



Outer Banks Lighthouse Society Celebrates 25 Years of Advocacy

by Cheryl Shelton-Roberts

Looking back to the day we envisioned the Outer Banks Lighthouse Society (OBLHS) as a group to fight for the preservation of North Carolina's lighthouses that were in need of being cared for, there is no way we could have ever wished for a more talented group of individuals—already busy with their own careers—who would roll up their sleeves and pitch in. Sometimes it is best not to know exactly what you are getting yourself into when initiating a nonprofit organization. Overanalyzing what could go wrong with individuals moving the proverbial federal boulder up the mountain to save our lights could have cut our efforts short due to fear of failure. But, when problems cropped up—like being the lone, independent voice in favor of moving the Cape Hatteras Lighthouse—jobs were divided up among a willing group and we each bent to the task: a letter writing campaign, media interviews advocating the move, attending multiple meetings on fact-gathering trips, and publications created to educate the public about the dire need to relocate the grand tower away from sea's edge and its high probability of success. In the end, the world watched as the “move of the century” unfolded in 1999.

Some of our first efforts gathered volunteers to open the door at Bodie Island Lighthouse for the first time in decades; we canvassed to get the first-order Fresnel lens transferred from the US Coast Guard to the National Park Service; and, to kick off preservation of that tower, we had an expert summarize its needs. While a professional company worked at Cape Hatteras as part of the initial relocation preparation efforts, OBLHS funded scaffolding from that job site to be moved to the Bodie Island Lighthouse to determine restoration needs there. It took years, but funding followed.

It has been a challenging yet rewarding twenty-five years that have taken us to all the great lighthouses in the state multiple times. We made friends, and some became like family. To gather and see our lighthouses surrounded by an adoring public including kids, photographers, and artists is a treasured memory. Thank you to all who have been part of the team, who have donated precious time and money, who have written encouraging notes to us. Stay with us and spread the word: We need youth to take interest and become involved in our lights' future. The young must be exposed to the great stories behind these beautiful edifices, their unique architecture, stonework, ironwork, and the grandeur of their lights breaking the darkness that man has followed to safety for centuries.

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1995



LIGHTHOUSE NEWS

DEDICATED TO
UNITED STATES LIGHTHOUSE ESTABLISHMENT

1st Issue - Complimentary

Winter 1995
Volume One
Number One

The Lost Roanoke River Light Found!

*Couple from Ohio Discovers Lighthouse
Miles from its original location!*

On September 5th, the Society is formally incorporated. The first issue of Lighthouse News, an 8-page compilation of articles and information on all North Carolina lighthouses is published, starting a long and successful tradition. and the first "information page" on the Internet is created by Steve Shelton. Also, the Society purchases original plan drawings of several North Carolina lighthouses from the National Archives and donates them to the Outer Banks History Center to support the History Center's goal of having the largest collection of graphic material related to NC lighthouses.

In 1996, the first annual Keepers' Dinner, hosted by island artist Glenn Eure, is held. Featured speakers include Elinor DeWire, author of four books about lighthouses, and David Stick, pre-eminent Outer-Banks author and historian. This year also marks the beginning of the Society's involvement with the "Save the Lighthouse" campaign for the preservation and protection of the Cape Hatteras Lighthouse. Volunteers begin working at Bodie Island and Cape Hatteras lights to share information with visitors.



1997



The Outer Banks Lighthouse Society becomes the first non-profit organization to vote to support the National Park Service in moving the Cape Hatteras Lighthouse to save it, and donates a Harbour Lights replica of the lighthouse to NC Senate Majority Leader Marc Basnight, who, in turn, presents it to President Bill Clinton in Raleigh while requesting federal support for moving the lighthouse. The first tee-shirts are designed to promote the Society.

