From: Jeremy D'Entremont
To: Clark Ellison
Date: Tuesday, August 5, 2003 1:45 PM
Subject: Re: Penfield reef

Clark,

This is great information! It's exactly the kind of material I'm always trying to find. With your permission I'll use some excerpts in my CT lighthouse book. I'll keep you posted on the book -- if you'd like I can email you the Penfield Reef chapter for your review before the book goes to publication. That will probably be sometime next spring.

I have not been inside the lighthouse. Last year I chartered a boat out of Bridgeport along with a couple of friends to photograph Penfield Reef and Stratford Shoal lights. Penfield Reef had really been in bad shape and it's nice to see that it's been fixed up, at least on the outside. Apparently there's still a lot more to be done on the inside. As you probably know, the Coast Guard originally planned to demolish the lighthouse and replace it with some kind of modern structure.

I think Penfield Reef Light has never gotten the press it deserves -- I think it's a very interesting lighthouse. And I find the ghost story more convincing than "Ernie," the ghost at New London Ledge Light. The story of Ernie's death is probably fictional, but we know the keeper of Penfield Reef really did drown near the lighthouse. And many people before you experienced strange things there. Even after automation they've had lots of problems with the light behaving erratically.

Thanks again - I'll be in touch. If anything else occurs to you I'll be very interested. Of course, I'd also be interested in any photos you might have from that time.

Best,
Jeremy

From: "Clark Ellison"
Date: Tue, 5 Aug 2003 12:06:45 -0500
To: "Jeremy D'Entremont"
Subject: Re: Penfield reef

Have you ever been in the light? Seeing as they have rebuilt the stairs I would guess they discovered the false bottom in the closet at the bottom of the stairs on the first floor. Our thoughts were that it was where they hid their "winter comfort" and so it was where we hid ours. I noticed that most people believed it an adventure or possibly even romantic to be a wickie. It was not. Most of the time it was nothing more than boring. Three men were stationed on the light with two on board and one off, two weeks on and one week off was the rotation.The information I read on the light stated it had four bedrooms on the second floor. When I was there it had a small bedroom for the OINC and a large bedroom for the other men, a bathroom and a radio room and of course the hallway that led to each room and the ladder up to the light. The light had an electric lamp and motor to turn the light but the motor never worked. The light was kept in motion by a stack of weights on cables that had to be wound up on a drum and the weight would lower through the floor and through a gear box that would spin the light which floated in a brass vat of mercury. Or so I was told as one could not see the mercury. If the weights touched the floor they would spin and twist the cable causing the motion to stop. The radio almost never worked as it was an old tube type and tubes were hard to come by. We had to change at least one a week and Eaton's Neck did not want spend

any unnecessary funds on the light so we only received two or three a month. And then once in a while they would send a few extra so we could do our daily reports.
Looking at the design picture you notice we had a "basement". That was where the cistern to catch rain water was located. The valves to the cistern had been shut long before I showed up. Water came from a 180 foot buoy tender through a hose that was hauled by hand across the water. Lots of fun when the tide was flowing. Do not ask where the septic field was as it did not exist. The washer and dryer were in the lowest level of the light also. On the first floor there was a kitchen, generator room, Penfield was the only light in our group that had shore power so we only had one generator, workshop and hall way. There were two green fuel tanks on the side facing away from Bridgeport and the fog horn was just that, an air horn, it had six inch diameter 1/8 inch thick plate in it that compressed air rattled to produce the sound that could be heard a minimum of nineteen miles away. How I hated the fog, the horn rattled the whole building, and my quarters were right above the horn. It also had three .38 caliber holes shot in it by the Black Rock Harbor Police one night when they came to visit, off duty.
There was a guy, do not remember his name now, that was a member of the Bridgeport police department, marine division, that was OINC before the guy I relieved. If you live in the area he might still be around. There was also a guy that owned a marina or marine repair place that had a house on Fairfield beach. He came out and brought his son to visit and told us of when his dad brought him out to the light as a child.
Anyway back to when I was there. In the summer we fished and it was generally good but in the winter the wind blew through the building. The curtains in the crews quarters were seldom still. The dark green tiles on the galley deck were polished and waxed again and again as there was nothing else to do. The few times I managed to steal a TV from Eaton's Neck we did have TV to watch but as soon as I left, the guys from Eaton's Neck, would retrieve the TV. The water quality was such as it was boiled before drinking it. We had a district inspection and a Lieutenant told me we were not allowed to keep our sewage in there. In there was our cistern, I thought he was going to puke when I informed him it was not sewage but our drinking water. He dropped his flashlight and ran up stairs to get the Captain to look at the situation. After that we had five gallon coolers with water and drained the cistern scraped and repainted it. Doubt that I would fit through that little hole anymore.
Anyway most people are interested in the ghost. I never believed in ghost and had never even heard the story when I encountered him the first time. Stanly Blake and I were on the light and it was late at night. I heard Stan walking up the stairs and decided to get up and have coffee with him thinking it was just before sunrise. I got out of bed and pulled on a pair of shorts and as I came out of the door I noticed there was no one coming up the stairs after all. It was at that time that Stan opened the door to his room and it was obvious he just woke up also. He said I did not know you were up and when I heard you I decided to get up and have some coffee. He and I slinked around the light looking for who was intruding and found no one. We were both sure someone had walked up the stairs as you could hear each step creak. one at a time, as they always did when someone came up. Now understand we had visitors that would let themselves in at all hours of the day and night but always announced their arrival when they entered the kitchen. Later I was telling Helen, she was an art teacher from Bridgeport that came to visit in her sailboat, and she brought us information on her next visit about the ghost. We had more visitations after that but did not get up to seek the ghost in person.
We have moved to Austin and somewhere in a box I have some pictures of the light back then. It will be a while before we get our house done but if I come across them I will try to take a picture of them with my digital camera. I noticed there was not any pictures of the light from the side where we launched our boat. There was a hand operated crane that was used to raise and lower the boat and a rusty ladder that ran up the side in the boat launching area so we could get into the boat at low tide. Facing the light looking at the crane, on the right hand side we each painted something on the rocks and then painted our names on them when they shut down the light. You would have to be on the Reef/sound side to see it when it was there. I doubt there is more than small specks of paint on the rocks now.
In my quarters there was two murals, on one wall was Neptune in a chariot pulled by fish that Helen painted and on the other wall was the moon with father time silhouetted in front. Father time was the first painted over as at night it looked more like the grim reaper. Three coats of paint and it could still be seen in the moon light. I painted around the Neptune one several times but was told to paint over it and finally gave in and did so. Never did give in on the decorations in the radio room though. Each month, long before I came aboard, the Playmate of the month went up on the wall, when we left, they stayed. I could

