1824. They had survived a watery grave only to suffer a more agonizing death on land, likely typical of many shipwreck victims on the island.

The way the world learned of the fate of Mr. MacKay and his crew was most interesting. Sealers would visit the island in the early spring specifically for the purpose of salvaging what they could from wrecks occurring over the winter. One man salvaged an expensive cloak from the body of Mr. MacKay. While walking down a street in Charlottetown, he happened to be spotted by Mrs. MacKay. Recognizing her husband's cloak, she pulled it open to find his initials she had sewn into the lining. The matter was reported to the police and the fate of the Jessie was revealed. A ship was dispatched to recover the bodies and the resulting outcry moved the provinces to again consider doing something about the island.

In 1826 New Brunswick sent two men to Trinity Cove on the western side of the island, where they



Fog Alarm cannon at Atlantic Cove in 1937. Clara Dennis/  
Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management

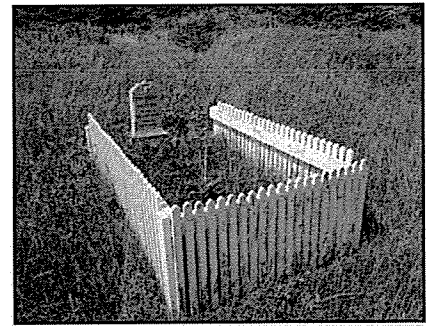
built a provision store and a house of refuge. The same year Nova Scotia dispatched Captain Hector McKenzie and his two nephews to Atlantic Cove, on the other side of the island. The two groups never knew of each other's existence although they were only about a mile apart. That is, until the *Britain*, a timber ship, wrecked on the night of December 26. Four men of a crew of forty survived and managed to find the Nova Scotia station at Atlantic Cove. The next morning McKenzie set out to look for more survivors and discovered the New Brunswick

group. Unfortunately, McKenzie had been inadequately supplied and later in the winter had to abandon the station, setting out for Cape Breton in a 12-foot boat. He made it, frost-bitten, but alive.

Finally, in 1839, lighthouses were finally established at both ends of the island. Through the years various types of steam whistles and fog horns were also in service. Despite these advances, shipwrecks still occurred on the island due to fog and bad weather conditions. The southwest end of the island first had a wooden lighthouse, which burned down in 1916. In 1917 it was replaced by a cylindrical steel lighthouse, which is now on display in the parking lot of the Coast Guard base in Dartmouth. Light operations on the southwest were automated in 1964. The current light is solar-powered beacon on a large fiberglass tube.

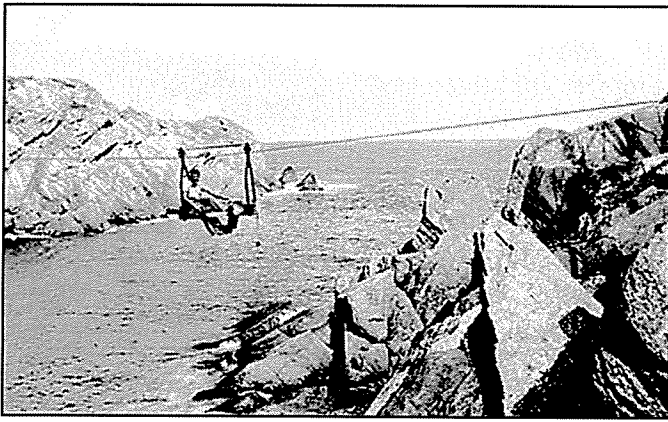
The original wooden lighthouse on the northeast end of the island was replaced with a concrete tower in 1962, and automated in 1991. There are still a few lighthouse station buildings standing at each end, but the old keeper's house at the southwest end will collapse soon.

At Atlantic Cove, near the centre of the easterly side of the island, there are still some buildings which



### *The Laing Twins*

*In published articles I have noticed references made to the grave of lighthouse keeper's children from the late 1800's. The grave, perhaps the only marked grave on the island, is located at Atlantic Cove. Buried here are the 5 1/2 month old twins, Violet and Eric Laing, children of a wireless operator. They died in August of 1936. The cause of their death was contaminated water. It has been said that previous occupants had emptied waste in the coal bin, rather than using the proper facilities.*



Man being transferred in a boatswain's over suspension wires at the North East light in 1937. *Clara Dennis/Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management*

