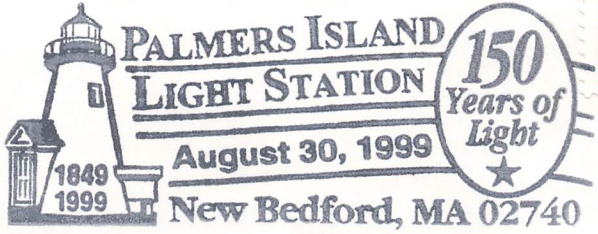
CITY OF NEW BEDFORD, MASS. ★ MAYOR FREDERICK M. KALISZ, JR.

SPECIAL MUNICIPAL ISSUE

PALMERS ISLAND LIGHTHOUSE









Celebrating 150 Years of Light



PALMERS ISLAND LIGHT 41°37' 37" N 70°54' 35" W

PORT OF NEW BEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS

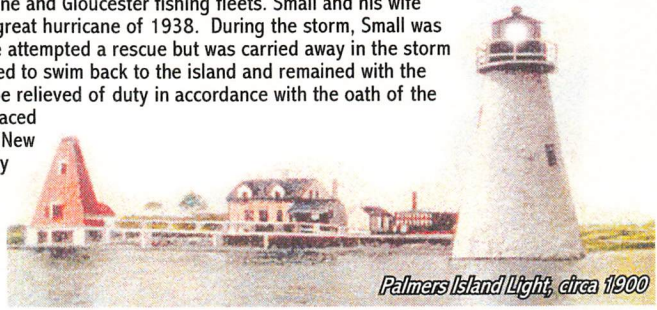
№ 0172

of FIVE-HUNDRED

PALMERS ISLAND LIGHT

Palmers Island Lighthouse served as the gateway to New Bedford's inner harbor before the Hurricane Barrier was completed in 1966. One of the oldest sites in the city, the six-acre island was named for William Palmer, one of the 36 original settlers of Dartmouth in 1652. Palmer was killed in a skirmish with hostile natives. Perhaps for this reason the island served as a prison camp during King Philip's War (1675-76). Captives included the wife and son of the great chief, Pometacom, alias King Philip. The island was also used as a garrison during the Revolutionary War. In 1849 at the height of whaling era, Charles M. Pierce built the light and keeper's house for $1,951. William Sherman was appointed first lightkeeper on August 30, 1849. The original beacon burned New Bedford whale oil, as did most of the nation's lighthouses in the first half of the 19th century. The lighthouse became the central element of the city Seal in 1849. The City's motto, *Lucem Diffundo* means *I Diffuse Light.* A 1908 report describes the illuminating apparatus as including a French-made lens 14 7/8" in diameter, of the Fifth Order and "fixed red" at 500 candlepower. In 1931, a report lists it as "fixed green" at 870 candlepower. The light stands approximately 35 feet above mean low tide. Over the years, the island was the site of a hotel, dance hall, bowling alley and amusement park. Today, only the lighthouse remains. Until it was automated in 1941, a lightkeeper was always on duty. The last keeper was Arthur A. Small, who started his sea career at age 14 sailing with the Maine and Gloucester fishing fleets. Small and his wife Mabel served Palmer's Island Light from 1922 until the great hurricane of 1938. During the storm, Small was swept off the island on his way to the fog horn. His wife attempted a rescue but was carried away in the storm surge and drowned. Though badly injured, Small managed to swim back to the island and remained with the light. When rescued the following day, he requested to be relieved of duty in accordance with the oath of the Lighthouse Service. On March 26, 1980, the light was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. In April 1999, New Bedford was designated an official Millennium Community of the White House Millennium Council. Mayor Frederick M. Kalisz, Jr. directed restoration of the light as one of the city's Millennium Projects, in keeping with the national theme to "honor the past and imagine the future."

- Arthur P. Motta, Jr.



Palmers Island Light, circa 1900