

[From Summer 1998]

## **Assateague Lighthouse**

The historic Assateague Lighthouse was built in 1867 and is maintained by the U.S. Coast Guard. However, the first lighthouse on this site, built by the U.S. Treasury Department in 1883, was a 45 foot-high stone tower that proved inadequate. The present 142 foot-high structure is one of nearly 20 other tall, historic, brick lighthouses still functioning along the Atlantic Coast today.

Sitting on a natural bluff 22 feet above sea level adds to the light's height and visibility. Because of the dynamic movement of the island, the light no longer sits adjacent to the open sea. The southward growth of the island since 1850 has stranded the lighthouse almost 5 miles from the Chincoteague Inlet.

The lighthouse was built because of growing coastal commerce and the alarming number of shipwrecks that were occurring.

The first light was an oil burning, fixed Fresnel lens, visible for up to 18 miles. This Fresnel lens is now located at the Chincoteague Oyster and Maritime Museum. In 1963, it was replaced by the DCB-36 rotating beacon which is still in use today and is visible for 22 miles. Inside the brick tower, a cast iron spiral staircase leads up to the lens tower.

The lighthouses along the eastern seaboard each have a unique color pattern and light flash pattern. By day, the broad red and white stripes distinguish the Assateague Light and by night the characteristic is the flash pattern of two consecutive flashes every five seconds.

### **Lighthouse Tours**

The Assateague Lighthouse will be open one weekend each month for tours, according to the U. S. Coast Guard.

However, since the lighthouse is an active federal aid to navigation, it could be unexpectedly closed for maintenance or safety reasons.

Therefore, visitors are encouraged to call the Coast Guard Aids to Navigation Team Chincoteague at 757/336-2872 or the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge 757/336-6122 before driving to Assateague specifically for a lighthouse tour.

### **LIGHTHOUSE TOUR DATES**

June 20-21 9 am - 3 pm

July 25-26 9 am - 3 pm

Aug. 15-16 9 am - 3 pm