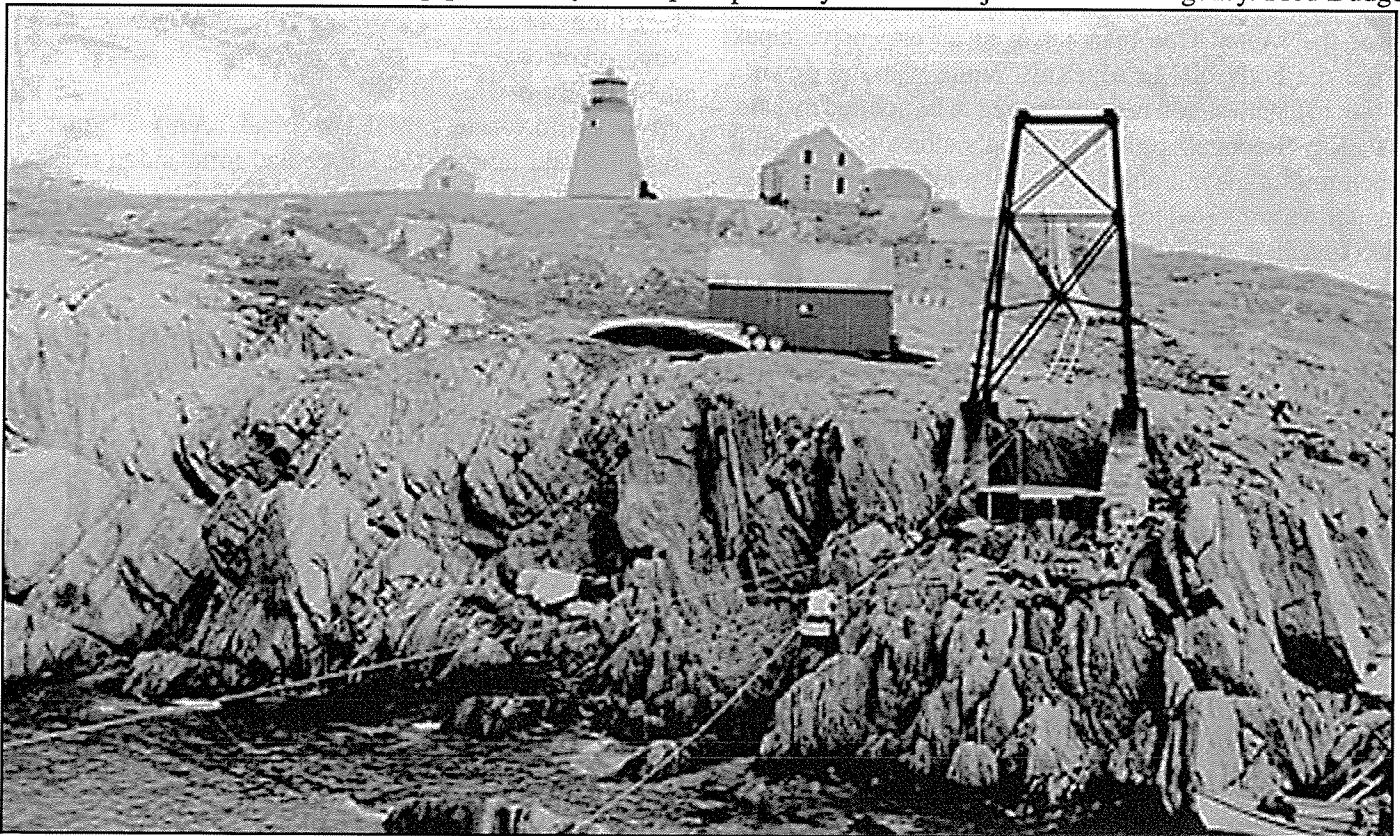
were used for the wireless station, but they are now in extremely poor condition. All the historic buildings on St. Paul Island will be gone within a few more years.

One of the interesting things about the lighthouse on the southwest point was the apparatus for turning the lens. The lighthouse lens was rotated around a stationary kerosene-powered mantle, making the light appear to be flashing to ships at sea. The lens was kept rotating by a large weight running down cables. Usually, this apparatus would be inside the lighthouse tower, requiring the keeper to crank the weight back to the top periodically to keep

the lens rotating. But because of the squat tower on the southwest point, the cable ran down the side of the cliff.

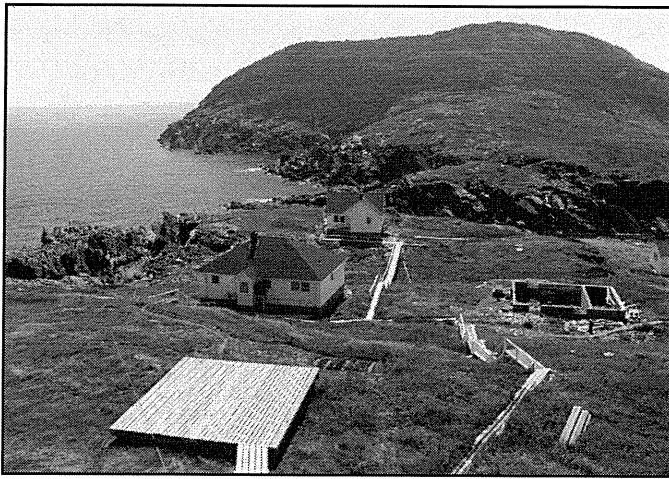
The keeper had to crank the weight to the top. The descending weight powered a clockwork mechanism which rotated the light. This was a great arrangement except in the case of one thing - ice. If freezing rain or other icy conditions were encountered, the ice could build up on the cable, stopping the weight's descent and in turn, halting the rotation of the lens. In this situation, the keeper would have to periodically go out with a large hammer and beat on the cables to keep the ice off, all night long. This could be very dangerous on the southwest light, since the ground around the keeper's house and the lighthouse sloped down into the ocean. The same ice stopping the lens also made moving around the station very treacherous. For this reason, a makeshift fence was built around the cliff edge and the keeper might have to even run a rope between the house and the light to hold on to.

