

[From Summer 2006]

## **Assateague Island Lighthouse Represented at the 2006 International Lighthouse Conference**

Chincoteague Natural History Association (CNHA) president, Joyce Maher, and Pat Bane, a member of the organization, presented a workshop at the 2006 International Lighthouse Conference in Southampton, Ontario, Canada on June 2, 2006. The conference entitled *Capturing the Past, Securing the Future* was held at the beautiful Bruce County Museum and Cultural Center from June 1-4. It was diverse in its content, but its main purpose was to increase awareness of the historical treasures lighthouses are and encourage people to maintain them. Ken Rothenberg and other volunteer organizers, centered the conference on the Chantry Island Lighthouse, located 3/4 of a mile from Lake Huron's Southampton shore. It is a bird sanctuary and home to a large variety of seabirds. Volunteers enjoy visiting it and sharing its history with tourists from around the world; however, now that it is under government protection visitation is limited and no one lives there any longer.

Over 150 people from across Canada, the United States and Italy gathered to discuss the history of lighthouses and the importance of preserving them. Maher and Bane's power point presentation of the Assateague Lighthouse prepared by CNHA board member Myrna Cherrix opened their workshop, *Preservation Through Partnerships*. Their talk also included a background on the "vanished" Assateague village and the fundraising efforts for the lighthouse by members and volunteers from CNHA. Participants filled out idea forms regarding their mission statements and how they can protect and preserve their own maritime historical buildings.

The conference began with a presentation on *The Architecture of Italian Lighthouses*. Other workshops featured a wide variety of lighthouse related topics: shipwrecks, architecture, maritime commerce, lives of lighthouse keepers, their families, and much more. A new film, *Alone in the Night*, was screened and showed a variety of ships and lighthouses on Lake Huron and told a funny and sad story about seafaring peoples' lives on the great lakes. Canadian singer/composer of folk ballads Valdy, winner of two Juno awards, performed in concert to a sold out crowd.

A highlight of the 4-day event was a boat trip to Chantry Island to tour the Imperial lighthouse. The lighthouse and the keeper's cottage were completed in 1859. After the light in the tower was electrified in 1954 the lighthouse keeper was no longer needed and the cottage was vandalized and laid in ruins for half-a-century until volunteers from the community spent over 25,000 hours working to bring the little cottage and surrounding gardens back to life. The restoration effort was spearheaded by the Marine Heritage Society and the Propeller Club. These dedicated people practice what they preach!

While in the area, Maher and Bane also visited the Kincardine Lighthouse in Kincardine, Ontario, Canada. The octagonal tower, which rises to an overall height of 24.4 meters above a two-story keeper's house, supports a twelve-sided lantern. It is the home to a marine museum and is headquarters for the Kincardine Yacht Club which maintains and operates it. Both Kincardine and Chantry Island are working Lighthouses guiding pleasure boaters and fisherman along the Lake Huron's western shore. The Yacht Club also caters dinners and fundraisers in the first floor dining room and asks for donations of visitors who tour the structure.

Conferences, workshops and focused efforts on behalf of Lighthouses are needed if we are to keep these reminders of our watermen and keepers. If you are interested in volunteering to help out on the Chincoteague Wildlife Refuge at Assateague Island Lighthouse, we need volunteer greeters upstairs and down. Currently, we are trying to raise money to help pay for a much needed paint job. CNHA Business Manager Lynn Talbot would welcome a call. Her office is in the Bateman Center

and she can be reached at (757) 336-3696. You can help your local Lighthouse and have lots of fun doing so.