

# The Lightkeeper



## In This Issue...

Pg. 3—AGM Update

Pg. 4—Cape Sable part 2

Pg. 10—The Foghorn's Lament—Book Review

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 the 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.

---

## **NSLPS Executive 2020/21**

### **President/Website Content**

Denyse Contrasty

### **Past President**

Joe Flemming

### **Treasurer**

Matthew Burke

### **Membership**

Cathy McKenzie

### **Lightkeeper**

Maggie-Jane Spray

### **Social Media**

Breagh Jenkins

### **Members at Large**

Howard Eaton

Jean Daigle

Golnaz Karimi

## **Welcome New Members**

Jacob Aronoff

Trevor Bain

Susan Lively

Adam MacKay

Marianne Pavlyak

Jim Tirone

### **Cover Photo**

Cape Forchu Lighthouse

Credit to Denyse Contrasty

### **Back Cover Photo**

Georges Island Lighthouse

Credit to Golnaz Karimi

## **Membership News!**

We're excited to announce that community groups supporting their local lighthouses will now have their affiliate fees waived.

Contact [ask.us@nslps.com](mailto:ask.us@nslps.com) for more information.

---

The **Lightkeeper** is published by the  
NOVA SCOTIA LIGHTHOUSE PRESERVATION SOCIETY

c/o Maritime Museum of the Atlantic

1675 Lower Water Street

Halifax, Nova Scotia

B3J 1S3

[askus@nslps.com](mailto:askus@nslps.com)

# 2022 Annual General Meeting

Update from Denyse Contrasty

Given the fact that only 25% of NSLPS members are within commuting distance of Halifax, the Nova Scotia Lighthouse Preservation Society has chosen to host their annual general meeting virtually via Zoom so that all members can attend. The AGM will take place on Wednesday, June 22 at 7:30 p.m. Atlantic Daylight Time; 6:30 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time.

An email invitation and reports from the Board will be sent two weeks prior to the AGM. The business portion will be very short but must be held to satisfy both CRA and NS Registry of Joint Stocks regulations.

This year's talk will be "The Architecture of Nova Scotia Lighthouses", a look at the evolution of construction styles starting with the first lighthouse built at Louisbourg in 1736. Our guests this year will be Heritage Trust NS members who have assisted owners to get Provincial Heritage status for their historical structures in NS heritage in NS.

## THE ARCHITECTURE OF NOVA SCOTIA LIGHTHOUSES



# Cape Sable

By: Betty June Smith

*This is part 2 of a story submitted and authored by Betty June Smith. You can find the first part of the story in our 2021/22 Fall/Winter edition.*

The tower was equally unadorned inside. Steep, steel ships' ladders connected 5 above-ground floors, the 3 lower floors 20' apart, a nerve-jangling climb, with the bare, chill walls echoing and amplifying every gasping breath of the new climber. (Old climbers ran up and down, in daylight or dark; lighting went in late.) Two more floors, 10' apart, then the lantern, of concrete and iron to 9', then 5' panes of heavy glass set in cast-iron and brass sashes and meeting the iron roof.

From a narrow catwalk just inside the lantern windows, keepers cleaned the lens exterior, the window interiors, painted, and put up/took down heavy dark curtains used to protect the prisms from destructive sunlight. Set in one of the lantern's 8 sides was a door leading to the deck, a narrow, slightly sloping ledge ringed by wooden (later steel) railings. During winter, keepers scrambled out to clear snow or frost from the outer surface of the panes.



*Beverley Smith, daughter of author, cleaning the light.*

Inside the lantern, the concrete and iron walls, and the floor, were painted grey or red, as issued by Department of Transport stores. The ceiling and a canopy just above the lens were white, to reflect light back down to the lens and increase the signal's strength.