Such conditions and the sheer isolation and lack of access to any type of medical care made living on St. Paul a precarious situation at times for the keepers and their families. One time young Ina Budge had decided to forego the use of the traction devices made for her by her father (tin with nail holes punched through were attached to their shoes to grip the ice). Ina slipped on the ice and bit a hole through her tongue. On the mainland, this would probably not be a major medical emergency. Fred Budge



The North East light is located on a small 2 acre rock separated from the bigger island by a strip of water known as "The Tittle". *Clara Dennis/Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management*





St. Paul Island from the top of the Northeast Light. *E.M. Rip Irwin*

decided to contact a doctor using the radiotelephone for advice. He was advised that if the wound were a cut, Ina would be alright and it would heal by itself. But, if the wound were a hole, she would need an emergency evacuation for treatment. Thankfully for Ina, the injury healed itself during the time that the debate over whether it was a hole or a cut went unresolved.

The victims of St. Paul weren't limited to just those from shipwrecks. A number of keepers have also lost their lives. In the 1950s, assistant keeper George Gatza died when the cable holding the boatswain's chair (used for transportation across the gap between the main island and the smaller two-acre rock where the northeast lighthouse is located) broke, dropping him into the water below. He had been trying to cross over to the main island in hopes of finding a place where some Christmas parcels could be brought ashore, since weather conditions wouldn't allow the supply boat to land supplies at the Northeast Light.

Other keepers and their family members also perished on the island. The story is told of a keeper and a young lady who went out in a dory to try to help some



A close up view of the Southwest St. Paul abandoned keeper's house. *William Budge*

of the light station personnel who had ventured out on the ice after a seal. The ice separated, carrying them out to sea. None of them were ever heard from again.

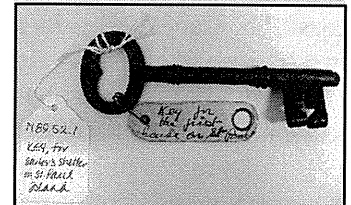
The nickname "Graveyard of the Gulf" has been well earned. One can only imagine the scores of people who tragically met their end on her shores. These included the British soldiers from the Sovereign were laid to rest in mass graves and the 400 Irish immigrants from the Sibylle, who dreamed of life in a new world, but found terror and death instead. The many keepers and those who manned the humane stations likely shared the sentiments expressed by Billy Budge regarding his time helping his father keep the Southwest light- "If our light had prevented only one shipwreck, or saved only one life, then we had not served in vain".

Today, St. Paul is a lonely place, visited occasionally by divers or amateur radio operators on expeditions. Her shores are approached only in summer by boats from Cape Breton seeking to catch some of the lobsters crawling over her ledges and what remains of the ships which have met their end on them. For now, the lighthouses still flash and some of the historic buildings still remain shakily standing as a reminder of St. Paul's long and tragic history.

Recommended reading:

- "Memoirs Of A Lightkeeper's Son", by Billy Budge. Available at bookstores or from the author, [ve1aao@ns.sympatico.ca](mailto:ve1aao@ns.sympatico.ca)
- "Wreck Hunter", by Terry Dwyer. Available at bookstores or from the author, [shipwrecked@ns.sympatico.ca](mailto:shipwrecked@ns.sympatico.ca)

*There are a lot of stories about ship wrecks on St. Paul Island. Perhaps the most poignant is that of Mrs. Mackay and her resolve to find her husband after she identified a stranger wearing his coat. This tragedy created the resolve to have humane establishments placed on the island. Beginning in 1832 the government of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia established refuges for ship wreck victims on both ends of the island.*



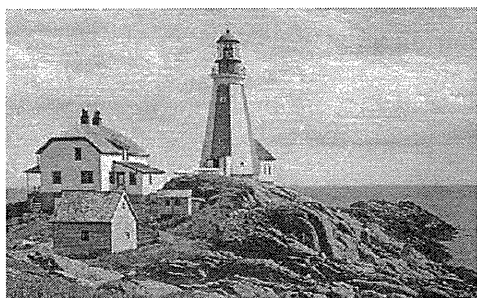
Key to Sailors Shelter on St. Paul Island. *Courtesy of the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic*

## Cape Forchu: The Second Most Visited Lighthouse in Nova Scotia

On Wednesday April 25, 2006 participants at the NSLPS AGM were among the first people to view a new presentation on the Cape Forchu lightstation created by Nancy Knowles, the staff and volunteers of The Friends of the Yarmouth Light Society. This presentation will be used to promote Cape Forchu lightstation by providing a historical over view of the light and the challenges and joys faced by community members as they worked together to take over the management of the lighthouse.

For the past 167 years the lighthouse on Cape Forchu has guided mariners safely into the Yarmouth Harbour. The Cape is almost surrounded by three different bodies of water, the Atlantic Ocean, the Bay of Fundy and Yarmouth Harbour. The Cape is high, rocky, and it has a decidedly different appearance than the surrounding coast. The Cape derives its name (Forked Cape) from the two narrow, rocky forks that extend to the south. Cape Forchu is almost an island itself - however it is connected to the mainland by a causeway.

In 1839 a lighthouse was erected at Cape Forchu, to protect vessels both arriving and departing from Yarmouth Harbour. January 15, 1840 was the first full day of operation for the Cape Forchu light.



The keeper's house was built in 1912 and serves today as a museum and tea room. *The Friends of the Yarmouth Light Society*

The original wooden structure was octagonal in shape and stood 18 metres high. Its second-order Fresnel lens could be seen approximately 20

miles out to sea and was a guide for 123 years. Over the years, the effects of the strong winds caused the timbers to deteriorate and the original tower was torn down and a new concrete tower was constructed in 1962. The original eight-panel 260 prism lens, can now be seen up close at the Yarmouth County Museum.

