A “Connector” to Ongoing Restoration Work at Wood Island Light Station

BY: **BOB TRAPANI, JR., ALF EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR** PUBLISHED: NOVEMBER 8, 2012

In the same manner by which lighthouse history is an unbroken chain of time, events and vigilance, so too is our modern day effort to preserve the historic light station structures we are fortunate to have an opportunity to enjoy and cherish.



A project to restore the historic connector building between the keeper's house and lighthouse is currently underway (Photo by Bob Trapani, Jr.)

To ensure that posterity has the same opportunity, passionate volunteers from ALF’s Friends of Wood Island Lighthouse are stringing together some very impressive achievements that are making new history, while safeguarding this irreplaceable legacy for the future.

During 2010 the Friends of Wood Island Lighthouse (FOWIL) restored the 1858 light tower. In 2011, they restored the exterior of the wooden keeper's house, which included a project to return the dwelling's front porch to its 1906 appearance (the year FOWIL has chosen as its period of historical significance for the light station). The total cost of both projects was over $300,000.



A vintage photo of Wood Island Light Station showing the historic connector building that remains in place today (ALF Photo)

Endeavoring to keep the restoration momentum moving forward at Wood Island, FOWIL is currently undertaking its latest project – the restoration of the wooden connector building that leads from the keeper's house to the lighthouse. And in doing so, FOWIL continues to "connect" history together in more ways than one!

At first glance, the appearance of the connector building may not be as charming or deemed as important as the other light station structures, but it is no less historic. In fact, during the initial phase of the project, which entailed the removal of contemporary and rotted wood components, the vintage board and batten siding construction of the connector building became quite evident.

Jim Leslie, President of the J.B. Leslie Company, summed up the progress to date, noting, "The clapboard siding has been removed and structural repairs to the main foundation timbers, floor joists and sills, have been made."

Another exciting aspect of the demo process included the discovery of a pair of steps previously hidden from sight. The J.B. Leslie Company of South Berwick, Maine, the firm contracted for the project, discovered the two steps following the removal of the wood floor, which required replacing. It is believed that the steps are a surviving aspect of the connector building's original construction, prior to the keeper's house being remodeled by the U.S. Lighthouse Service in 1906.

Though the two steps will again be hidden by a new wood floor once it is installed, they will remain in place and the fascinating discovery – now that it has been documented, will be yet another interesting story to share with visitors when they return to the island in 2013.

Before the connector building could be restored, crews first had to realign the granite stone foundation, which over time, was dislodged from its original set position by settling and frost heaves that have occurred in the soil during the last century and a half. This was no easy task, given the weight of the granite blocks and the limited space from which to work beneath the connector building. Crews used plenty of muscle and determination during the process, but their efforts were well worth it.



A pair of steps (leading from the connector building to the kitchen) were discovered during the initial phase of the project, which have long been hidden and appear to date back to the 19th century (Photo by Bob Trapani, Jr.)

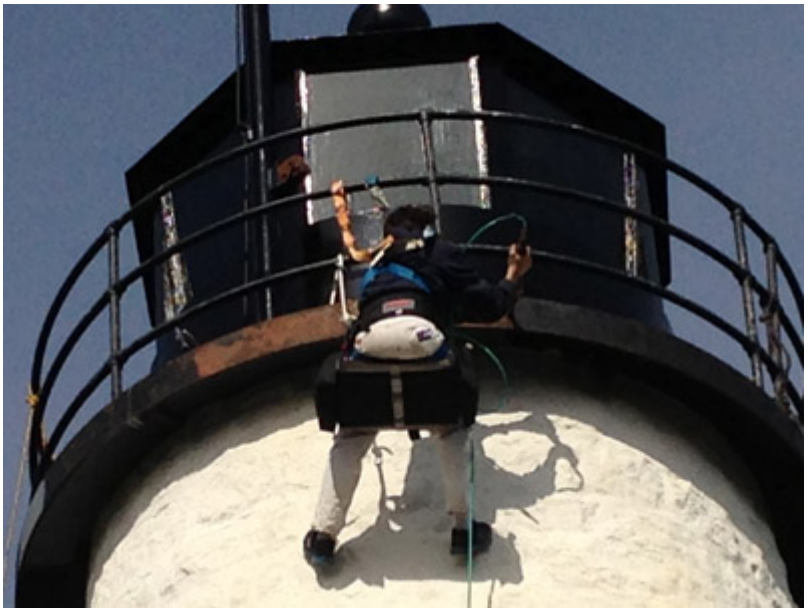


Kyle Brant of the J.B. Leslie Company repositions a granite block along the foundation as hydraulic jacks lift the wooden structure (Photo by Jim Leslie)

Jim Leslie described the process of repairing the connector building’s foundation, saying, “In order to reestablish the old granite foundation, we had to raise the wooden structure with hydraulic jacks, move each piece of granite back into position, then place the connector building atop its original plane. During this process, we also removed the doors and will realign them to the building’s newly restored configuration.”

