The popular magazine of ships and the sea

Ships & Sailing

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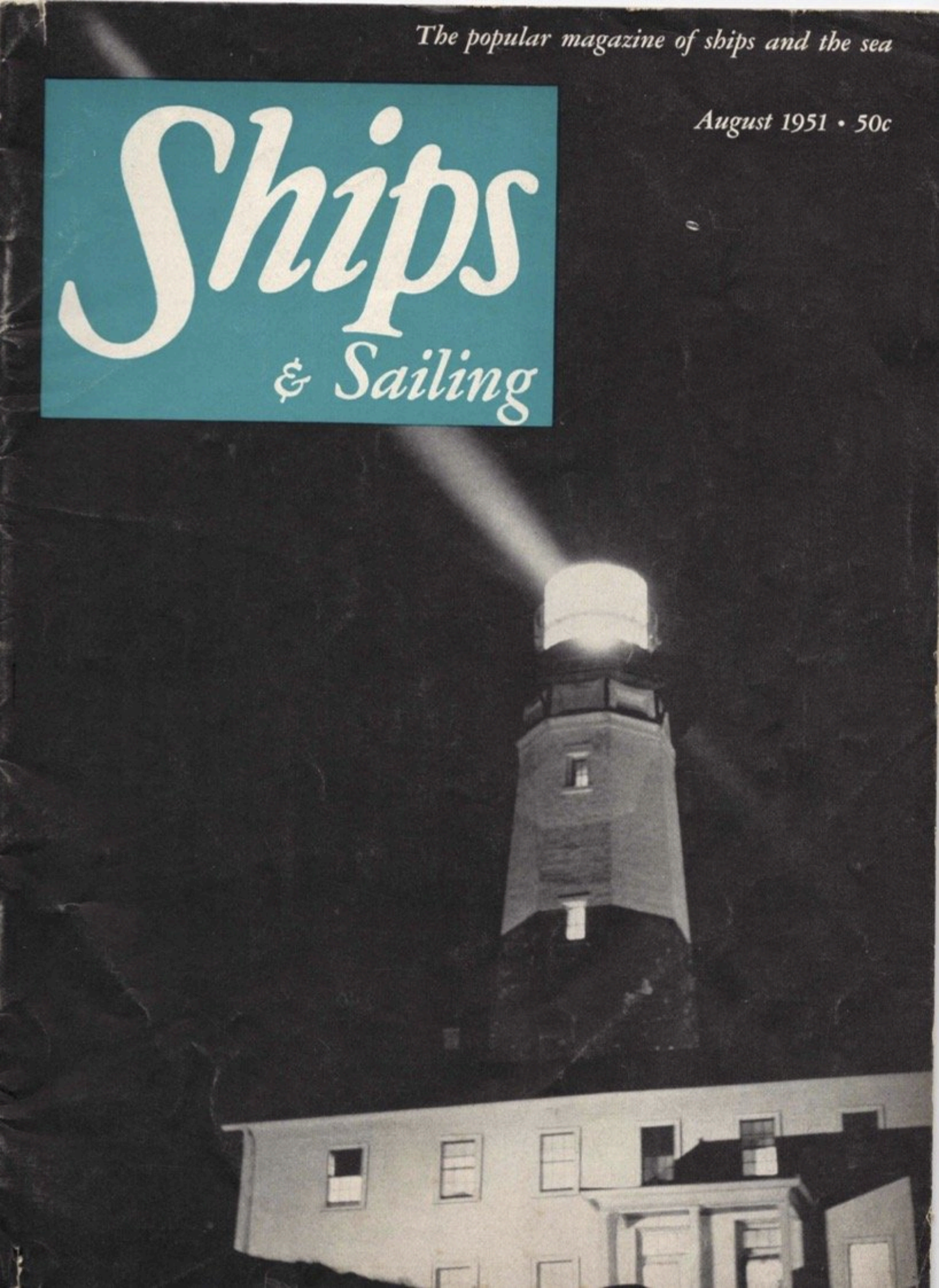