The 1962 light has a narrower base than the original and the hexagonal shape allows the wind to funnel around the 77 foot tower easier. This characteristic, referred to as an "Apple Core" design, is very rare and believed to be the first of its kind in Canada. Its additional height and lens power extended the original light's range by an extra ten miles. According the Rip Irwin, in his

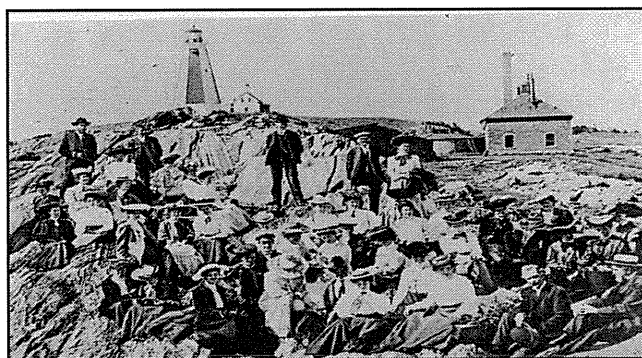


Current Cape Forchu lightstation from the sea. *Josette d'Entremont*

book *Lighthouses and Lights of Nova Scotia*, "Two of the last of the regular lightkeepers, Lawrence Wentzell and Walter Goodwin, have both related stories to me of hurricane-force winds, when the only way they could move about outside was on their hands and knees, with seas so high they swept up over the west side of the station and cascaded down the other side like a waterfall."

The lighthouse rests 37.5 meters (125 ft.) above sea level, nestled into jagged rocks and offers a breath-taking natural vista. The keepers' house is a 1½ story vernacular duplex constructed in 1912 housed two lightkeepers who faithfully tended the light until 1993. In 1992 the site was designated a recognized federal heritage building.

In 2000 the lightstation became the first in Canada to be transferred to a municipality by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans under the Alternative Use Program. The lightstation is owned by the Municipality of the District of Yarmouth and is lovingly managed by the Friends of the Yarmouth Light Society. The transformation of this property is a testament to the patience, tenacity and compassion of this group.



Cape Forchu was a popular gathering place in years gone by. *The Friends of the Yarmouth Light Society*





Community volunteers promote the lightstation in SeaFest Parade. *The Friends of the Yarmouth Light Society*



Family day at the light. *The Friends of the Yarmouth Light Society*



Marketing team L-R: Nancy Knowles, Mauritta Fevens, Zelaina Strug-Zelmer and Claudette Tufts. *The Friends of the Yarmouth Light Society*



*The Friends of the Yarmouth Light Society*

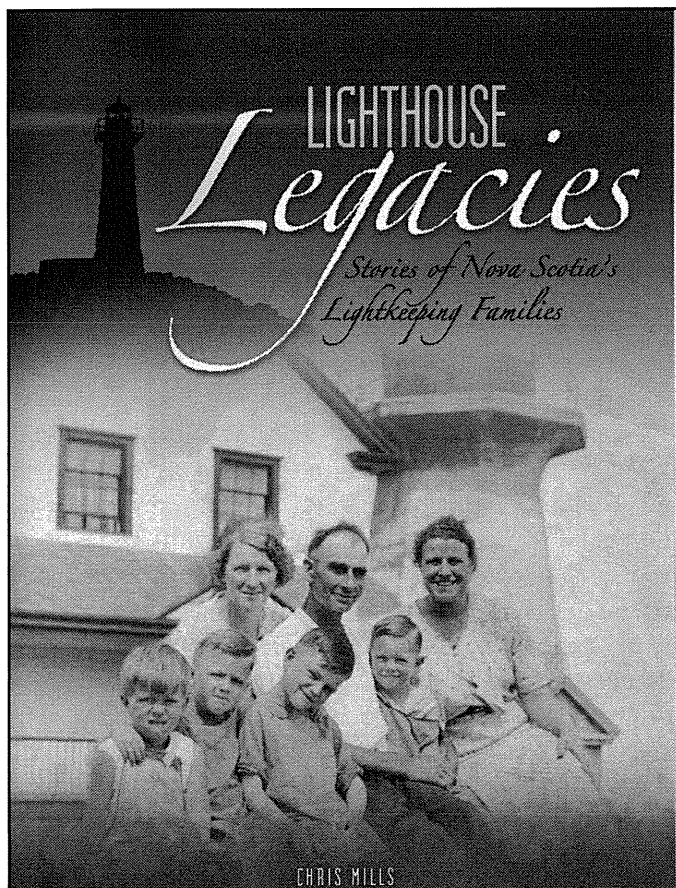
In the mid 1990s it became clear that light-houses were being de-commissioned and were in danger of demolition. Recognizing the very real threat of losing the Cape Forchu lightstation, the community came to its rescue! Petitions were distributed, and supporters came together. The Friends of the Light was originally begun by the Yarmouth County Tourist Association, and, shortly after community members became the founding members of the society as we know it today. In turn, the municipality entrusted the care of the property to the loving hands of the Friends of the Yarmouth Light Society. Around the same time as the transfer the Friends resolve was put to the test as the site was closed by the Canadian Coast Guard after an environmental assessment found lead paint contamination in the soil.