Outside, the lantern was entirely Marine Red, and the tower white, refreshed every third year with a coat of special cement wash. High winds frequently scrubbed it with salt spray and all forms of precipitation, so by the third year, personnel became so annoyed by the distressed appearance of the tower that even the hard and dangerous job of repainting it was welcomed. For years a bo'sun's chair suspended from the deck was used for this. In 1954 a Keeper B.F. Smith and Assistant Sidney Smith built a safer lift, an open box of sturdy wood, large enough to hold two

painters, brushes with extension handles, and scrapers. The sides were high enough to prevent a man from falling out, but nothing could prevent an uneasy feeling as he reached up to work on the overhanging deck, or far to the side. The box had wheels which helped it move easily up and down the tower sides, but at the top of the light the rig held the box off so it was swinging free.

A tractor gave power to raise the box, much heavier than the chair. A harness of rope encircled the lantern base, and extended over the edge of the deck, ending in a block through which the rope to hoist and lower the box was run; a similar pulley was tied into the ropes of the box. Because the station buildings were close together, the tractor had to drive through fields, away from the southern sides, when they were being painted. The driver could not see how high the box was getting. A signalman stood where he could see the box, and be seen by the driver. A dreadful suspense reigned for everyone as passenger and signalman watched the blocks drawing closer together, and the driver imagined it and feared that somehow he might miss the signal and drive too far. When the top part of each side was scraped and painted, and the first "Lower away," call heard, relief and joy took over. The lower laps, still dangerously high, seemed much safer. It took one man using brushes 10 hours to paint each of the eight sides above the string course; later, two men using rollers could complete two sides a day.

This was during the 1960's when Cape Sable had a staff of three, one man to tend the tractor, two to paint. A hundred years after the first keeper, John Hervey Doane, lit the new beacon. His son Isaac seems to have been his assistant, but not a government employee as until 1959, head keepers were appointed to the Civil Service and responsible for hiring, training, and paying their helpers. When Mr. J.H. Doane died, in 1871, Isaac became keeper until 1902. The list of keepers since then:

Arthur Cunningham 1902 - 1916

Albert Wise 1916-1927

Hugh Nickerson 1927

H. Lloyd Johnson 1927-1931

Benjamin F. Smith 1931-1945; again, 1952-1970

Albert Smith 1945-1952

Sidney Smith 1970-1979

Reginald Smith 1979-1984

Francis Casey 1984-1986

A. Dugandzic 1986

Cape Sable keepers and families lived in Mr. Doane's home, bought by the government as the station dwelling, until



*The Painting Box at the very highest point; circa 1978. At left, UHF radio antenna for communication with Yarmouth Marine Radio. Mid right, rack of 4 AGA electric horns; lower right, outside extensions of fog detection unit.*



1910, when a large new duplex replaced it; even then, several generations of station children went to school in a new part of the former, and its stone foundations are still visible.

Built without wiring or plumbing, the duplex interior was sheathed with, apparently, unseasoned lumber. The walls were much cracked, as were the board floors, and the uninsulated building was drafty and cold. Through the 1940's to '80's, on-going improvements resulted in a comfortable and attractive home. In 1960, a single dwelling for the new third keeper was built, but at several hundred yards north of the rest of the station, and it doesn't appear in scenes of the station herewith.



*Cape Sable Light and Fog Alarm Station, 1952, from the east. Left to right: Fog Alarm building; old steam boilers; Old Light, shortened and used for storage; duplex dwelling; New Light, with radar reflectors on deck railing; barn. ·*

Technological changes came thick and fast. As ships were using radar, so radar reflectors were installed, then replaced by a racon transmitter - a radar response beacon which sends a station-identifying code in response to radar signals from passing ships. A solar switch was installed: could it be trusted to start and stop the light? It couldn't; out it went\*. The hand-wound weights to turn the lens were replaced by electric motors; electric horns, replacing the diaphone, were mounted on the lighthouse, and a fog-detection device nearby sampled air density, triggering start-up as needed.

\*(Lights run at all times now.)

Rooms were built into the lighthouse. First, a fall-out reporting post during the Cold War; DND felt the tapered sides of the tower would cause radiation fallout to slide down and accumulate near its base; in the event of nuclear disaster, a series of posts measuring fallout and reporting it by radio-telephone to HQ (site unknown) would permit our leaders to remain underground until it was safe to emerge ...The post here was never equipped with roentgen meter, nor survival rations provided for the (one) human monitor; it did receive its full complement of shelves, very sturdy and wide.