FOWIL’s latest restoration efforts have not been solely confined to the wooden connector building. The project’s scope of work has also included a complete rehabilitation of the lantern’s interior and exterior ironwork. The J.B. Leslie Company addressed the rust and deterioration along the lantern’s gallery and underside, which was causing unsightly rust stains on the light tower’s upper taper.

Once all of the rust was removed and the remainder of the iron surfaces properly prepped, crews applied a fresh coat of black paint to the lantern. In order to repaint the lantern’s underside, crewmen donned safety harnesses and utilized a boson’s chair to apply the topcoats – hardly a job for the faint of heart.



Loyd Dussault works from a boson's chair to repaint the underside of the lantern (Photo by Jim Leslie)

Though the current project has encountered the usual challenges of working on an island during the temperamental shoulder season, and has even endured work stoppages due to the affects of Hurricane Sandy and winter storm Athena, the J.B. Leslie Company, continues to persevere. The project is expected to conclude by the Thanksgiving holiday.

Hats off to the Friends of Wood Island Lighthouse whose tireless efforts are forging quite a chain of historic achievements at Wood Island Light Station – vital accomplishments that add to our past and enrich our future!

The 2012 restoration of the connector building…



The old board and batten construction of the connector building was revealed during the initial phases of restoration (Photo by Bob Trapani, Jr.)



A view inside the connector building during the initial restoration phase (Photo by Bob Trapani, Jr.)



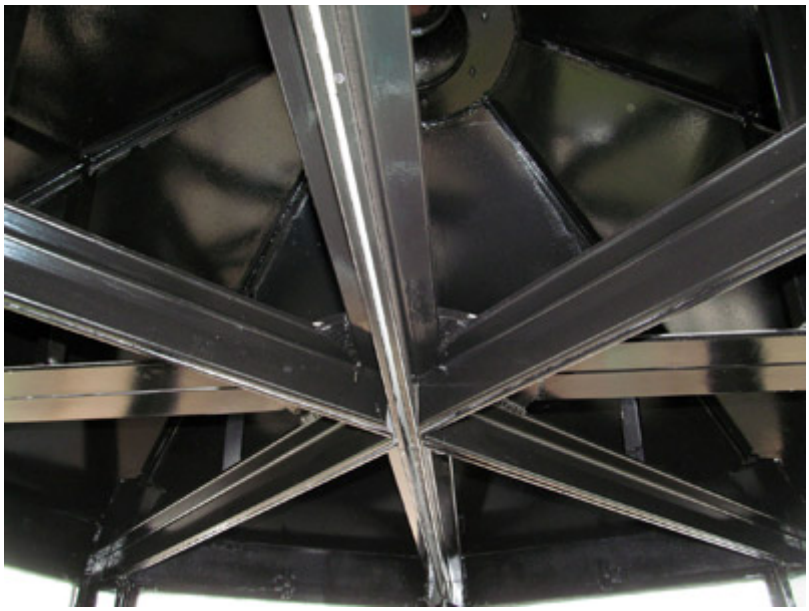
The connector building's granite foundation needed to be reset before the structure could be restored (Photo by Bob Trapani, Jr.)



Due to rot along the wood foundation of the connector building, sections of the main timbers required replacing (Photo by Bob Trapani, Jr.)



An aspect of FOWIL's latest restoration efforts included the prep and repainting of the light tower's lantern on both the exterior and interior (Photo by Bob Trapani, Jr.)



A view of the lantern's freshly painted cupola (Photo by Bob Trapani, Jr.)



Recent storms have slowed the restoration work down some, with this image showing how far up on the lawn the surge reached during the height of Hurricane Sandy (Photo by Bob Trapani, Jr.)



(L to R) Sean Smith, Joe Thayer, Kyle Brant and Jim Leslie of the J.B. Leslie Company inside the connector building on November 5, 2012 (Photo by Bob Trapani, Jr.)

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November 8, 2012 at 4:14 pm

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AMERICAN LIGHTHOUSE FOUNDATION

PO Box 565, Rockland, ME
04841
Ph: (207) 594-4174

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