The Lights of Goat Island – Both Still Standing

By Kathleen Finnegan

Comments?



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This vintage post card image gives us a rare ...

There are two lighthouses, both located in New England, that are known as Goat Island Lighthouse, and both are still standing. And if you really want to get technical, you could say that there are three lighthouses that are all still standing in New England that have been called Goat Island Lighthouse. All of this can be confusing to the lighthouse novice, as well as to some die-hard lighthouse enthusiasts, especially if you include yet a fourth lighthouse on the west coast of the United States that has also been called Goat Island Light. But there is only one real Goat Island Lighthouse.



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Newport's Goat Island Lighthouse after a new ...

This is all caused by nicknames that often take hold with the public, which is common with a number of lighthouses around the United States, many that have become more commonly known by their nicknames than their real names. For example, one of the most photographed and recognized lighthouses in New England is most commonly called Nubble Light, a name that appears on post cards and even maps. But the real name of the Nubble Lighthouse located in York, Maine is Cape Neddick Lighthouse. But this story is about the Goat Island Lighthouse, but which one?



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Quite often old post cards, provided they have ...

There is a lighthouse in San Francisco that is often called by its nickname, Goat Island Lighthouse, but its real name is the Yerba Buena Lighthouse and this story is not about it.



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Even today, Newport, Rhode Island is known for ...

The fact is, there is only one lighthouse in the United States that is the real Goat Island Lighthouse and it stands on an island off the coast of Cape Porpoise, Maine and it is the only lighthouse that can claim Goat Island Lighthouse as its true name. But this story is also not about that lighthouse.

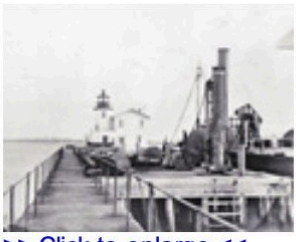


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This view shows how nice the keeper's house was

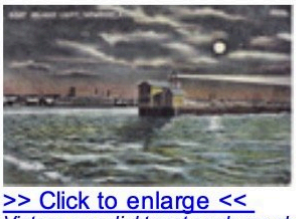
This story is about the lighthouse, or should we say lighthouses, of Goat Island in Newport Harbor, Rhode Island. The real name of Rhode Island's Goat Island Lighthouse is Newport Harbor Lighthouse, but it is more commonly known as Goat Island Lighthouse. To make matters even more confusing, is the fact that the

more confusing, is the fact that the lighthouse has also been called the Newport Breakwater Light, and in the early 1900s it was often referred to as Schoeneman's Light, after long time lighthouse keeper Charles Schoeneman, who was the lighthouse keeper there for nearly 40 years, from 1883 to 1921.



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For a time, the Newport Harbor, Goat Island ...

In the 1700s farmers would bring their goats to graze on the island, from whence the name Goat Island was derived. But it wasn't until 1823 that the government built a lighthouse on the north end of Goat Island to mark the entrance of Rhode Island's Newport Harbor. The official name assigned to the lighthouse was Newport Harbor Lighthouse, but almost from the day when the lighthouse was first lit on January 1, 1824, it became known as Goat Island Light.



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Vintage moonlight post cards are always a ...

In 1830 the Army Corp of Engineers started to build a new breakwater at Goat Island in Rhode Island, and it was decided that the lighthouse should be moved to the breakwater. However, for whatever reason, the government instead decided to build a new lighthouse on the breakwater. The new tower was completed in 1838 but was not put into use until December 18, 1842 when the breakwater was fully completed. During that time the old 1823 Goat Island Lighthouse continued to be used, and was then left standing even after the new lighthouse started operation.



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This experimental electric light and electric ...

During this time plans were underway to build a new lighthouse on Rhode Island's Prudence Island. An architect drew up plans for an elaborate, beautiful new lighthouse. However, it was then that Edward W. Lawson, who was the local lighthouse superintendent, suggested to Stephen Pleasonton, the man who was in charge of our nation's lighthouses, that an immense amount of money could be saved by dismantling the original and now unused lighthouse on Goat Island, Rhode Island and move it to Prudence Island. Pleasonton, known for his penny pinching, immediately agreed. And in October of 1851, the original 1823 Goat Island Lighthouse was dismantled and put back together on Prudence Island and a new "birdcage-style" lantern room was installed atop the tower. Thus, the old Newport Harbor, Goat Island Lighthouse now became the Prudence Island Lighthouse, the only light station in America to be established 29 years after its tower was originally built, now making it the oldest standing lighthouse in the state of Rhode Island.



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This 1925 photo shows all that was left of ...

In the meantime, the keepers of the Goat Island Lighthouse continued to live in the original keeper's house that had been built for the first 1823 tower. Finally, in 1864, the government constructed a new keeper's house. Some reports indicate that a new tower was also built at that time, but with no photographic evidence to support those stories, it is more likely that the 1838 Newport Goat Island tower simply had some renovations done to it during the time that the new house was constructed.



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In 1869 the U.S. Navy took over Goat Island, Rhode Island and built a new Naval Torpedo Station at the site that over the years expanded by immense proportions; however the lighthouse itself remained under the control of the Light House Board and later the

Newport's Goat Island Lighthouse with its lonely ...

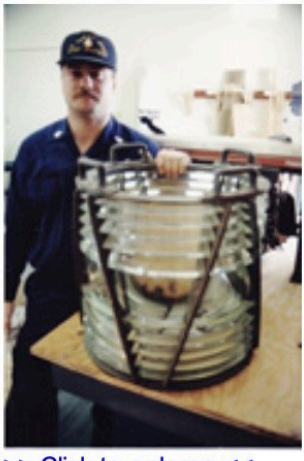
Bureau of Lighthouses.



>> Click to enlarge <<

In 1851 this tower, which was the original 1823 ...

The real end of Newport Harbor's Goat Island Lighthouse Station came on November 9, 1921 when a 155-foot-long submarine named N-4 smashed into the breakwater and severely damaged the foundation of the keeper's house. It is unclear if the keeper and his family were at home at the time, but if they were, it must have caused quite a stir; but perhaps it was not unexpected accident.



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Petty Officer 1st Class Mark Whaley is shown in ...

It was then decided that the keeper's house was unsafe to live in and the last keeper, Charles Schoeneman, was forced to leave and then, after helping the Navy take over control of the lighthouse, he retired after having lived at the lighthouse for nearly 40 years. It must have been a sad day for Schoeneman to leave the home that he had taken such good care of for so many years. It would now be demolished and the electrified tower would be taken care of by Navy personnel who would never be as dedicated to the lighthouse as he was.



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The Prudence Island keeper's house shown here was ...

In 1951 the U.S. Navy's Torpedo Base and Factory, which during World War II employed nearly 13,000 people, closed. Today, many of its buildings no longer exist. The area between the island, the shore, and the lighthouse was filled in when a large hotel was constructed and the automated lighthouse became a backdrop for weddings, picnics, and photographs.



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This is the architectural drawing of the proposed ...

In 2000, Timothy Harrison, who was then president of the American Lighthouse Foundation, negotiated a preservation lease with the Coast Guard for the nonprofit group to take over the preservation of the lighthouse and the Coast Guard would still maintain the beacon in the tower. In 2006, for safety purposes, the American Lighthouse Foundation had a picket fence installed around the perimeter of the lighthouse, which was similar to the fence that had once been at the lighthouse. However, the lighthouse itself, although in good condition, is still in need of restoration.



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