At last the families had ample storage for beachcombed treasures.

Power reaches the station by underground cable from Cape Sable Island, standby generators also went into the lighthouse, with panels holding the programs to start, stop, and service all equipment, With near perfection reached in the field of aids to navigation, two hazards remained: human error and insurmountable weather conditions.

Three ships have recently grounded on Cape Sable or its ledges: MV MAID OF LA HAVE; freighter RYTHME; bulk carrier EL PASO COLUMBIA.

The small coastal freighter MAID OF LAHAVE was empty the night of February 4, 1957, returning to Canadian waters after engine room refit in the US. She approached Cape Sable from the west at slow speed in thick fog, moderate on-shore winds, and heavy ground swell. Radar showed the station clearly; sonar, plenty of water below. Suddenly, fire broke out in the engine room amidships, spread to the cargo hold and sent billows of smoke from packing material there. Now Captain Jules Jourdain and crew of five were trapped aft, unable to drop anchor; the captain did not want to abandon ship. Charts showed there was a clear way to a rock-free gravel beach at Cape Sable. Captain Jourdain notified Yarmouth Marine Radio station of his intention to run in and put his little ship, a converted WW II landing craft, ashore west of the light. The wind went west, clearing the fog somewhat as the swells began breaking in shallower water; the crew readied the dory lifeboat.

Meanwhile, notified that a burning ship was making for shore, Keeper B.F. Smith called his assistant, Sidney Smith, who set out up the beach at 4 a.m. into a smoky wind. About a mile along he came on the scene of the grounded vessel and the crew, just landing in heavy surf.

Following tradition and Department of Transport rules, the keepers gave all assistance to the wet, cold, frightened wreckees: food, shelter, contact by phone with authorities and families - even something for severe toothache, to which some would prefer stormy seas. Basic though these services sound, their value becomes clear when compared to the treatment of those in a similar wreck which this crew knew about. In that case, local "wreckers" had stolen cargo and gear, terrorized the crew, and killed one crew member.

