

"He who does not look ahead remains behind." ~ Spanish proverb

Most local folks, vacationers and lighthouse lovers are aware of the Hereford Inlet Lighthouse in North Wildwood. The unique, Victorian style Lighthouse was designed by Paul J. Pelz, architect of the Library of Congress. It is listed on both the State and National Registers of Historic Buildings and is the only one of its kind on the east coast. Hereford was the first permanently occupied building on the island and its construction led to the birth of all of the Wildwood communities that exist today.

The early Anglesea settlers sought shelter here during some horrific storms and the islands first religious services were held in the Lighthouse parlor.

Since 1874, Herefords bright beacon has saved the lives of countless numbers of mariners traveling along the treacherous, shoal lined, coast of New Jersey. Even in 2011, it continues on as an active aid to navigation.

During the last decade, the Lighthouse has been undergoing a meticulous, accurate restoration based on its original plans. In 2004, the project was awarded the New Jersey State Preservation Award.

Since 1983, Hereford has been opened to the public as a museum that spotlights the life of a lighthouse keeper from the late 19th to the mid 20th century. Tens of thousands of visitors have toured the magnificent old building, bought souvenirs, attended special events, participated in the "Buy a Brick Campaign," taken part in the annual Christmas ceremony and strolled through the Victorian cottage gardens. 750 dues paying members from all over the country help support this historic landmark.

As the chairman of the "Friends of Hereford Inlet Lighthouse, I have to admit it has been many years of exhausting, never ending work but a total labor of love for myself, my fellow board members and our very small group of dedicated volunteers. I couldn't think of a better cause than helping to preserve, promote and manage the most important historic building in the Wildwoods.

It may not be common knowledge but just as much and just as important history occurred a stones throw away from Hereford Lighthouse. This history was very much interrelated with that of the Lighthouse.

Just north and adjoining the Lighthouse property, where the State Police Station is today there existed 2 other organizations. The first was the U.S. Life Saving Service which had a station at that location from 1872 to 1915 (there was a primitive version of a life saving station near there as early as 1850)

Like the Lighthouse Service, the Life Saving Service was in the business of saving lives and ships. The Lighthouse did it by warning - the Life Saving Station by rescue. A highly trained crew of 7 of the toughest, most fearless, men in the county, all expert boat men, lived at this station from fall to spring. They drilled every day in all of the various meth-

Historic Anglesea Maritime Village

By Steve Murray



An artist's rendering of the proposed Anglesea Maritime Village

ods of life saving and walked lookout watches 24 hours a day.

If a ship ran aground on one of the many sandbars near the Inlet, where the crashing waves over the shallow water can be treacherous, the vessel would eventually be battered to pieces.

Once noticed the Life Saving crew would launch their surf boat into the breakers and them row out the one or 2 miles to the wreck. This could happen any time - on a sunny day, in a thick fog, in the middle of the night, in a January blizzard or in the middle of a northeaster or hurricane. Their motto was appropriately "you have to go out - you don't have to come back"

If they were unable to launch their boat, that had a small cannon (Lyle gun) from which they fired a weight with a light line attached. This would be aimed to fall across the sinking ship. The victims would then pull in this light line from shore which would have a pulley and a heavier line attached at the other end. Written instructions told them how to rig this up, high on a mast and the crew on shore would send out a "breeches buoy" rescue device. This was a life ring with pant legs attached. The line and pulley set up worked like one of the old fashion continuous clothesline. One by one each victim would sit inside the buoy and be pulled safely above the water to the beach.

The Anglesea Life Saving crew were always very busy. There were over 60 major wrecks near the Inlet involving merchant schooners, commercial fishing boats and even huge steamships. Hundreds of incidents involving small boats were so frequent they were not even recorded.

In 1915 the U.S. Coast Guard absorbed the duties of the Life Saving Service and moved into their old station. The sign above the boathouse doors now read "U.S. Coast Guard". They would continue on with most of the same duties but with one important change. They were now a military group

charged with the duty of protecting our coastline. The government also declared that in the event of war, the Coast Guard would be put under the command of the Department of the Navy.

This happened first in 1917 during WW I. German submarines prowled the east coast, stalking and lying in wait to torpedo defenseless merchant ships. Despite the Coast Guards vigilance, many ships were destroyed and many lives were lost. The merchant schooner Dorothy Barrett was even attacked and sunk within sight of the North Wildwood beach.