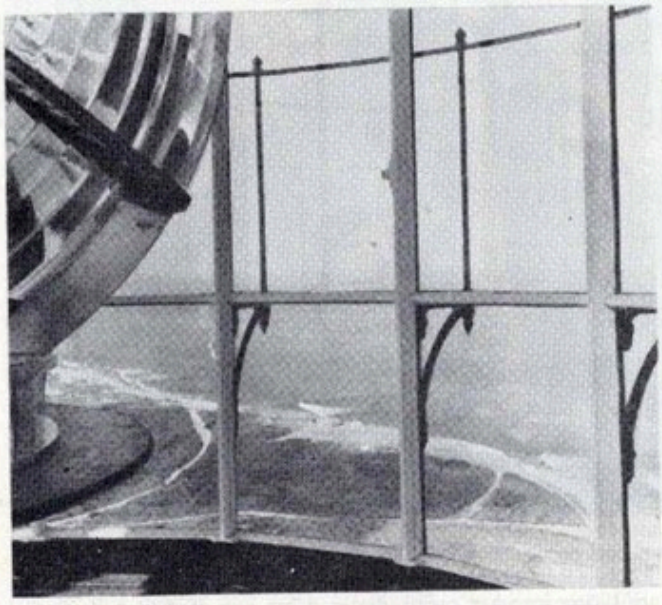
For ships in the night



THE REVOLVING beacon 168½ feet atop the lighthouse contains a 1000-watt electric bulb. It's made of molded glass shaped like a compressed sphere.

By daylight or dark, in fog or clear weather, the Montauk Point lighthouse warns ships of the shoals and land at the tip of Long Island's 150-mile span

PHOTOS BY JOHN DOMINIS
From Three Lions



THE 200,000-candlepower light throws a beam 19 miles out to sea to warn ships of the treacherous Shagwong Reef. Here the light looks seaward over the easternmost tip of Long Island.

ALONG the winding coasts of the United States, Alaska, Hawaii, and the Virgin Islands, the Coast Guard maintains some 30,000 lights that mark by night the location of every sand bar, rock, headland, wreck, and other hazard to navigation. Five hundred of these warning beacons consist of fully manned lighthouses; other lighthouses on inaccessible rocks or lonely reefs are radio-operated by ANRAC (*A*ids to *N*avigation *R*adio *C*ontrolled). Thirty-seven lightships stand guard over offshore shoals and rocks, or mark harbor approaches, while other aids include radio and radar beacons and similar electronic position finders for ships at sea.

Not only do the various lights on buoy, lighthouse, or lightship warn of danger in their vicinity but they also help the mariner to find his position by night. Each light has its own timed pattern of flashes and dark intervals between, and because no two lights in the same area have like characteristics, the navigator can readily identify which light he has in sight. By crossing its bearing with that of another or by doubling a lone light's angle upon his bow as he approaches it, he can easily find his own position.

Seamen who pass the same lights fairly regularly find



IS THAT a square flag and ball she's showing? Or the flags NC? Whenever anything resembling gunfire or a continuously sounding fog signal is heard, Chief Jones, in charge of the lighthouse, checks nearby ships for other signals of distress.

each light takes on its own personality — the interrupted red, green, or white flash that marks a sunken vessel's grave; the staccato wink of the quick flashers, ever reminding them of sharp channel turns or a narrow entrance ahead. Then there are the slower flashing buoys that mark the coasts and the group flashers on middle grounds or at the channel's edge. But it is the great, sweeping beam of the lighthouse that generally greets the sailor home from the sea and marks the landfall after a long ocean passage from far-away lands.

So it is no small wonder an aura of romance surrounds the lighthouse. Every year, the Coast Guard receives hundreds of applications from people anxious to become a lighthouse keeper, but now the job is carried out by men of the Coast Guard. Let's take a trip out to the famous Montauk Point (Long Island) lighthouse and see what the job is really like.