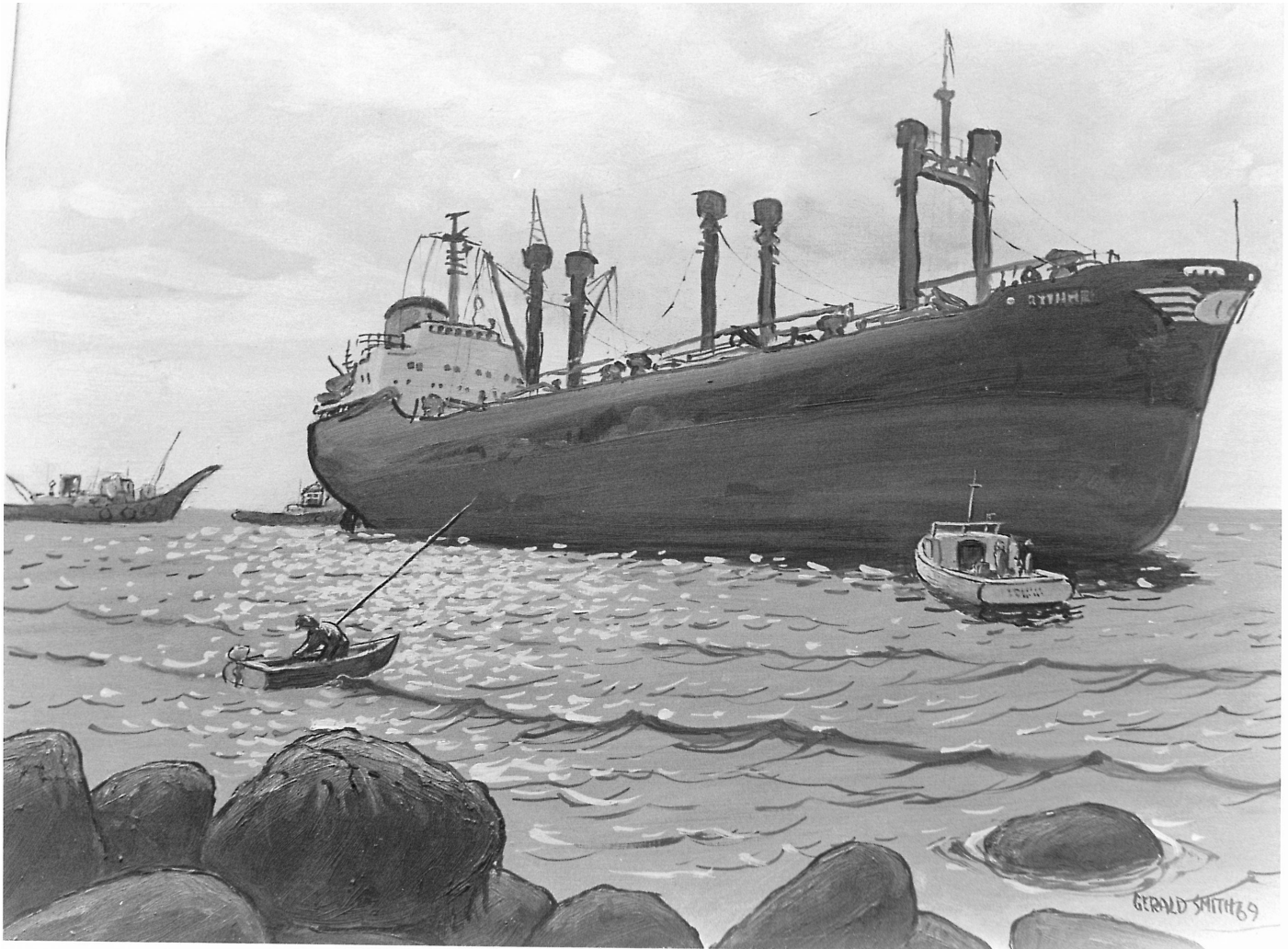
This time the RCMP stood guard as needed.

Official investigation concluded that faults in the new wiring had caused the fire. The MAID was towed off the beach, repaired, re-used as a barge, sprang a leak while crossing over Cape Sable's Horse Race Shoal, and sank, but suffered no loss of life in any of her peace-time adventures:

Moral error, perhaps, put the Greek freighter, RYTHME, ashore on Cape Sable's Black Point in August, 1969. Though spokespersons for owners and captain blamed malfunctions of direction-finding gear, etc., for the "accident", local seamen believe it was a deliberate, unnecessary grounding for suspect reasons, and one helped by functioning radar and depth-sounders, at that. Unbelievably, in extremely dense fog, this 10,000-ton ship worked her way in through "taus marains" without snagging on any, and drove herself on shore at high water so forcefully that at low water she was practically high and dry.

Fog had covered the area for days previous; from time to time fishermen, coming upon her lying to or idling about, had spoken her, offering help - always refused. When the fog cleared, people on the mainland and station saw a great, high hull that appeared to be sitting atop the Point - one of Cape Sable's heights of land, 10' - and everyone who could, visited the site. Seamen predicted the RYHME could never be towed off, or make it back to deep water anyway. However, ocean tugs freed her, tearing out her keel, and after time in drydock, she returned to service.

In December 1981, the JOSHUA T. towed the 63,000-ton bulk fuel carrier EL PASO COLUMBIA eastward near Cape Sable in severe weather. The forces of wind and sea against the high sides of the empty ship broke the towing cable, and drove her shoreward for miles, finally onto Outer Shoal, less than a mile east of the light station. Was the towmaster not familiar with the North Atlantic in winter? His course left no margin of safety for the worst possible scenario; sailing even 5 miles farther out than he did would have given the EL PASO COLUMBIA room to be driven past Cape Sable outside of the ledges, and on to open ocean and deep water.



*THE RYTHME* Painting by Gerald Smith, formerly of Cape Sable, showing the ship at low water, tugs standing by, and men in boats raking Irish Moss.

