

The Nova Scotia Lighthouse Preservation Society

Volume 30 Number 3 Fall/Winter 2023/24

[www.nslps.com](http://www.nslps.com)

# The Lightkeeper

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**NSLPS Executive 2023/2024****President/Website/Social Media**

Denyse Contrasty

**Past President**

Joe Flemming

**Treasurer/Social Media**

Matthew Burke

**Membership**

Cathy McKenzie

**Newsletter**

vacant

**Members at Large**

Howard Eaton

Jean Daigle

Golnaz Karimi

Shauna MacDonald

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.

**Welcome New Members**

Kevin Keys

Thomas Little

John MacLellan

Karin Russell

Richard Weldon

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  
Editor: Theresa RolletMcWilliams

**Cover Photo**

Hurricane Lee Damage, Medway Head

Photo credit: Ray Leger

**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.



Terence Bay Lighthouse Photo credit: Christine Musie

## Hurricane Lee Damage edited by Denyse Contrasty

### From Ray Leger at Medway Head Lighthouse:

You may have heard that on Sat. Sept. 16, Hurricane Lee made landfall near Yarmouth and Brier Island, NS, thankfully only as a Category 1 hurricane packing winds of 50 to 75mph. Being this early in September, the trees still had all their leaves and this caused many to get uprooted damaging the power lines. As many as 280,000 residents were without power at some point and here in Port Medway, it was 3.5 days before power was restored.

...Winds being out of the South caused damage to the South facing siding only [of the Medway Head Light] and the waves (reported being 20-30' high) and the storm surge destroyed the Dalhousie Receiving Antenna as well as relocated our Memorial bench about 30 feet from its original location. Had the storm hit directly from the East, both wind and wave damage would have been much more substantial.

### From the Terence Bay Lighthouse Committee:

[This lighthouse was featured in our Fall-Winter 2022-23 newsletter and had extensive repairs done by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) in 2019-20. A member of the Committee sent a photo of storm damage to the water side of the lighthouse (photo on page 2) to NSLPS who in turn informed DFO the condition of the lighthouse post Lee.]

### From The Friends of Paddy's Head (aka Indian Harbour Lighthouse):

... I am enquiring about repairs that are needed to the lighthouse since Hurricane Lee. ... I need to know the next steps to follow as it would be a shame if the lighthouse was left to deteriorated more over the coming winter, since all the effort was put into repairing it back to its former glory just a few years ago. I was also wondering if we could get permission to wrap a tarp over the exposed bits until the work could be done...if this is possible. [NSLPS contacted DFO to ask about possible repairs before winter.]



Hurricane Lee damage at Paddy's Head      Photo credit: Friends of Paddy's Head

## Cape Breton Travels

By Cathy McKenzie

A great trip to Cape Breton with my sister Lois included delivering Nova Scotia Lighthouse Protection Society maps to the Visitor Information Centres and lighthouses. It was a three day where we saw a lot of Cape Breton and completed the Cabot Trail in one day. This included many beautiful landmarks and three lighthouses in our travels:

- ◇ Mabou Harbour Lighthouse which has a beautiful glass window with a lighthouse in it.
- ◇ St Paul's Island Lighthouse where we visited the top of the lighthouse and spotted the museum next door.
- ◇ Neil's Harbour Lighthouse that now operates as an ice cream stand but wasn't open that day.

However, going there was a great reason to drive along the Cape Breton Highlands with spectacular views.

We love this great province of Nova Scotia with all the wonderful lighthouses that once protected our ancestors for many years.

[This year, sixty-five hundred (6,500) copies were distributed to Visitor Information Centres and lighthouse community groups around the province. By mid-August, NSLPS had run out of maps and still received requests for more into September. Thanks to Howard, Denyse, Cathy and her family who distributed these maps around Nova Scotia for the 2023 Tourist season. All had a fantastic time visiting NS lighthouses and meeting their community owners/operators!]



St. Paul's Island Lighthouse 4th order lens

Photo credit: Cathy McKenzie

## Margaretsville Lighthouse Sign Update

By Denyse Contrasty

Two years ago, the Friends of the Margaretsville Lighthouse agreed to partner with NSLPS in a pilot project to provide interpretative signage for community groups without any for their lighthouse. Both parties researched content and photos to develop a graphic layout that would be used as a template for future signage sponsored by NSLPS. This past August, the final draft was sent to a Maritime manufacturer who offered a 10-year guarantee against delamination and fading plus a wheelchair friendly podium. In November, the crate with sign and podium was delivered to the Friends who plan to re-



Early visitor to Margaretsville sign.

Photo credit: Denyse Contrasty

-landscape the grounds in front of the Margaretsville Lighthouse next spring and install the sign then.