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For ships in the night

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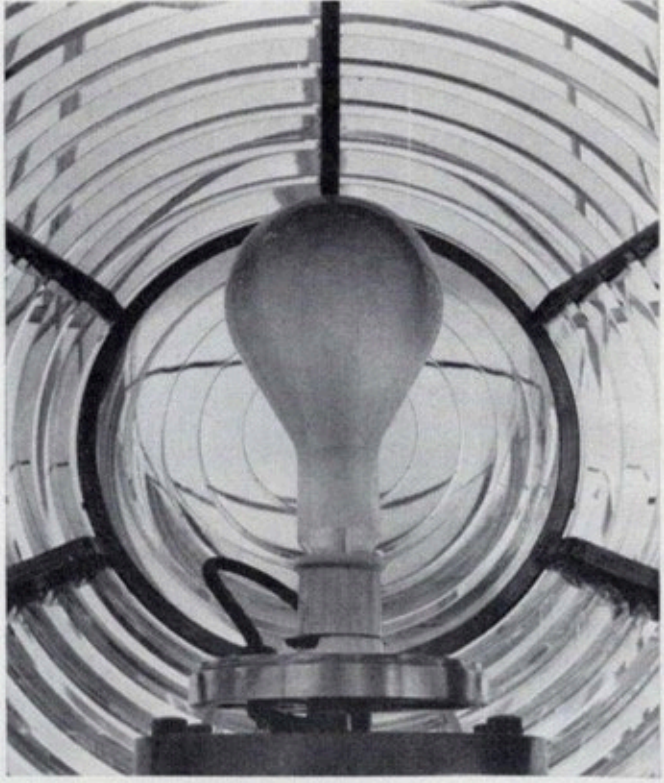
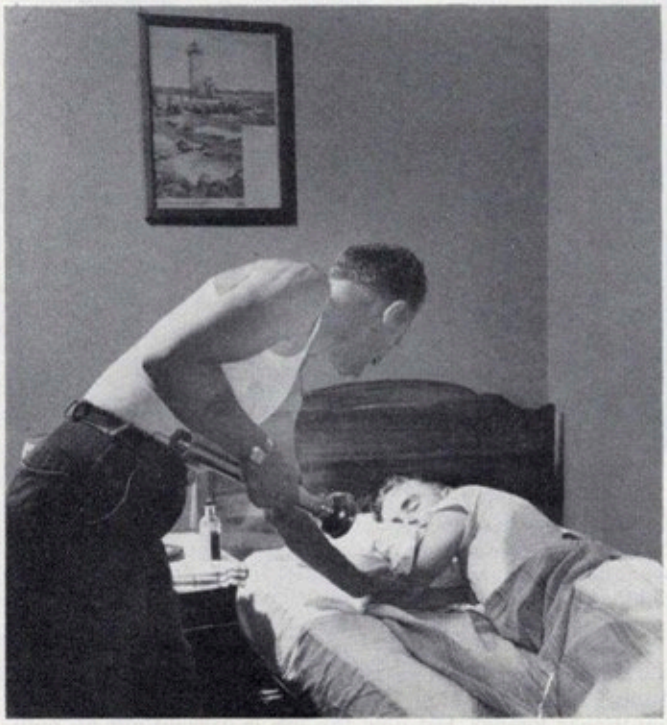
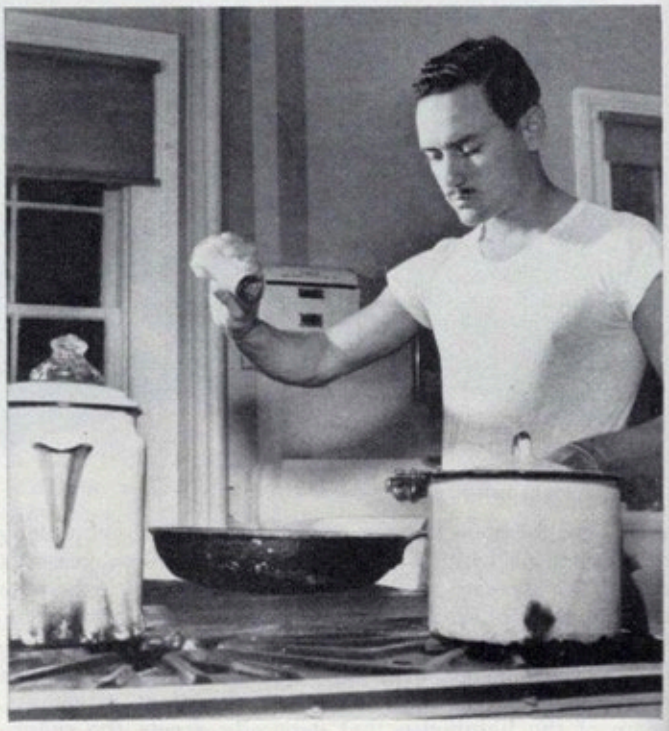


ABOVE: Behind the powerful bulb is a small center section of the beacon showing the lens-like terracings around the surface of the diffuser. Bulbs often burn out, are quickly replaced.