Surely had his tow been loaded he would not have made that error; in the first news reports of the situation, it was stated that she normally carried liquid natural gas, and it was not known if she was loaded; if she was, and struck hard, it was expected the volatile fuel would ignite and explode, causing total devastation of the coast for a radius of 30 miles, and considerable destruction over a larger area.

Soon radios broadcast that EL PASO COLUMBIA was empty; however, there was a skeleton crew aboard and winds now of 100 mph were building monstrous seas and driving the ship directly towards Cape Sable. Whatever error the captain of the JOSHUA T. may have made earlier, he now displayed the greatest seamanship and, with his crew, the greatest possible personal bravery too, because in those terrible conditions he took the EL PASO's crew off safely.





*EL PASO COLUMBIA* Apparently sitting pretty, actually aground on a reef that is tearing her bottom out as waves force her over it. Later freed, repaired, and no lives lost.

From A.J. Provan, A/District Manager, Canadian Coast Guard,

Saint John, N.B.: "Mr. A. Dugandzic was the last permanent lightkeeper to serve at Cape Sable...Cape Sable Lightstation was permanently de-staffed on May 30, 1986. The station has been remotely monitored from Cape Forchu Light station since that date on a continuous 24-hour basis."

Of all the buildings, only the New Light remains; the station is radically different from the busy, well-kept workplace and home loved by many keepers and families. We are thankful that the Federal Heritage Building Review Office designated this light tower a Classified Building on July 28, 1989, as this provides the highest level of on-going protection.

The Cape Sable Lighthouse has been designated Classified because of its impressive design and its importance in its setting.

The design represents an early and unusually successful adaptation of reinforced concrete technology to the particular functional requirements of lighthouse construction. The 30 metre height was used to advantage to create a structure of elegant proportions and classical balance. The strength of the tower design...provides a strong architectural presence on the open landscape of Cape Sable. The critical location of the lighthouse in one of the busiest inshore fishing grounds in the world and adjacent to some major shipping lanes makes it an important landmark. (7)

THE END

*Credits:*

*General information: Crowell's History of Barrington Township*

*References: (1), (2), (3), (4), (5), (6), (7): Joan Mattie, Federal Heritage Building Review Office Report (5) The Wreckwood Chair, Evelyn Richardson*

