Conimicut Lighthouse: Transferred to Rhode Island Community

By *Jeremy D'Entremont*

Comments?

Conimicut Lighthouse: Transferred to Rhode Island Community



>> Click to enlarge << 57Kb

The ceremonial transfer of ownership of the ...

Bob Onosko and Fred Mikkelsen were teenagers when they served as Coast Guard keepers at Conimicut Lighthouse near Warwick, Rhode Island in the late 1950s. As such, they were happy to be present on September 30, 2004, at a ceremony officially transferring ownership of the historic lighthouse and familiar local landmark to the City of Warwick. The event was supposed to be held outdoors at Conimicut Point in Warwick within view of the lighthouse, but as Mikkelsen reported, "The weather forced the celebration indoors with a photo of the light as a stand-in for the real thing. With a 20 to 30 knot northeast wind, the point was not the place for sane people!"



>> Click to enlarge << 54Kb

Conimicut Lighthouse is located near the mouth of ...

The 1883 "sparkplug-style" lighthouse was transferred under the National Historic Lighthouse Preservation Act of 2000 (NHLPA). Officials of the Department of the Interior, the U. S. Coast Guard and the General Services Administration (GSA) came to the Elizabeth Buffum Chace House in Warwick for the event. The Pilgrim High School Band played and a Police Department honor guard was also present.

The Coast Guard's Captain Scott Keane, who lives at Nobska Lighthouse on Cape Cod, presented a ceremonial key to the lighthouse to Warwick Mayor Scott Avedisian and City Council President Joseph Solomon. It was Solomon who started the ball rolling for the City to acquire the lighthouse in 2002 when it announced that it

was being declared surplus property and would be awarded to the most suitable new steward under the NHLPA. The City Planning Department completed the complicated

application process.

Stephen A. Perry of the GSA said at the event, "These lighthouses are, in fact, historic treasures, and they should be preserved. At the end of the day, the law is just a tool, and what really makes these things happen are people... people who are willing to work together in a creative way." Under the NHLPA, as many as 200 or more lighthouses will be transferred in the coming years.

The present Conimicut Lighthouse replaced an earlier granite tower built in 1868. During the Coast Guard era there were

usually two or three men on duty at the offshore lighthouse, although Fred Mikkelsen says he was once there alone for 37 straight days. The light was among the last in the nation to be converted from kerosene to electricity, with the conversion taking place in 1960. Although it is often stated that Conimicut Lighthouse was the last in the nation to use kerosene, there was at least one that was converted to electricity a bit later – Burnt Island Light in Maine.

A page on the official web site of the City of Warwick says of the lighthouse, "Such a strong symbol of the City of Warwick should be preserved and maintained – and the National Historic Lighthouse Preservation Act of 2000 will ensure that this piece of Warwick's rich history and traditions will be preserved for the enjoyment and pride of generations to come." There are plans to restore the structure and hopes of eventually offering public tours.