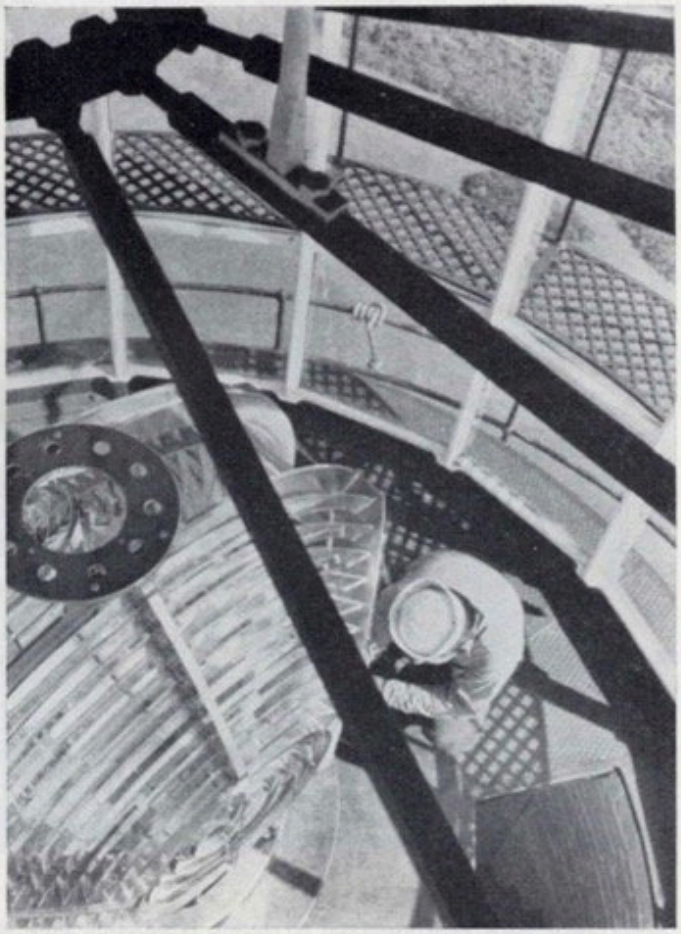
LEFT: For relaxation, the Chief takes a busman's holiday and joins his daughter for a picnic on the beach. Beyond the Point, the Intracoastal Waterway runs down Block Island Sound.



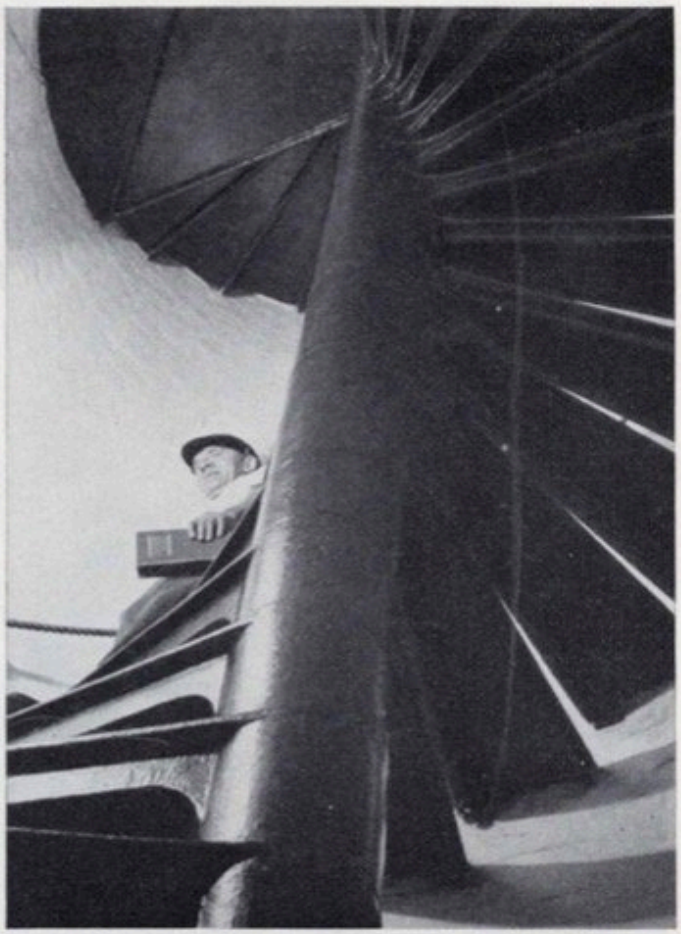
TWENTY minutes to 12! One of the lighthouse keeper's routine duties is to wake the next man for his four-hour vigil.