Society volunteers continue to help out at Bodie and Cape Hatteras lighthouses. The Society writes a letter of support for the application of the Cape Hatteras Lighthouse to be included on the National Registry of Historic Places, and on October 19th, the lighthouse is granted the status of National Historic Landmark. The society donates an exhibit panel installed in an interpretive display at Cape Lookout Lighthouse.



1999



During the "Move of the Century," Society volunteers are treated to a special visit underneath the lighthouse and some get to lay bricks for the new foundation. Bruce and Cheryl Shelton-Roberts are asked by the Park Service to produce and publish a booklet on the move process which becomes a best-seller. Member and songwriter Bett Padgett releases her song "Hatteras: If a Lighthouse Could Speak." At the Keepers' dinner, signed hardhats from the move are auctioned off, with the proceeds earmarked for finishing the restoration of the keepers' quarters. The Society donates \$5,000 to be used for exhibits at the Cape Hatteras Lighthouse.

The Hatteras Lighthouse reopens to the public for climbing. OBLHS spends much of the year planning and organizing the Hatteras Keepers Descendants homecoming, co-sponsored by the Park Service, to be held in 2001. Bruce Roberts obtains a corporate sponsorship of \$10,000 from Bank of America. Cheryl Shelton-Roberts, along with OBLHS member and professional genealogist Sandra Clunies, researches the Cape Hatteras keepers oral history book. The Society researches and pays for the engraving of the Hatteras Lighthouse keepers' names on 36 foundation stones. In addition, the Society begins supporting the much needed repair and restoration work on the Bodie Island Lighthouse.



2001



In January, A.C. Joyner & daughter begin engraving 36 foundation stones with 83 Hatteras Light keeper's names. The monument is designed and paid for by the Society and comes to be known the "Circle of Stones." In May, the Society and Park Service welcome over 1,100 guests to the Hatteras Keepers Descendants Homecoming. Events include a re-dedication ceremony, unveiling of the circle of stones, a panel discussion, and a life-saving drill at Chicamacomico Life-Saving Station. In addition, the Society writes letters of support to help the Outer Banks Conservationists gain ownership of the Currituck Beach Light Station.

In September, OBLHS and the Chesapeake Chapter of the USLHS hold a joint event in Virginia, climbing the Old and New Cape Henry Lighthouses, cruising past six other lights, and touring Old Point Comfort Lighthouse, Portsmouth Lightship, and the Virginia Beach Life-Saving Station. The Society also sponsors two structural engineering reports and provides the scaffolding to determine needed repairs at Bodie Island Lighthouse. In addition, the DVD Growing up at the Lighthouse, a 40-minute recording of the surviving Keepers' children at Bodie Island is produced as part of the Society's efforts to help with the restoration of Bodie.



2003



The Society holds a special weekend in October entitled "Two Hundred Years of Light" at the Circle of Stones at the Cape Hatteras Lighthouse to commemorate the bicentennial of the 1803 Cape Hatteras Lighthouse; special addresses by authors Homer Hickam, Kevin Duffus, and David Stick make the event memorable. The Society votes to have yearly events at different NC lighthouses. Thanks in part to the efforts of OBLHS, Bodie Island Lighthouse is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Society holds a retreat in June, visiting Currituck Beach, Bodie Island, Cape Hatteras, and Ocracoke lighthouses in one weekend. In October, the first Keepers Weekend to be held at Cape Lookout is a great success, featuring an evening cruise, a lighthouse climb, and trips to Portsmouth Island and Shackleford Banks. The Society works with the Park Service to keep the original Fresnel lens in the Bodie Island Lighthouse instead of it being removed. OBLHS purchases original engineering drawings and letters for Bodie Island, which are donated to the Outer Banks History Center. Society member Bett Padgett begins her ten-year tenure as President of the Society.