Since then the society has developed the site to include the light, museum, gift shop and picnic area. These features have encouraged the tradition of the light-house property being used as a popular local gathering spot in Yarmouth County. Many unique events draw the community to the site including the Easter Sunrise service, the Dump Day viewing of the lobster fleet leaving Yarmouth Harbour and traditional family picnics at the lighthouse.

This year, the society's latest venture, the Mug-Up Tearoom, will offer light lunches to visitors. The dedication and efforts of the society continue to be both an inspiration and role model to other community groups seeking to take over the management and operation of their local lights.

## BOOK REVIEW: *LIGHTHOUSE LEGACIES*

by Tony Thompson



A glance at the map of Nova Scotia shows that, for most of its history, the Province has been Canada's Ocean workplace. Except for the Annapolis Valley almost all the towns and villages are on the coast. The Province's economy has always depended on the sea. Fishing, coastal and trans-ocean trade, shipbuilding and the navy have been central to its life. All this sea-going activity has depended for its safety on lighthouses and their keepers. In the mid 1950's there were over 350 lights (of various kinds) in Nova Scotia and, over the years, thousands of people have shared in looking after them.

This whole way of life (it was much more than a job) which began in Louisbourg in 1734 has now almost disappeared. What was it like for the 250 years that it lasted? Chris Mills, in this wonderfully evocative book, gives us an astonishingly broad and clear picture. Picture is not quite the right

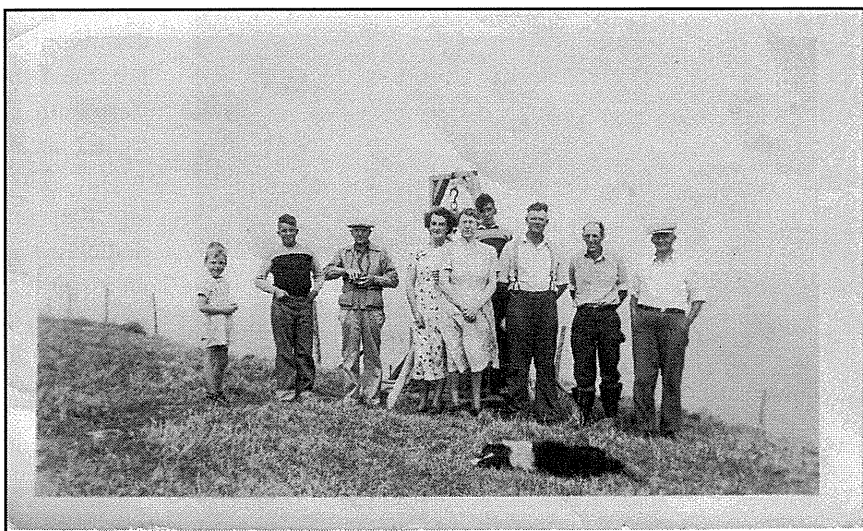
word because it is the sounds of that life that he gives us: the sounds of the ocean and wind, the sounds of machinery, even the sounds of war; of course, the sounds of fog-horns, bells and whistles but, above all, the sounds of voices.

This book is the distillation from more than 60 interviews with members of Nova Scotia's lightkeeping families and the collective memory of those families comes alive in these pages. The stereotypical lightkeeper is a misanthropic bachelor alone with the light in a tower on a rock. This was not at all the case in Nova Scotia. Most lighthouses were staffed by families. Here we read of families with four, five, eleven, even fourteen children growing up in the confines of a small wooden lighthouse. If the buildings were small, these children had, in many cases the freedom of whole islands as playgrounds. Looking back, one says that she couldn't imagine a better childhood. However, the thought of taking a two-month old infant to grow up out on Gannet Rock in the Bay of Fundy boggles the modern mind preoccupied with safety and health care.

Chris Mills, who is sometimes heard conducting interviews on radio, has a gift for asking the right questions to get to the essence of a situation. In these interviews he was helped by his own background as a lightkeeper.

These former lightkeepers and their families responded to his questions with open frankness and great humour. He responds by giving their stories with dignity, showing us their lives while respecting their privacy. He also has the knack of picking out exactly the right sentence to illuminate the situation.

Those situations range over the whole gamut of a lightkeeper's life: the lightkeepers themselves, the nuts and bolts of the machinery, the daily drudgery of making sure the light is lit and turning properly, the special needs and quirks of fog-horns, the extreme vagaries of weather on the Atlantic coast, the joys and trials of raising a family in an



Whitehead Island (Argyle, Yarmouth County) lightkeeper William Spinney (second from right) with family and friends, circa 1950. *Courtesy Ronald Spinney*



isolated place, the role of women in the whole enterprise, the effects of the war, and, of course, no collection of lighthouse tales would be complete without some ghost stories.

This book was designed to show “how people felt about lighthouse life. Why did they do it? What did they enjoy about it? Who hated it and why? How did they cope with isolation, death and routine as they lived out their lives on tiny islands and headlands?” It succeeds magnificently.

The way of life may be gone but here we have a vivid memory of what it was like. The stories are “poignant, sad, funny and evocative”. For anyone with the slightest interest in lighthouses (surely almost everyone) this is a book that must be read. I think, however, that it is a book that would be best read aloud. Perhaps read by the light of a Coleman lantern at a campsite on a calm summer night with the stars overhead and the sound of the ocean nearby or, perhaps, read by the wood stove on a stormy winter’s night.