*Illustrations: "The Hungarian" - photo courtesy of Kathy Johnson*

# The Foghorn's Lament: The Disappearing Music of the Coast

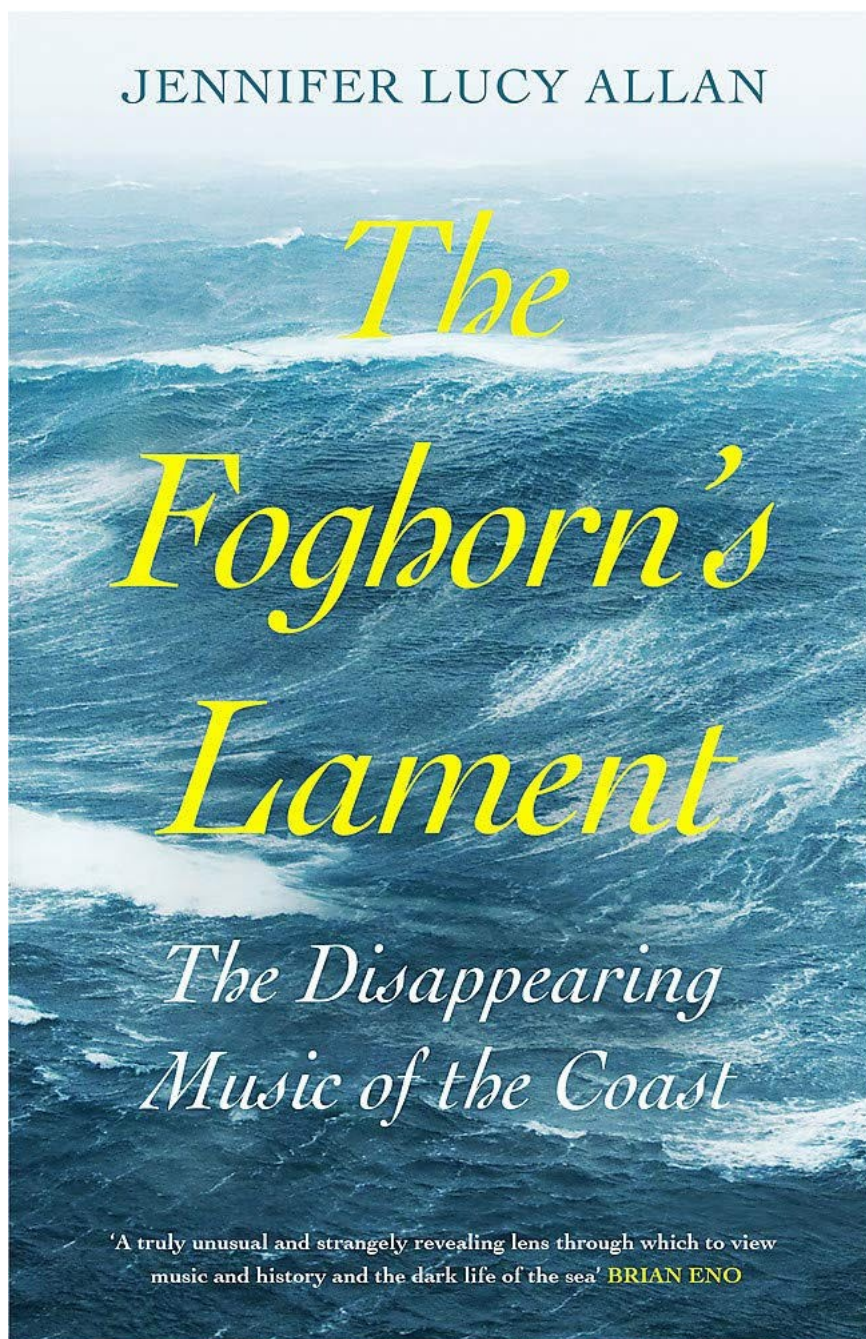
Book review by: Chris Mills

On the granite cliffs at the approaches to Halifax Harbour stands a rusty, wind and salt-battered foghorn. Some form of sound signalling device has boomed, blatted or blasted out a warning from this area since 1891. But, on a snowy February day in 2021, some sort of electrical meltdown occurred, the horn rasped out a few ragged blasts, and went ... silent.

It's the story of many foghorns around the world. Although a few dozen people wrote to request the horn's repair at Chebucto Head, the Canadian Coast Guard decided to let it go, citing expense and obsolescence in favour of modern electronic navigation tools such as GPS and radar.

It is timely that Jennifer Lucy Allen's *The Foghorn's Lament: The Disappearing Music of the Coast*, made its appearance shortly after Chebucto Head lost its voice. Allan is a UK-based journalist and broadcaster with a PhD in ... fog horns. That's right. Foghorns. *Lament* is her heartfelt exploration of these coastal noisemakers; their history, their gut-shaking sounds, their role in coastal soundscapes, their inability to ever be a reliable aid in pin-point navigation, and ultimately, their demise.

Weaving the sound of the foghorn through popular culture, music, and collective memory, Allan takes us on a wide-ranging sonic adventure; it carries her from Shetland to Vancouver, from San Francisco to Saint John, New Brunswick. It's fitting that she begins the main part of her book by exploring the myth of Robert Foulis, the Scottish-born Saint John resident said to be the inventor of the modern-day fog horn (his was a steam whistle). It's a story many Canadians are familiar with, thanks to heritage moment segments on television: Foulis, walking home through the foggy streets of Saint John, hears his daughter playing piano and discovers that the lower notes carry better through the mist, inspiring him to develop a fog signal that the colonial lighthouse authority places on Partridge Island (Saint John Harbour) in 1859.



As Allan writes, it's a "tangle of folklore" and "a narrative that is easy to believe, but impossible to prove, and which imbues the foghorn with its emotional power from its very first cry."