NSLPS paid about \$4000 to produce this sign and were grateful for an unexpected \$1000 grant from Fedex last summer to assist us in this project. Our Board believes this is money well spent as it will allow visitors to read about the Margaretsville Lighthouse when it is not open to the public. Also, the QR codes at the bottom of the sign can be scanned to link to the NSLPS website and to the Facebook page maintained by the Friends for further information.

For a closeup photo of the Margaretsville Lighthouse sign, please go [www.nslps.com](http://www.nslps.com) and look under "Of Interest" on our home page.

### **NOTICE: Membership Changes regarding "Renewal" and "Foreign members":**

*NSLPS membership runs from April 1 of the current year to March 31 of the following year.*

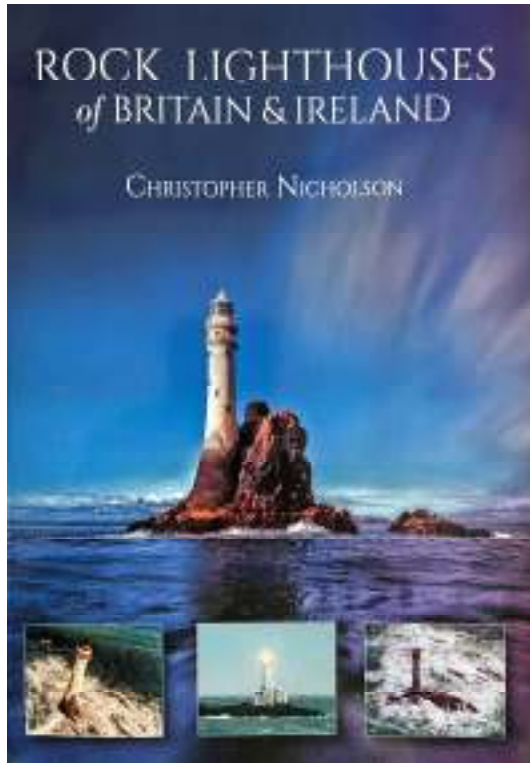
**Starting April 1 2024:** If you have not renewed by November 1 of the current membership period, you will receive just a reminder to renew your membership when the Fall-Winter edition of the newsletter is mailed. If you decide to renew after the Fall-Winter newsletter has been mailed, we will send you a copy once we have received your payment.

**Starting April 1 2024:** Foreign members who have either a Single or Family membership, will start to receive their newsletters as a PDF file via email. Those Foreign members with a Sustaining or Patron membership, will continue to receive a physical copy by mail.

These changes are necessary due to the increase in postage costs and the low number of membership renewals that NSLPS receives after November 1.

**Book Review by Chris Mills:****Rock Lighthouses of Britain and Ireland.****Christopher Nicholson. Whittles Publishing Ltd., Dunbeath. 2023.****304 pp. Photos, illustrations, diagrams, map.**

The sight of a solitary beacon, rising improbably from a sea-washed rock; legendary stories of herculean efforts to build these sea-battered structures; the keepers who tended their lights, living in claustrophobic, shuddering towers. The whole idea of a structure built to protect human life amidst the chaos of the open sea is irresistible, and it is thanks to books such as *Rock Lighthouses of Britain and Ireland* that we can truly begin to understand the colossal efforts that went into building, staffing and maintaining these lifesaving outposts.



*Rock Lighthouses of Britain and Ireland* is the fourth version of Christopher Nicholson's *Rock Lighthouses of Britain*. It first appeared in 1983, published by Patrick Stephens in Cambridge. In it, Nicholson explored the histories and significance of 12 offshore towers in England, Scotland, Wales, and the Isle of Man, complemented by a generous selection of black and white photos and archival images. The book quickly became a classic, revealing the challenging construction of lights in remote sites, and the lives of the keepers who lived and worked within cramped towers.

A revised edition published by Whittles, subtitled "*The End of An Era?*" came out in 1995. In 2006 Whittles released an updated edition. If that edition was the penultimate, then *this year's* is undeniably the *ultimate* work on Rock Lighthouses, this time around including the lighthouses of Ireland.

In the beginning, it was rudimentary technology that provided a guiding light for mariners; perhaps a smokey bonfire on a cliff above a raging sea. Over the centuries, evolution: coal-fire, whale-oil, fish and vegetable oil-fired lights, kerosene (paraffin), and then the marvels of the electric light bulb, magnified and projected by intricate prisms and lenses. Today, the 'digital' flashes of compact LEDs reach into the darkness to warn and to guide mariners.

Nicholson explores the need for and the construction of 19 remote towers, from the most famous, on Eddystone in the English Channel, to the last traditional rock tower on Fastnet, off the south coast of Ireland. There's Scotland's Bell Rock, the oldest operating rock light in the world, designed in part and built by the famous Stevenson family of lighthouse engineers. Off the coast of Wales, the Smalls, where bickering lightkeepers shared a tiny room atop wave-battered wooden stilts. On the Skelligs, in Ireland, "the lighthouse at the end of the road", keepers lived below ragged spires of sandstone and the remains of a sixth century monastery.

