The rebuilding of a landmark — new Great Poi

by Hobson Woodward

A tattered poster on the wall of a construction site trailer on Great Point proclaims a somber message: 'Great Point Light: 1818-1984', but a shadow falling across the sign, an image created by a new tower, belies that message. It hints that Great Point Light will shine again.

"The 190 millimeter light will flash once every five seconds and be visible for fourteen nautical miles," says Greg Creedon of the U.S. Coast Guard. "We have a responsibility to the seafarers of Nantucket Sound to maintain a light at Great Point."

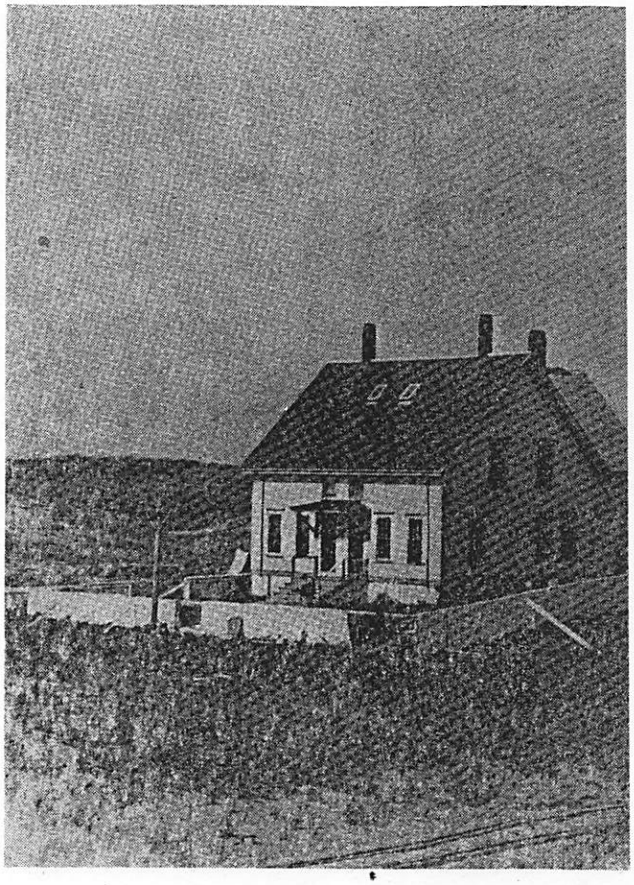
During the night of March 29, 1984, a raging sea claimed the 166-year-old Great Point Lighthouse. This autumn, a solar-powered replica of the beacon will illuminate Great Point Rip once more.

The original structure cost $14,885.12 in 1818. The lighthouse nearing completion on Great Point today will cost U.S. taxpayers nearly 100 times as much with a price tag approaching $1,140,000.

U.S. Senator Edward Kennedy was instrumental in appropriating federal funds for the project and has visited the site twice as construction has progressed. A spokesperson for Kennedy said Monday that the Senator plans to visit Great Point after the project is finished, sometime around September 1.

"Senator Kennedy will join the Coast Guard in planning an opening ceremony at the lighthouse," the spokesperson said. "No date has been set, but we expect now that it will be in late September."

The new fully automated, self-sufficient lighthouse will have a core of reinforced concrete that is five feet thick at its deepest point. It will carry a rubble veneer constructed partly of stone recycled from the old structure. Its 9,283 candle-power beam will be run by 12 volt batteries drawing energy from eight 35-watt solar panels placed in a false window near the peak of the tower.



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Inquirer and Mirror archival photograph

Great Point Lighthouse is seen here as it appeared in the 1920's. The Lighthouse Keeper's dwelling, destroyed by fire on February 16, 1968, is visible adjacent to the beacon. The lighthouse tower itself, exposed to the sea as the point eroded around it for 166 years, finally desintegrated during a storm that occurred during the early morning hours of March 29, 1984.

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done to insure that this building will stay in place. This is a remote location and there are strong environmental forces at work out here. It's a sophisticated structure."

The beacon is built on pilings sunk 35 feet into the ground and covered with a thick concrete base. The 71 foot structure was built in four sections of poured concrete.

"The building is designed to be able to withstand 130 m.p.h. winds and 15 foot breaking waves," Bentley said. "The structure is virtually vandal proof."