KEEPING a lighthouse means keeping house, too. The men keep the big 12-cup coffee pot at a steady simmer day and night.



ONCE during each four hours of darkness, the men must wind the hundred-pound weights that power the clockwork mechanism to turn the beacon. Weights descend the lighthouse's side.

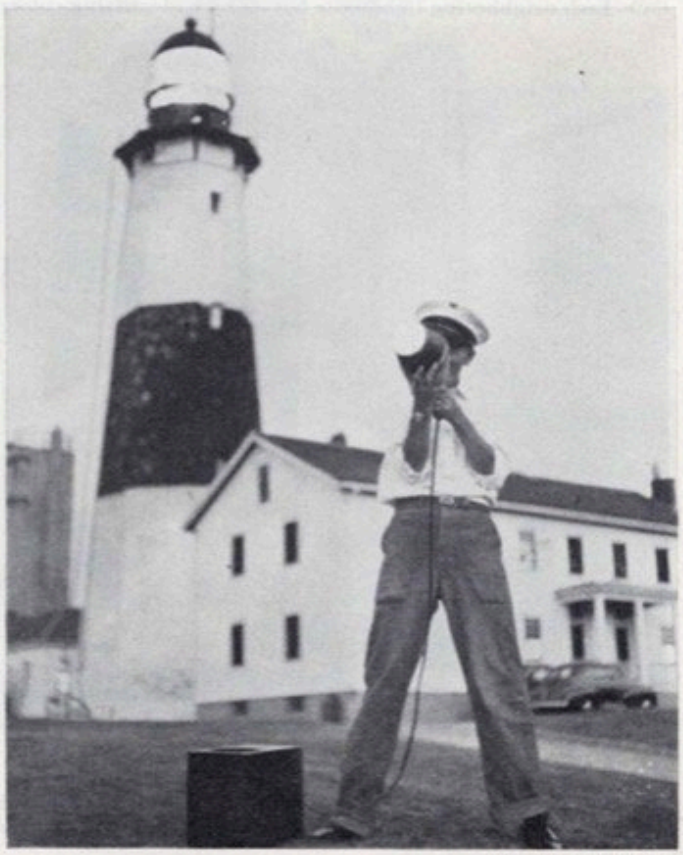


A SPIRAL staircase winds up inside the lighthouse to where the beacon throws its white warning flash once every 10 seconds. The original lighthouse was built on this site in 1797.



ABOVE: Over the radiobeacon transmitters in the rack, a receiver is manned 24 hours a day to bring in weather bulletins.

RIGHT: "What ship? Where from, where bound?" A battery-operated blinker is used to contact ships passing the Point.