But don’t just read it! More needs to be done to remember this vital part of our maritime history. Sambro Island should be a National Monument to lightkeeping. More of the buildings should be preserved for future generations. Rip Irwin and Chris Mills have written wonderful books at the opposite ends of the ‘lighthouse spectrum’. Perhaps other NSLPS members can write letters to the local MP, MLA, Councillor or the local paper. These stories and this way of life deserve Canada’s full attention.

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## Ways to Visit NS Lighthouses\*

### McNabs Island Ferry:

Contact Mike Tilley, McNab’s Island Ferry, 465-4563. Mike takes visitors to McNab’s Island and will also take people out to Devil’s Island, tides permitting. Mike works out of Fisherman’s Cove in Eastern Passage.

### Seal Island:

Contact Charles Kenney, at 902-745-2897 or 902-745-2345 for information about Seal Island. Charles may also be able to arrange accommodation.

\* NSLPS is providing this information as a service and has no responsibility or liability for these service providers.

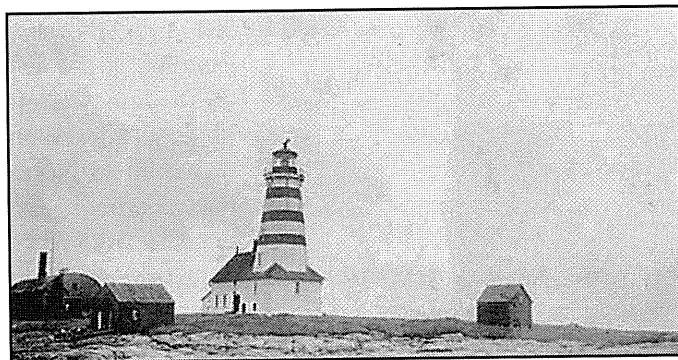
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## Congratulations to the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic!

The NSLPS congratulates the MMOA for being named the best maritime museum in Canada by Reader’s Digest. It is the oldest and largest maritime museum and was opened in 1948. Nearly three million people have visited since it moved to Lower Water street in 1982.

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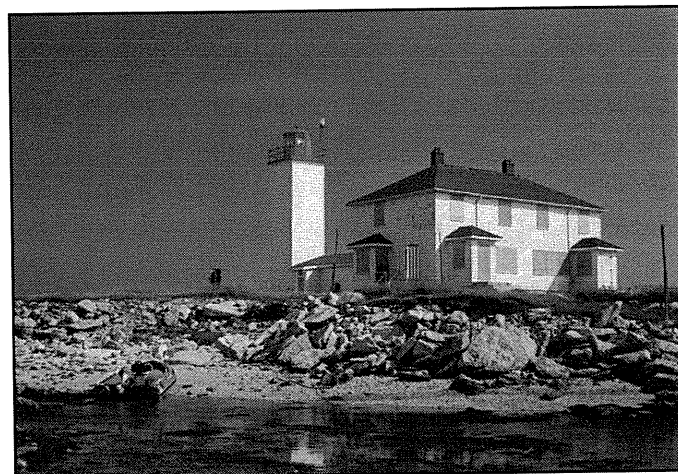
## LOST LIGHTS: Cranberry Island



Cranberry Island is located at the northeast side of the entrance to Canso Harbour. *Clara Dennis/Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management*



The foundation is all that is left of the beautiful Cranberry Island lighthouse. *Chris Mills*

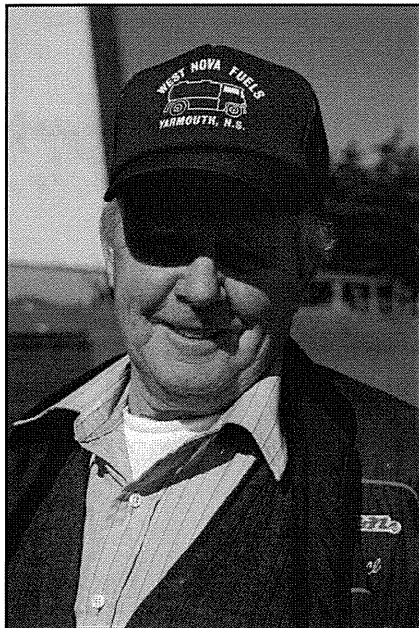


The latest light and abandoned light keepers' house on Cranberry Island. *Chris Mills*

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## FAREWELL

### Jim Nickerson 1928-2006



Jim Nickerson at the Seal Island lighthouse in the fall of 1989.  
*E.H. Rip Irwin*

One of Seal Island's last lightkeepers has died at the age of 78. James (Jim) Murray Nickerson was born in North East Harbour and spent many years on Seal Island as assistant and acting principal keeper. Jim's wife Mary is a descendant of the island's original settlers – the Hichens and Crowell families, who set up a lifesaving station in the 1820s and who became Seal Island's first lightkeepers in 1831. Jim passed

away on June 6th. He is survived by his wife Mary, and by one brother and one sister.

