The Pemaquid Point Lighthouse

Pemaquid Lighthouse and the keeper's house were built in 1827. The tower was rebuilt in 1835 and the stone dwelling was replaced in 1857 by the present wooden structure. The light was originally lit by kerosene lamp, and then by gas, becoming automatic in 1934. It can be seen for 14 miles in clear weather. The tower itself is not accessible to the public, since the lighthouse is under the jurisdiction of the Coast Guard.

The Town of Bristol owns and maintains the surrounding park and the Fishermen's Museum, now housed in the old lightkeeper's dwelling. The light is a familiar navigational aid to fishermen and all coastwise traffic. It warns them of the dangers of the rugged, treacherous rocks upon which it stands, just as the many signs cautioning people to be wary of going too near the water alert those on land to the dangers of slipping or being caught by a rogue wave.

The Fishermen's Museum

The Fishermen's Museum opened in 1972. It contains many displays of fishing techniques of the past and present. There is a navigational room with old charts, a duplicate of the lens now in use in the tower, and other navigational aids. Of particular interest is a wall-size chart of the coast of Maine and pictures of all the lighthouses with a numbered key showing their locations on the chart. In the picture gallery are some fine half-models of fishing boats and many photographs of present-day fishing methods, as well as those of bygone days.

The Museum, supported by voluntary donations, is open seven days a week during the summer and by appointment in the winter.

The Pemaquid Art Gallery

The Pemaquid Art Gallery was founded by local artists from New Harbor in July 1929. The present gallery building was opened in 1960 continuing the gallery's distinction as the oldest existing art society in the state of Maine.

The exhibitions reflect the traditional as well as the contemporary approaches to the art of today.

The gallery is a non-profit organization whose income maintains the building, gallery operations and an annual art scholarship awarded to outstanding art students in the local community.

The Park is open, daily, from Memorial Day to Columbus Day, from 9 A.M. to 5 P.M.

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PEMAQUID POINT LIGHTHOUSE

The Pemaquid Point light was commissioned in 1827 by John Quincy Adams. Congress appropriated $4000.00 to build it. Jeremiah Barry. Bricklayer of Thomaston, was contracted "to build, finish and complete a Lighthouse and Dwelling House at Pemaquid Point." The price agreed upon for the tower and the house: $2800.00.

Apparently something was wrong with the construction of the first tower, and eight years after it was built, in 1835, a new contract was drawn up with Joseph Berry, mason of Georgetown, to "rebuild, finish and complete the Tower at Pemaquid Point." The specifications and instructions were identical in almost every way to the original ones, except for one or two curious directives: "The whole to be laid in the best lime mortar; the same to be used never to have been wet with salt water; the mortar to be mixed with fresh water." It was also specified that the walls of the tower were to be of solid stone and mortar and not to be done by building two walls and filling in the middle. The price of the new tower, using "existing materials" was $1395.00.

The stone dwelling house must have suffered the same deterioration for in 1857, thirty years after its construction, a new keeper's dwelling was built, this time of wood. Now housing the Fishermen's Museum, the dwelling looks much the same as it did when it was rebuuilt.

Isaac Dunham was the first of fourteen light keepers to serve at Pemaquid Point. The keeper's salary in the early days was $350.00 a year. It was customary for the keeper to have a small farm along with his running of the light and from time to time there have been several barns on the property. The only child to be born at the lighthouse was Susie Lawler, in 1868. In the middle 1920's Edith, the daughter of Keeper Herbert Robinson was married on the porch of the lightkeeper's house. Leroy S. Elwell was the last keeper of the light before it was automated in 1934.

