U.S. COAST GUARD

Re-Lighting the Way

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First District



Lighthouses have captured the imagination and intrigue of our nation for decades. There are festivals and galas when a lighthouse is restored, and hundreds of books have been written about lighthouses and their histories. Websites, gift shops and television shopping channels offer the lighthouse aficionado or amateur collector memorabilia for just about any lighthouse in the country.

"People are in love with them," said Chief Warrant Officer David Waldrip of the First Coast Guard District's Office of Aids to Navigation. "You cannot walk into a gift shop in New England without seeing lighthouses." From clothing to coffee mugs, and key chains to license plates, "Everybody seems to be having some little lighthouse knick-knack these days, or a photograph in their home."

In an effort to meet the demands and extensive care that lighthouses require, the Coast Guard began licensing lighthouses to private and non-profit organizations under the Private Aids to Navigation Program. The program was established to satisfy the public's growing desire to salvage and preserve lighthouses as a part of America's history.

One such lighthouse, Clarks Point Light in New Bedford, Mass., was re-lit as part of a grand celebration of the New Bedford's maritime heritage, June 15, 2001.

Financed by local businessmen in 1797, Clarks Point began its watch as a crude, wooden tower at the southern entrance to the harbor. After two fires in only five years, it was turned over to the federal government in 1804. A 42-foot stone structure replaced the wooden tower to help whalers and other ships entering the harbor from Buzzard's Bay.

In 1860, in anticipation of an attack during the Civil War, the seven-sided granite Fort Taber was constructed next to the lighthouse. Construction of the fort progressively blocked the view of Clarks Point from approaching ships, and in 1869 the lantern room was moved to the top of Fort Taber. In 1898, with the erection of Butler Flats Light Station, Clarks Point was deemed obsolete and the stone structure was demolished in 1906.

Clarks Point Light stood dark for nearly 80 years until it, and Fort Taber, were designated a National Register District in 1973. Clarks Point was briefly re-lit for the bicentennial in 1976, but because of its isolated location, it fell victim to extensive vandalism and was darkened once again.

After close to a century of neglect, Clarks Point Light was given a new lease on life in 1997. Mayor Frederick M. Kalisz, Jr. and the City of New Bedford committed $7 million to a determined, rigorous plan to renovate Clarks Point and build a new city park at the adjacent Fort Taber. Although the park, with walking and biking trails, a boathouse, bathhouse and community center, won't be finished until 2005, the restoration of the lighthouse and keepers quarters were all but completed during the winter of 2000-2001.

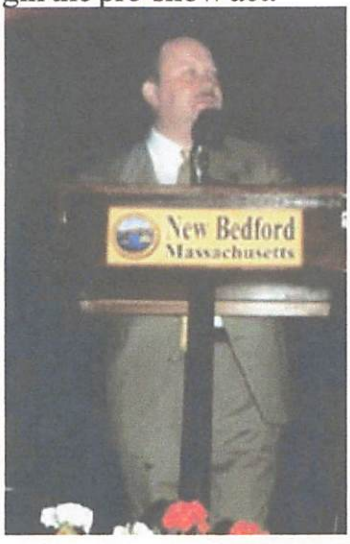
And what a project it was. But, as Arthur Motta, Jr., the City of New Bedford's director of tourism and marketing, said, "If we can do it, anyone can."

"New Bedford is proud of its maritime landmarks and we continue to demonstrate that pride with action," said Mayor Kalisz. "...The city's motto has been



relightourhistoricmaritime landmarks to ensure that they shine brightly for the new millennium."
Crude, elaborate graffiti covered the exterior and interior surfaces of Clarks Point's walls, as well as the fort. What nature had not destroyed of the wooden siding with wet and dry rot, vandals had used to fuel fires throughout the fort's arcade and gun bays.
Doors and windows needed replacing in the lighthouse, and new wiring, receptacles and lighting fixtures, including the beacon, were destroyed. Gaping holes in the wooden parapet floors leading to the lighthouse revealed a 50-foot drop to the fort floor, and missing sections of the cast-iron ornamental balustrade needed replacing.
City workers and crews from the Bristol County Sheriff's Department did the majority of the reconstruction, greatly reducing the effects on the city's purse strings. A $15,000 donation from N-STAR also played an important role in helping to finance the project.
Jose Pereira, a welder with the New Bedford Wastewater Department did most of the welding of the lantern room's metal frame. Pereira, recognized by the Coast Guard with a Certificate of Appreciation for his efforts, was also the man behind the welder's mask of the restorative work for Palmer's Island Lighthouse.
But the light itself is the essence of any lighthouse. It is what thousands of New Bedford residents and visitors to Fort Taber Park came to see on a hot summer evening in June.
A few hours before the festivities began, CWO Waldrip made final focusing adjustments to the 250mm clear acrylic lens. The light has a range of nine nautical miles, and is "fixed", meaning it does not rotate or blink.