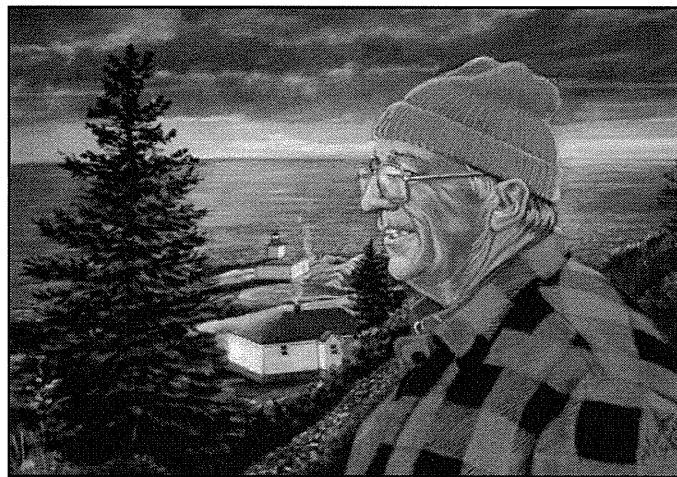
### Mike Forrestall 1934-2006

A staunch supporter of Nova Scotia's lighthouses has died at the age of 73 following a distinguished 40-year career of service to the public. Senator Mike Forrestall died in Dartmouth on June 8th after a battle with lung cancer. At the time of his death, Forrestall was the second longest serving member of the Canadian Parliament. He began his political career in 1965 after being elected to the constituency of Halifax.

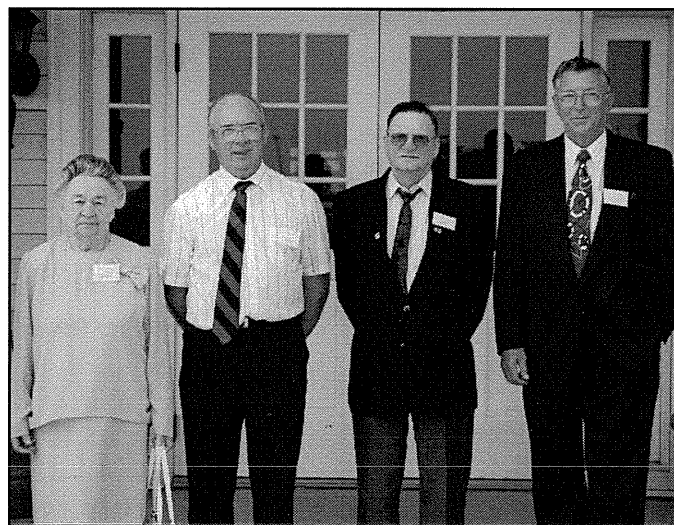
Forrestall was an ardent advocate of maintaining heritage lighthouses and along with Senator Pat Carney, introduced the Lighthouse Protection Act to the senate in April, 2000. After being de-railed to due several changes in government, the bill has not yet passed, but until his death, Senator Forrestall remained committed to the protection of lighthouses across Canada. Our condolences to the Forrestall family.

### Walter Barteaux 1929-2006

Walter Barteaux, who spent part of his childhood at the Cape d'Or lighthouse, passed away on June 6th at the age of 77. His father Vance kept the Cape light during the 1930s. Walter went on to spend most of his career as a marine engineer on the Great Lakes and on several Marine Atlantic ferries.



Walter Barteaux at Cape d'Or. *Painting by Maurice Bernard*



Walter Barteaux in 1995 (at right) with lightkeepers (from left) Maisie Adams, Frances MacIntosh and Jack MacLean. *Chris Mills*



## Melda (Palmer) DeBaie 1925-2006

We are sad to report the passing of Melda Debaie, who grew up at the Owl's Head lighthouse on Nova Scotia's eastern shore. Melda was four months old when her parents John and Etta Palmer took her to live on the edge of a cliff overlooking the Atlantic. By the time she was three or four, Melda "woke up and seen where I was" and more than 7 decades later she was not shy to tell folks that life at the Owls Head light was not all pie and cake.



Melda (Palmer) DeBaie in 2003 with a photo of her old home at Owl's Head. *Chris Mills*

Life in the combined lighthouse/dwelling was isolated, exposed and removed from social activity, and Melda made the move (with her parents' blessings) to Ship Harbour to work in woodworking

factory at the ripe old age of 14.

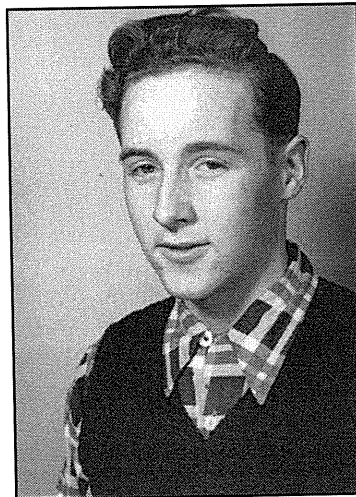
She later married and raised seven children. In later years Melda held no romantic illusions about lighthouse life, and she told Chris Mills in a 2003 interview that the day she left the lighthouse was the "happiest day of me life!" But she admitted to a "little twinge of sorrow," when years later the Coast Guard burned the lighthouse down, and she revealed that, despite the hard times, she had a certain fondness for Owl's Head.

"I can see every rock and every stone and every cliff. Oh, I can see it all! It's engraved in me mind forever."

Melda is survived by her sister Marie Stevens, six children, 10 grandchildren and 6 great-grandchildren.

## Albert Leonard Matthews 1938-2006

My brother Leonard Matthews was born on June 18, 1938 on Carter's Island in Lockeport, on the south shore. Our father Victor Matthews was the lightkeeper there. On the island Leonard's sisters and brother were Alfreda, Victoria and Sherman. What a life!