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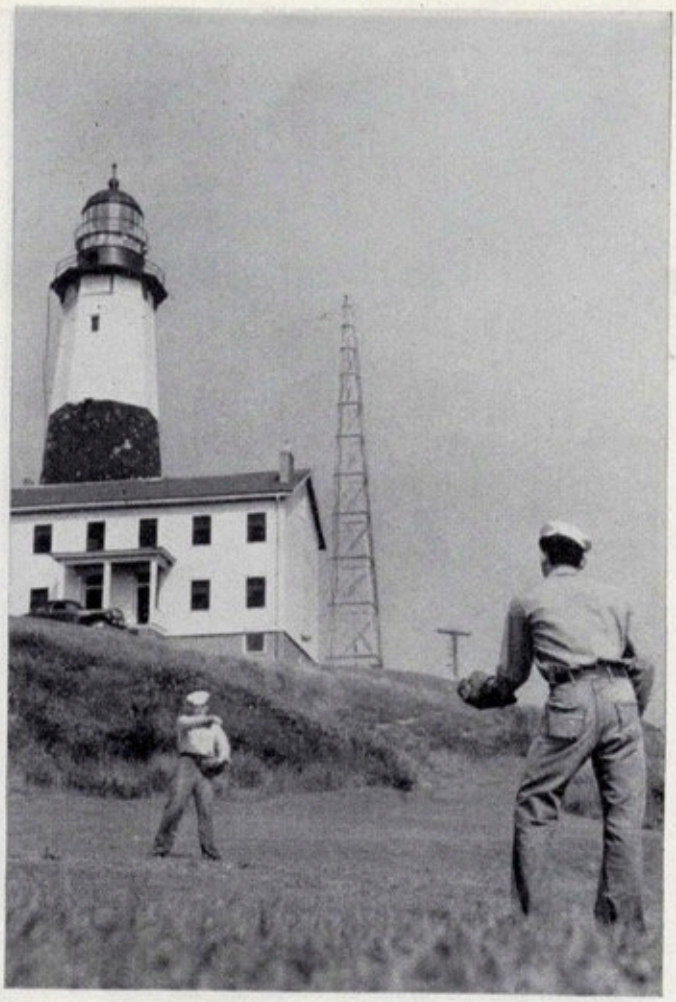


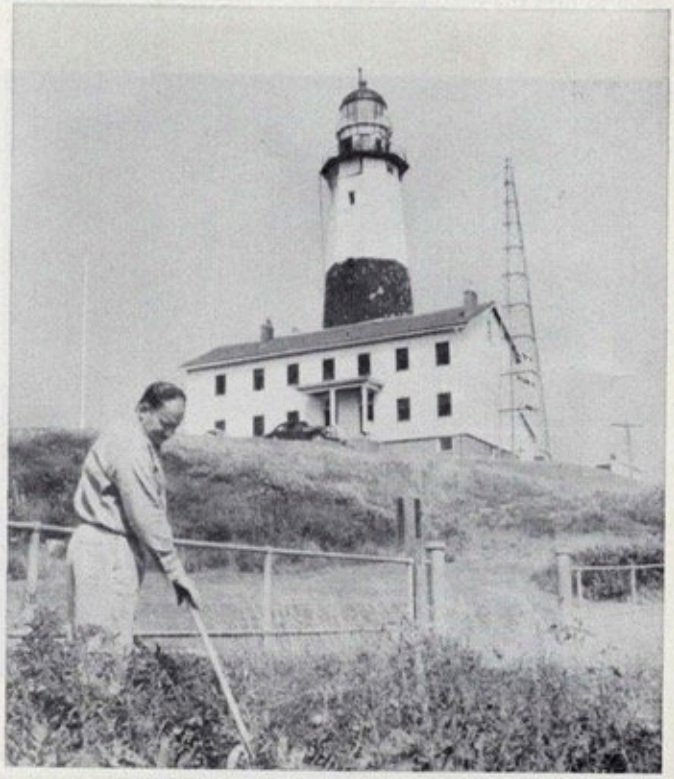
A GAME of catch during the "watch below." The black band around the lighthouse makes its identification easier during daytime. Each neighboring lighthouse has its own identifying colors.



ANOTHER popular leisure-time recreation is shooting pool in the billiards room set up at the lighthouse by the Coast Guard. As with sailors generally, most of the men are keen readers.



BETWEEN watches at the light, men play pinochle. Through the Coast Guard, the Lighthouse Service comes under the Treasury.



CHIEF JONES' hobby is his garden. In the sandy soil at the Point, he manages to raise a variety of fresh vegetables.