Undeterred by the stifling humidity, revelers began trickling in around 4:00 p.m., and by 5:30, they were pouring in by the hundreds. An excited buzz filled the air like electricity as people walked about, watching a Civil War re-enactment group, and examining the authentic 1846 brass cannon that would later be used to signal for the re-lighting. There were food vendors selling everything from French fries and hot dogs to ice cream and authentic Portuguese breads.
Finally, around 6 p.m., singer and guitarist Jon Nelson, took the stage to begin the pre-show act. Nelson "worked" the crowd for an hour with folk songs, sing-alongs, and plenty of jokes.



The New Bedford Symphony Orchestra, under the baton of Dr. F. John Adams, entertained the crowd with music by John Philip Sousa, Johann Strauss and Richard Rodgers. Soprano Susan M. Mello performed selections from Puccini's La Boheme and Gershwin's Porgy & Bess.

Mayor Kalisz addressed the crowd of nearly 3000, demonstrating an infectious commitment to the city that he has led to this success.
"Tonight, by re-lighting Clarks Point Light, we not only honor those who have gone before us, but we ensure those who follow...believe that honoring our history, honoring our past, honoring our city's treasures, is of the utmost importance to this community, and to this great country."
Capt. Gerald Davis, Chief of Staff for the First Coast Guard District, and keynote speaker for the evening, said, "I've spent most of my adult life at sea. And I know that on cloudy and foggy nights such as this, it's not a star that I strain my eyes to see. For me, and thousands just like me, it's a beacon from a lighthouse that's stretched out to sea and parted the night or parted the fog that I looked for. That I trusted to lead me home.
"It's for a special purpose that we're here tonight. Someone's son or daughter will find their way home by our actions."
No other city in America has ever restored three lighthouses, and Davis commended the City of New

Bedford for its commitment to restoring Clarks Point Light, as well as Palmer Island and Butler Flats Lights. He recounted the rich yet troubled history of Clarks Point, and of Mayor Kalisz's steadfast efforts to bring all three lighthouses back to life.

Davis spoke of the long-lasting relationship between the Coast Guard and the community of New Bedford, and of the "...indefatigable spirit and determination of our bonds, as well as our common purpose for preserving our nation's maritime heritage..."

Before presenting him with a Meritorious Public Service Award from the Commandant of the Coast Guard, Davis turned to a visibly moved Mayor Kalisz, and offered him a hand salute.

"You have an awful lot to be proud of, sir," Davis congratulated him.

Tim Harrison, Chairman of the American Lighthouse Foundation, shared Davis' sentiment.

"A few weeks ago," Harrison addressed the crowd, "I was down at the rededication of Cape Hatteras Lighthouse in N.C., America's tallest lighthouse. I gotta tell you folks, they had about half the size crowd that you have here in New Bedford."

Harrison then presented Mayor Kalisz with the Keeper of the Light Award, an award which, according to Harrison "we give out very rarely, almost never. It's the highest award we give out."

"When you leave here tonight after this ceremony is over, take one moment and stop and think and say a prayer for the men and women who tended the lighthouses in New Bedford," Harrison closed with.

"Because that is your history."

Finally, with all the awards presented and all the speeches given, the moment that everyone was waiting for arrived. On the order of Mayor Kalisz, the Rhode Island Light Artillery, Battery B fired a six-pound cannon, giving a booming signal to officially relight Clarks Point Light. The crowd seemed to hold its breath for the few seconds before the brilliant white light pierced through the fog, on its way to a ship at sea.

The orchestra's finale broke through the shouts and cheers of the spectators. The fireworks display had a surreal, ghostly quality as the lights from the many-colored explosions pulsed through the fog before falling away into the ocean.

History had been made, again. Given New Bedford's track record, probably not for the last time, either.

"It's through events such as this," Capt. Davis said, "At the Clarks Point Light re-lighting ceremony and celebration that the legacy of our nations lighthouses and light ship sailors shall endure forever."