not bring myself to remove that which so many before me had done. The old logs from the light had gone years before I arrived, our logs consisted of weather reports and inserts of the fact we could not give the weather report to Eaton's Neck because the radio, once again, was not working.
We had the occasional "rescue" but usually we stayed on the light. We did have a guy in his cabin cruiser run aground and when we went to check on him he complained about there not being any marker to show the reef was there.
There were five lights in our group controlled by Eaton's Neck. Eaton's Neck, Stratford Shoals, Penfield Reef, Greens Ledge, also known as the spark plug, and Great Captain Island. Each with their advantage or disadvantage. No one actually mans Eaton Neck as it is on the main base, Great Captains had earth you could walk on, The Spark Plug had nothing good that I can remember about it, Penfield had shore power and lots of visitors and we could go ashore in our sixteen foot fiberglass boat, Stratford was desolate and weathered the worst storms being where it was. It was almost always the first light in the Round Robin and the farthest away from the main base. The Round Robin was the run from Eaton's Neck to each light to drop off food and supplies and exchange personnel. While I was wandering around several light house web sites I had seen Frank Able had called it a log run. I do not know if this was one of yours sites or not. If you have his e-mail address tell him I said hello.
Well I have to get out and do my chores for the day.
Thanks for the memories,
Clark
----- Original Message -----
From: Jeremy D'Entremont
To: Clark Ellison
Sent: Tuesday, August 05, 2003 8:55 AM
Subject: Re: Penfield reef

Hi Clark,

Thanks for your note. I have material on Penfield Reef Light in a couple of places, so I'm not sure which you saw. There's a section on my own website - http://www.lighthouse.cc/penfieldreef/ - and I also wrote a story for Lighthouse Digest - http://www.lhdepot.com/Digest/StoryPage.cfm?StoryKey=1452

I'm currently working on a book on Connecticut lighthouses, to be published in 2005. I'd very much like to hear more stories of your time at the lighthouse. Any memories would be of interest. And I'm also interested in the ghost. I have an open mind about these things, and I'm going to be giving a presentation on haunted lighthouses in Hull, MA on October 23.

I've added your name to the list of keepers in the database I manage at http://www.lhdepot.com/database/uniquelighthouse.cfm?value=70 . I'm not sure if the dates (1969-1971) I entered for you at Penfield Reef are correct - please let me know if that's wrong.

Thanks again for writing.

Best,
Jeremy D'Entremont

From: "Clark Ellison"
Date: Mon, 4 Aug 2003 22:55:31 -0500
To:
Subject: Penfield reef

Thank you for posting the pictures of Penfield Reef light. I live in Austin Texas and do not get up that way

but was OINC at Penfield for a year and a half and left just before they closed, or in their words, automated her. Although she has changed greatly since I left, the pictures brought back many memories. By the way the ghost is real.
Thanks
Clark Ellison