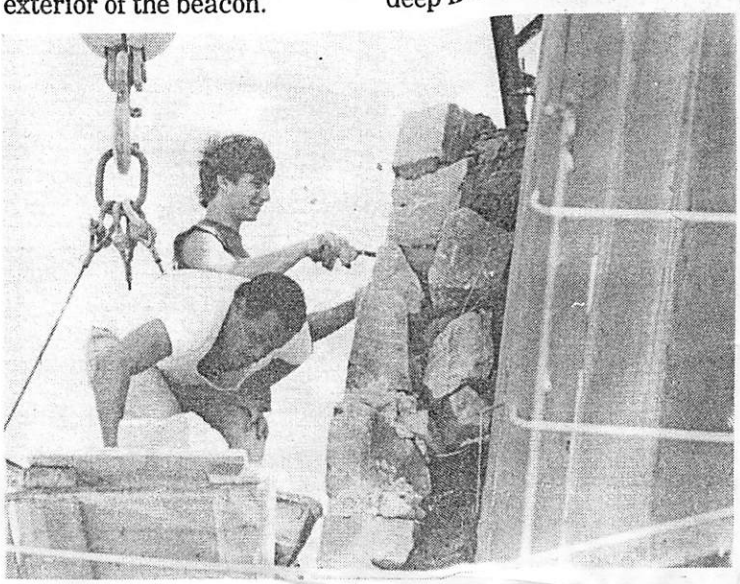
A two-inch thick steel paneled door will guard the entrance to the house and its five granite-silled windows will be of thick block glass.

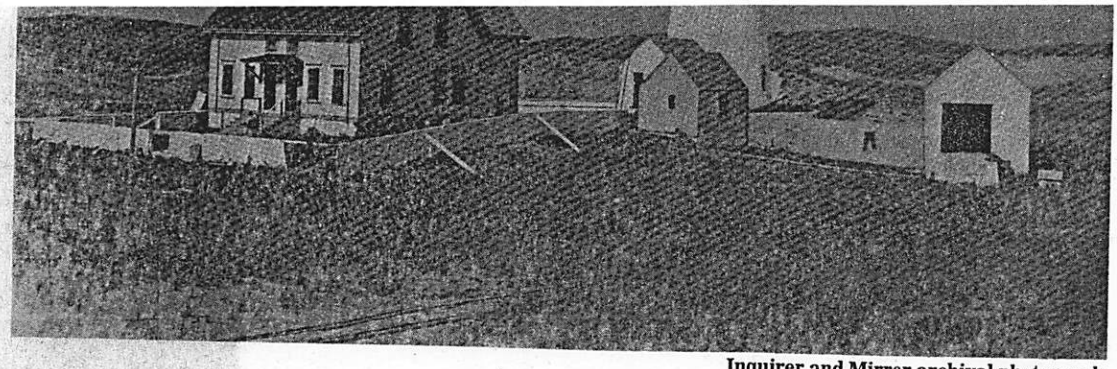
The interior will feature a cast aluminum spiral stair that will be a replica of Ira Winn's famous nineteenth century cast iron staircase.

"We chose to use materials like aluminum and stainless

Old photographs were consulted to determine how to make the new building historically accurate. The prime contractor for the project is Hydro-Dredge Corporation of New Bedford and masons from Rosado and Sons of Boston are laying the stone exterior of the beacon.

room' where the light's bank of batteries will be located. Above this the plastic and aluminum 'lantern house' will hold the flashing red sector light. The peak will be topped with a lightning rod connecting all the metal in the structure to a copper ground wire imbedded deep in its concrete base.





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"It's a substantial structure," Dave Bentley of Epple and Associates said Friday. The Nantucket engineering firm is overseeing work on the new lighthouse. "All that is humanly possible has been done to insure that this building will stay in place. This is a remote location and there are strong environmental forces at work out here. It's a sophisticated structure."

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"We chose to use materials like aluminum and stainless steel that are resistant to corrosion," Bentley said. "We tried to go first class all the way."

A visitor to Great Point will find the lighthouse some distance to the west of the original location. Great Point eroded around the original light for a century and a half and was eventually perched on the beach at the mercy of the ocean. The new structure should never fall victim to these forces.

"If the dunes ever migrate out from under this lighthouse it can remain standing off the point," Bentley said. "We would simply pile rock around the [45 foot diameter] base to make a small artificial island."

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Photo by Fred Clow

Workers lay a rubble exterior over the reinforced core of the lighthouse tower. Stone from the original tower were utilized in this work. Some of the recycled stone still carrys the white paint of the felled tower.

All the tools and materials for the project, including loaded cement trucks and a 100 foot Link-Belt crane, were transported to Great Point by barge. The project, begun in September, 1985, has so far been safe with no serious injuries to workmen on the site.

"Weather is the only problem we've had to deal with on a regular basis," Bentley said.

A brick covered pavilion with concrete benches will lead the visitor through the door of the lighthouse to an 'entry room' at the base of the spiral stair. Sixty-... room' where the light's bank of batteries will be located. Above this the plastic and aluminum 'lantern house' will hold the flashing red sector light. The peak will be topped with a lightning rod connecting all the metal in the structure to a copper ground wire imbedded deep in its concrete base.

During a recent visit 'Clerk of the Works' Dave Bentley surveyed the tower and watched as its concrete core slowly disappeared under a layer of rubble flecked with the white paint of the old building.

"This is the first traditional lighthouse I've ever worked on," he said. "There are not too many being built these days. This one is solid. It'll sit right where it is for a long, long time."