That "emotional power" runs through *Lament* like a dirge or a bagpipe's drone. In 2013, Allan and other onlookers are almost reduced to tears at the massive sound of the Souter Point diaphone foghorn during a "Foghorn Requiem" on the northeast coast of England. It's the sound of the end of an industry... but the foghorn was so much more than just a warning for commercial ships and smaller fishing vessels at sea.

In a way, it's odd that something so complicated and so loud and for so many years, ubiquitous along the coastlines of the world, could also be so unreliable. Mariners and lighthouse authorities never considered foghorns to be as effective as lights, yet, Trinity House and other lighthouse organizations carried out large-scale horn trials at sites such as St. Catherines on the Isle of Wight; arrays of trumpets pointing seaward, vessels offshore taking note of sounds and intensity through capricious fogs. Ashore, neighbours grimaced, covered their ears and complained of noise pollution.

That noise pollution soon became part of the coastal fabric, and today, it's hard to think of a foggy day on any coast without half-expecting the sound of a horn, echoing through the mist. *Lament* is a tribute to this, its main sections arranged, appropriately, in terms normally applied to the striking of a piano key: Attack, Decay, Sustain, Release.

We learn how Allan comes to be interested in fog horns, given her long-standing curiosity as to where music comes from. Through her visits with lighthouse attendants and horn aficionados (and there are many of these!), her exploration of foghorn technology and her ruminations on the place foghorns hold in our collective consciousness, Allan brings life to a sound that has largely disappeared from the world's coastlines.

There are a few exceptions. The foghorns at the base of the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco still warn vessel traffic in thick Bay fogs and they are still very much part of that city's soundscape... "the city's music" (and they're still manually triggered, albeit by a click of a computer mouse these days).

Then, there's actual ... music. I've already mentioned the Foghorn Requiem. There's also the Vancouver-based "Fantasie for Horns", and in Birmingham, something called "Blast," featuring a massive diaphone foghorn and described as "'an aural explosion in celebration of the city's steam-driven past.'" Then, in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century club scene, there's foghorn-inspired dance music, "a particular strain of drum and bass music," so prevalent, that in 2019, "after a few tracks went big on dark, sweaty dance floors that there were entire [online] forum threads suggesting there were, in fact, 'too many foghorns' in the genre."

There are many fewer foghorns on the coast these days, far away from sweaty dance floors. The big boomers are all gone, save a handful occasionally fired-up by doting former keepers and volunteers. Around certain coastal areas of the UK there are high-pitched "hazard" signals, and in eastern Canada, more pleasant-sounding pure-tone electric fog horns (some developed by AGA in Sweden decades ago) still dot the coast, although they are increasingly going mute.

*The Foghorn's Lament* is so much more than just an account of the infrastructure of the coast. It's a blend of folklore, myth, history, raucous sound, music, pop culture and love of foghorns. Allan convincingly links all of these facets. One reviewer describes Allan's as an "esoteric obsession". As a former lightkeeper and long-time coastal dweller who grew up with the sound of foghorns, it seems odd to me to consider foghorns as part of an obscure or specialized realm. But increasingly, they are.

We'll no doubt hear foghorns in films and documentaries for years to come, but the coast will be silent. We can thank Jennifer Lucy Allan for keeping some of those sounds of the coast, and the sounds of our culture, alive.



**Reminder: NEW Membership Year – April 1 2022 to March 31 2023**

NSLPS has started a new membership year and encourages members to renew online by going to the home page on the NSLPS website, [www.nslps.com](http://www.nslps.com) and clicking on RENEW:



If you cannot remember your password from last year or have never paid online, please email [member.info@nslps.com](mailto:member.info@nslps.com) and tell us what password you want. We will reset your password that will be masked upon being saved, meaning we won't be able to see (or remember) it from that time on.

For those who usually renew by post, we have enclosed a membership form for you to use with your newsletter. Alternatively go to the NSLPS website and click on BECOME a MEMBER. At the bottom of the web page, click on the words, "[print this form](#)".

Thanks for your continuing support of Nova Scotia lighthouses!