On September 16, 1903 the fishing schooner George F. Edmunds crashed on the rocks at Pemaquid Point in a heavy storm--the captain having miscalculated by 800 to 1000 feet the entrance to John's Bay. The captain and 15 of his crew perished. Only 2 fishermen were saved. In the same storm the Sadie and Lillie hit close by. Two men reached shore but the captain drowned in the heavy surf. On a foggy day in August of 1917 the Willis and Guy, a two-masted schooner struck on the rocks near Lighthouse Point. Her crew of three was saved but a hurricane four days later completely wrecked the vessel, scattering her cargo of coal all over the rocks. This proved to be a boon to the many townspeople who were able to salvage enough coal to heat their houses the following winter.

The light was automated in 1934 and later the fog bell which hung on the bell house and was operated by a Stevens striking machine, was removed. The bell now in place is much smaller than the original and only serves to indicate to visitors to the light what the bell house was used for. The weight tower and the roof of the bell house were badly damaged in a storm in April 1991 and repairs had not been made before Hurricane Bob completed the destruction. The reconstruction job was completed in the spring of 1992.

When the lightkeeper no longer manned the station, a gong buoy was moored off the big point to the west to replace the stationary bell at the light.

THE FISHERMEN'S MUSEUM AT PEMAQUID POINT

ABOUT THE LIGHTHOUSE: Pemaquid Light is under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Coast Guard, and the public is not permitted to enter the lighthouse proper. This tower and house were built in 1827 by order of President John Quincy Adams. The light was originally lit by kerosene lamp and then by gas, becoming automatic in 1934. It can be seen for 14 miles in clear weather. It has a candle power of 11,000. The lens exhibited in the Navigation Room is just like the one in the tower.

OUTSIDE: By the entrance to the Museum stands an old rudder from the dragger "Reliance", now fishing for groundfish out of New Harbor, and an old salmon tierce once used for salting and shipping salmon, holding approximately 12 bushels; and in the corner of the yard is an old fog bell like the one which originally hung on the bell house. By the wall of the building is the steering mechanism from the wreck of the "Willis and Guy".

INSIDE: In the Navigation Room the dominating exhibit is the lens formerly at Baker's Island light, southwest of the entrance to Somes Sound, on loan from the U.S. Coast Guard. This is a Fresnel lens built in France. Also seen is a bronze buoy bell and iron chain, a four-valve mechanism from a whistle buoy and a Lyle gun for shooting a lifeline to ships in distress. On the right is a chart of the coast of Maine used by fishermen and all coastwise traffic, and pictures of all the lighthouses on the coast with a numbered key showing their locations on the chart. Limited space prevents the spritsail next to the lens from being fully unfurled, but a picture beside it shows it as it was under working conditions.

FISH HOUSE: You now move to the work area of the lobsterman. Displayed on the work benches are tools and gear used in the lobstering and fishing industry, some now obsolete. Lobster pot buoys of fishermen in the area hang on the walls, as do pictures of the last fish house on Pemaquid Point and lobster measures and a display of various types of fish hooks. A reconditioned "make and break" engine is on exhibit as an example of the first form of power used by lobstermen. Of particular interest is a 28-pound lobster in a glass case on the wall over the ship's stove.

NET ROOM: In the third room are displayed several different methods of harvesting the sea, a small scallop dredge, a sink-gill net (for cod, haddock and pollock), an under-run line trawl for hake, a model of a purse seine for herring, eel traps, a cunner net for catching bait, and, suspended overhead, a scaled-down otter trawl used for catching ground fish and shrimp. This room also houses an exhibit of old tools, and models of a dragger, a lobster boat and a fish weir.

GALLERY: Working half-models of fish boats, as well as models of a whaler, a Friendship sloop and a "pinky", and photographs showing aspects of the industry in bygone days are featured. Of special interest is an exhibit honoring Harvey Gamage, master boat-builder, which consists of pictures of the building and launching of the schooner "Harvey Gamage"--step by step.

What you see here in the old lightkeeper's house is the result of the efforts of the citizens of Bristol who wanted to show you some of the aspects of fishing carried out in this area. Almost all exhibits have been donated by fishermen and their families. We don't charge admission but are entirely dependent on your donation to maintain and operate the Museum.