Leonard's 1953 school photo. *Courtesy Dale Veinot*

When Leonard was born, my father blew the fog horn and quite a few people wanted to know why that noisy thing was blowing! The fog horn was on because Victor was celebrating his son's birth on Carter's Island.

Victor Matthews went to Georges Island in Halifax Harbour in 1946. I was

born in 1945 in Woodside, on the Dartmouth side of the harbour. The Mathews family stayed on Georges Island for 18 years. My brother Leonard had his show-off boat with an outboard motor and his own dog, Rex (who loved him and disliked others!). Leonard also had pigeons that took messages to a man in Halifax. When Leonard was older he was an assistant lighthouse keeper on Georges Island.

Leonard passed away on April 30, 2006 in Richmond, Virginia from a heart attack. His wife Doris Bolt had passed away on Christmas Day in 2005. This upset my brother so much that he could not live by himself.

*Love,*

*Dale (Matthews) Veinot*

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**NSLPS MEMBERSHIP FORM: January 1 - December 31, 2006**

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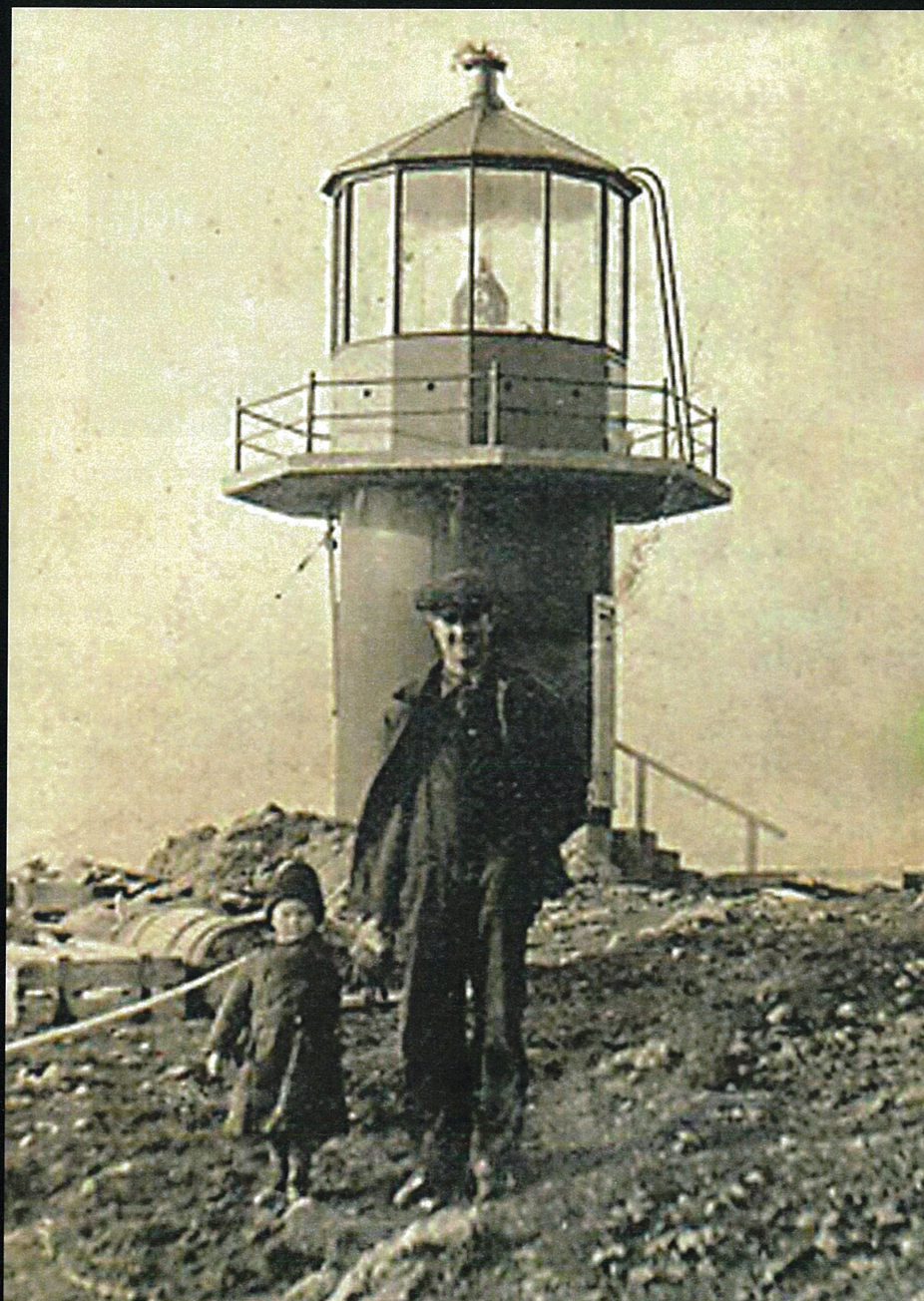
Foreign - \$15.00 U.S. Funds, or equivalent.

Amount enclosed \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Please make cheques payable to the Nova Scotia Lighthouse Preservation Society

Mail to: THE NOVA SCOTIA LIGHTHOUSE PRESERVATION SOCIETY

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St. Paul southwest light with keeper Frank Huntley and his daughter Katherine, in 1920. Note cable for clockwork weight leading from lantern deck at left.  
*Courtesy Claude MacLeod*