2005



OBLHS contributes money and manpower to restore the irreplaceable Bodie Island Lighthouse first-order Fresnel lens, which is transferred from the US Coast Guard to the National Park Service in May. Society members also volunteer over four weeks to transport, clean, and begin the restoration of the Cape Hatteras Fresnel lens at the Graveyard of the Atlantic Museum. A second retreat is held with visits to Oak Island, Old Baldy, and Price's Creek lighthouses. The annual Keeper's Weekend is held at the Comfort Inn South and members visit the replicas of the Roanoke Marshes lighthouse and *Elizabeth II* ship in Manteo.

A group of OBLHS members visit the US Coast Guard's National Aids to Navigation Museum (NATON) and Training Center in Yorktown, Virginia. The Society contributes \$10,000 to the National Park Service for repairs to the Bodie Island Lighthouse, and after repairs are delayed, initiates meetings and a letter-writing campaign. Displays funded by OBLHS on NC lighthouses are installed at Roanoke River Museum in Plymouth, NC.



2007



OBLHS donates \$2,000 to kick-start a campaign to raise funds for emergency repairs at the 1854 Chicamacomico Life-Saving Station. The Society partners with *Our State* magazine to help raise funds for NC lighthouses. And the Keepers' Weekend on Ocracoke Island is remembered for talks by island native and historian Earl O'Neal, a rare Ocracoke Lighthouse climb, a ghost walk, and dinner at the famous Howard's Pub.

The Society funds the ferry and entrance fees for 108 fourth grade schoolchildren from Southport, NC to visit and learn about Old Baldy Lighthouse. Board members participate in a workday in Plymouth, NC to help clean, paint, and refurbish the replica Roanoke River Lighthouse. The Keepers' Weekend focuses on Oak Island and Old Baldy lighthouses, with a special visit to the Oak Island Coast Guard station and a talk on Federal Point.



The Bodie Island Lighthouse restoration begins. OBLHS Board members climb the lighthouse to help document needed repairs, and volunteers continue work on the Fresnel lens which had been brought down from the lantern room in 2005. The Society, along with professional genealogists Sandra McLean Clunies and Kay Midgett Sheppard, provides genealogical research for keepers' descendants at the 150th anniversary of Cape Lookout Lighthouse. In addition, they pledge \$10,000 to return the original Fresnel lens from Block Island, Rhode Island, where it had been residing to Cape Lookout. Cheryl Shelton-Roberts is the keynote speaker at the 10th anniversary celebration of the moving of the Cape Hatteras Lighthouse.

The Bruce Roberts Photojournalist exhibit, sponsored by Our State Magazine, opens at the Outer Banks History Center, honoring the Society's co-founder and photographer extraordinaire. Society members visit Bodie Island Lighthouse one last time as restoration work begins. Planning and research begin for a Bodie Island Lighthouse Keepers' Descendants Homecoming, nicknamed "BOLD." The October Keepers' Weekend includes a trip to the little-visited Portsmouth Island, where longtime member Richard Meissner is president of their historical society.



The Society sponsors 4th graders from Harkers Island on a trip to visit the Cape Lookout Lighthouse. OBLHS donates \$5,000 in emergency funds to Chicamacomico Life-Saving Station after Hurricane Irene tears the 1897 boat house off of its pilings. OBLHS begins its now-annual tradition of participating in OBXmas at the Cape Hatteras Lighthouse for a free-free climbing day. A very full Keepers' Weekend takes members from Bodie Island to the Pea Island Cookhouse to Island Farm and then on up to the Currituck Beach Light! Also, in this year the Society launches its Facebook page, run by Board member Bob DaVia, which now, in 2019, boasts over 2,850 members!

During this year's Keepers' Weekend, members visit the remote Price's Creek range river light, Fort Fisher State Park, the site of the Federal Point Lighthouse, and enjoy a dinner cruise on the Cape Fear River, while hearing a talk by Leslie Bright, chair of the Federal Point Historic Preservation Society. The Society awards \$5,000 grant monies to Chicamacomico Life-Saving-Station to aid in general funds and upkeep.



