

[From Fall 1995]

Shedding a Little Light on the Lighthouse Lens Project

For several years, the CNHA has been attempting to generate a project to preserve and protect the original Fresnel lens from the Assateague lighthouse. In early September, CNHA president, Bill Engelhart, sent the following letter to Lighthouse Lens Fund contributors and/or the family of memorial fund designees advising them of the project status and slightly altered direction.

September 5, 1995

Dear Lighthouse Lens Project Contributor:

I'm sure you've been wondering about the status of the CNHA's project to preserve and interpret the Assateague Lighthouse's original Fresnel lens. I've attempted to write to you, as well as to write an article for *The Piping Plover* newsletter several times. However, every time I was about to do so, a new wrinkle would develop that hampered our ability to proceed with construction of a protective housing and precluded giving you any sort of coherent explanation of project status.

Without going into a contorted and detailed chronology of events, after the CNHA acquired a design and specifications for a protective structure, we lost a significant portion of funds earmarked for the project due to the lapse of grant funds. In addition, several other organizations challenged U.S. Coast Guard ownership of the lens and/or offered to build a structure to house the lens. The CNHA initiated this project (even though it was stretching our charter a bit) because no one, at that time, was actively making an effort to preserve and protect this valuable artifact. Once we concluded we weren't likely to acquire sufficient funds to proceed with our plans, and others were serious about protecting the lens, we took the position that we would limit our participation to a role more in keeping with our charter - interpretation of the lens at the lighthouse site.

At our annual meeting on April 15, 1995, it was the consensus of the membership that this was a more fitting role for the association. I was directed by the membership to advise the Coast Guard of this position, and to convey to the Coast Guard the strong opinion of the membership that the lens should be housed in a structure adjacent to the existing lighthouse. Both these positions were conveyed to the Coast Guard at a meeting on April 25, 1995, at which the Lighthouse Society and the Chincoteague Oyster Museum presented alternate proposals for housing the lens.

Based on the last information I was able to obtain, it appears that the Oyster Museum will be the recipient of the lens. Consequently, we would plan to work closely with them in developing interpretive material to be displayed at the lighthouse and the museum. The funds received from contributors will be used for this purpose. If you would rather have

your funds used for another of the CNHA's projects. please let me know by October 1, 1995.