Then, there is the "noblest of all extant deep sea lights" 12 miles west of Tiree on the west coast of Scotland. Lighthouse engineer Alan Stevenson chose the site out of dozens of rocks in the area for the graceful Skerryvore lighthouse, basing his tapered design on "water pressure measurements in excess of 6,000 pounds per square foot"!

Finally, there is Rockall, off -and-on home to a tiny light atop one of the most exposed and remote chunks of misery in the world, 250 miles west of the Outer Hebrides. It's never been home to a traditional tower or

(continued on page 7)

(continued from page 6)

keepers, yet it somehow symbolizes the proprietary, but altruistic need for a guiding light.

Nicholson covers a lot of ground in this book. His account of Grace Darling and her part in the rescue of shipwrecked mariners at the Longstone lighthouse in Northumberland is traditionally a well-known one, but no account of famous lighthouses would be complete without it.

Then, there are lesser known stories, such as the saga of “The Bull and the Calf”. The lighthouse authority favoured towering Bull Rock, off Dursey Island in south west Ireland. However, it was the much smaller nearby Calf Rock which became home to a cast-iron lighthouse in 1866. The light and its keepers were regularly battered by massive seas, until a “seismic storm” hit the southwest coast of Ireland in November of 1881, snapping the tower in half. Miraculously, none of the six people on the rock were injured. After 12 days spent covering in crude concrete buildings built into the rock, the men were rescued by local fishermen who rowed to Calf Rock. The principal keeper wrote a “powerful” account of the event, which made it into an Australian newspaper; all 1800 words in a single paragraph! By 1888 engineers and workers had completed a brand new lighthouse on nearby Bull Rock, some 91 metres (300’) above the sea’s grasp.

Fittingly, Nicholson concludes his epic work with a chapter on the “new era” for rock lighthouses. It begins with a dramatic drone shot of Trinity House (Lighthouse Authority for England, Wales, Channel Islands and Gibraltar) technicians standing on the helipad atop the Les Hanois light in the Channel Islands. Technician and photographer Scott Tacchi has gone so far as to capture their transportation – a helicopter, of course – hovering perfectly in the middle above the six men standing on the pad. It’s a stunning image and symbolic of the changes that have come to rock lights with automation and removal of the keepers by the mid-1990s.

The “golden age” of lighthouse construction in Britain lasted roughly a century, from 1790 to 1890. It was an era characterized by a great determination to make the seas around the UK and Ireland safer for mariners, no matter how challenging it was to build offshore lighthouses. Rock lights are still being built, but today, they are severely functional, automated beacons of concrete or fibreglass, bolted to hard rock and run off solar power. The remaining traditional towers are slowly being converted to solar operation, with regular maintenance trips by technicians to ensure all systems are operating correctly.

*Rock Lighthouses of Britain and Ireland* is impeccably researched and lavishly illustrated with stunning photos, archival images, hand-painted plans and detailed drawings. Photographs taken by roving lighthouse technicians add another dimension to our understanding of these structures, offering a rare glimpse into the interiors of stone towers (imagine working and living with two other keepers in a handful of tiny vaults where three strides could get you to the opposite side of a room?), to the work of today’s ‘keepers’. It’s the closest many of us will come to experiencing the rugged grandeur of these graceful towers, each edifice stemming from humanity’s “innate sense of self-preservation.”

No book review should be complete without constructive criticism, such as needed improvements to layout, content, editing, and so on, but, it is extremely difficult to find fault with this edition, on any level. It’s a book you can dip into, with an abundance of beautiful colour photos and archival drawings, but really, *Rock Lighthouse of Britain and Ireland* deserves a full read.

It truly is the ultimate work on Rock lighthouses.

Chris Mills  
The Lightkeeper/Nova Scotia Lighthouse Preservation Society

## US Lighthouse Society Visit August 12-29 2023

By Denyse Contrasty

On Saturday evening, August 12, NSLPS President, Denyse Contrasty, and Membership Officer, Cathy McKenzie, joined eighteen members of the US Lighthouse Society (USLHS) in their Welcome dinner at the Barrington Delta in Halifax. This Society had last visited Nova Scotia (NS) lighthouses in 2007 and were surprised by the number of lighthouses now owned and/or operated by community groups. Denyse started with a condensed version of this year's AGM talk "NSLPS and NS lighthouses today", followed by "The Architecture of NS Lighthouses". The latter was a big hit and several visitors asked if a copy could be posted to the USLHS website. The next morning, Denyse and Cathy accompanied them on their boat tour of the Halifax Harbour Lighthouses: Georges Island, Maugher Beach, Chebucto Head and Devils Island. It was a warm but very foggy three-hour ride, demonstrating the need for these aids to navigation that were erected in the 1800s.



USLHS at Medway Head Lighthouse 2023

Photo credit: USLHS