2013



The Bodie Island Lighthouse restoration is completed in March 2013, and in April the Park Service holds a relighting ceremony and opens the lighthouse to the public for climbing for the first time in its history. In October, OBLHS hosts a homecoming for Bodie Island Lighthouse Keepers' descendants (BOLD) and 300 lighthouse keeper's descendants attend. Cheryl-Shelton Roberts and genealogist Sandy McLean Clunies spend years researching and interviewing families and publish the "Bodie Island Lighthouse Keepers Oral and Family Histories" and a copy is given to each descendant. Bett Padgett continues visiting 4th graders at E. Clayton Elementary to share stories of NC lighthouses.

After 10 years of service as President of the Society, Bett Padgett hands over the gavel to longtime member Diana Chappell at our annual Board meeting. In May, board member John Havel designs and installs an exhibit on the Lighthouse Society and NC's lighthouses at the Hatteras Island Ocean Center in Hatteras Village. The annual Keepers' Weekend is held at Cape Hatteras Lighthouse and a group takes a drive down to visit Cape Point. The annual dinner is held at the Graveyard of the Atlantic Museum and speakers are historian and author Kevin Duffus and Society member and historian John Havel.





The Society sponsors and participates in the rededication ceremony for the circle of stones at the Keepers of the Light Amphitheater. The Society helps choose the site for the move, designs the layout for the stones and organizes the ceremony. OBLHS Board member John Havel installs a major exhibit detailing the move of the Cape Hatteras Lighthouse in the foyer of Mann Hall, home of NCSU's School of Civil & Environmental Engineering in Raleigh. Alumni of the move, including Bob Woody, Mike Booher, Skellie Hunt's family, and OBLHS Board member Bett Padgett attend.

For the first time in its history, the Society cancels its annual Keepers' Weekend planned at the Cape Lookout Lighthouse due to Hurricane Matthew. In May, a meeting is held at the Cape Hatteras Principal Keeper's Quarters to discuss a permanent marker for the original site of the 1870 lighthouse. Park Superintendent Dave Hallac, Deputy Superintendent Mark Dowdle, Cultural Resource Manager Jami Lanier, as well as representatives from the Hatteras Island Genealogical Society and OBLHS members John & Aida Havel, and Bett & Bill Padgett are in attendance. John presents concept drawings for a marker design that are discussed and voted on to move ahead with pending necessary funding.



At a social gathering held Friday before our annual Board meeting at Board member Cyndy Holda's beautiful home in Manns Harbor, the Board honors Jim and Mabry O'Donnell for 22 (!) years of outstanding service as Co-Secretaries of the Society. The Society again continues to man the Cape Hatteras Lighthouse for OBXmas so that for one day in December the lighthouse is open for a fee-free climb to all islanders and visitors. OBLHS celebrates the launch of a new, redesigned, responsive OBLHS website created by graphic designer John Havel.

The Society donates several boxes of Keepers' Weekend documents, including programs, board meeting minutes, and other miscellaneous items to the Outer Banks History Center in Manteo, NC. The archive is assembled and organized by Board President Richard Meissner and Board Member Judy Moon carefully curates the collection and creates a Finding Aid. (the collection proved very useful in creating this timeline!) The Keepers' Weekend scheduled for Cape Lookout is again cancelled, this time due to Hurricane Michael. OBLHS members again participate in OBXmas.



Board members Doug Stover and John and Aida Havel work closely with the NPS on the planning and implementation of a special day, July 1st, commemorating the 20th anniversary of the moving of the Cape Hatteras Lighthouse. 1999 project leaders and alumni attend including OBLHS friend Joe Jakubik, brothers Jerry and Jim Matyiko, photographer Mike Booher, Bob Woody, and many more "move celebrities." Events include speeches, a panel discussion, and the opening of a new museum exhibit on the move in the Double Keepers' Quarters. The annual Keepers' Weekend is held at Currituck Beach Lighthouse in Corolla, and the Society joyfully celebrates 25 years of existence and advocacy for NC's beloved beacons of light!