Prohibition came along and the Coast Guard was in another war - that against the "rumrunners". Numerous high speed pursuits often with an exchange of gunfire were quite common during these times.

In 1939, a new Coast Guard "Life Boat Station" was erected. This is the building presently next to the Lighthouse and where the State Police are stationed. That same year, the Coast Guard absorbed the duties of the Lighthouse Service and the entire property was now Coast Guard territory.

WW II came along, and for the second time they became an arm of the navy. Drilling and target practice were done daily. The beaches near the station still had banner planes flying, but not with advertisements. They were pulling paper targets for anti aircraft practice from the beach.

In addition to lookouts and boat patrols, the Coast Guard now had a mounted beach patrol, in which men on horse back with carbine and side arms, trotted along Wildwoods beaches.

The nearby Naval Air Station took advantage of the Inlet water as part of their training. Pilots in training were strapped into the cockpit of a Corsair fighter suspended from a crane. This was dropped below the waters surface and an officer with a stop watch timed the escape.

Once again, 25 years after WW I, German U boats became an even greater threat along the coast. So many merchant ships were taken by surprise that daily patrols went out looking for debris, fuel trails, survivors on life rafts and sadly, the oil soaked bodies of the dead.

The war ended and the Coast Guard resumed its regular routine of assistance to ships in distress, rescues and marine law enforcement.

1964 saw the beginning of the automation of lighthouses and Hereford became one of the first. The Coast Guard vacated the Life Boat Station as well as the Lighthouse.

Later that year a new organization, the N.J. Marine Police, moved into the building. The story continues of course, right to the present and history is still being made.

As you can see the Lighthouse shared not just common ground with these other organizations but a common history as well. The sad fact and problem is the only part of this fascination history that is preserved and displayed for the public is that connected with the Lighthouse.

Those of us, past and present stewards of Hereford Lighthouse have had a dream for many years. This dream is to acquire the old Life Boat Station and combine it (back) with the Lighthouse. This grouping of buildings would form one museum complex - "Historic Anglesea Maritime Village"

We are optimistic enough to even have a detailed plan. The main building of the station would serve as the entranceway to the "village". Here you would get your admission ticket and view the orientation video. The various rooms would feature displays telling the complete maritime history of Hereford Inlet which would include the Anglesea fishermen, the Life Saving Station, Coast Guard, Lighthouse, Marine Police, the Marine Services Bureau, as well as the North Wildwood Beach Patrol. The station house would also have a much larger gift shop which would be relocated from the Lighthouse.

The boat house and maintenance garage would also be used to house interpretive displays of our maritime history.

After finishing at the Life Boat Station, visitors would stroll over to the Lighthouse to tour there. Hereford at this point, would become a living history museum, much like the Physick Estate in Cape May. The Lighthouse keepers "wife", in Victorian costume, would guide folks through the rooms furnished just like the Lighthouse family from 1880 was still living there.

What about the State Police that currently occupy the Life Boat Station? This is the road block. No one is disregarding the importance of this division of Homeland Security. We want them to stay in Cape May County and their history, past and present, is just as important as the others I have briefly described.



"What then is time? If no one asks me, I know what it is. If I wish to explain it to him who asks, I do not know." ~Saint Augustine

A relocation of this unit however, would be a Godsend for the Lighthouse and themselves. There has not been boat launching capability at the site since the early 1960's. Vessels have to be taken by trailer to various public and private boat slips. In addition to this, the station is composed of 3-73 year old wood frame buildings, really not set up efficiently for a 21st century law enforcement agency. It's an extremely antiquated setup for them and we have a constant fear that invasive "modernizing" of the buildings will occur and ruin the historic integrity of the station.

Our current mission is to try to find a better location for the Police, somewhere on the water, that is agreeable to the Superintendent of the Marine Services Bureau. A major factor in this plan is, of course, money.

We have support for this project from North Wildwoods Mayor & Council, many of our State political leaders, other historic sites and museums, retired Coast Guard, and thousands of signatures on a petition.

Here's hoping this article will get more supporters on board. Please spread the word.

You can learn more about the Maritime History of North Wildwood in the book "Guardians of the Hereford Inlet" by Steve Murray. It is available at the Hereford Lighthouse or at www.herefordlighthouse.org



BUILT 1874

HEREFORD LIGHTHOUSE GARDENS & GIFT SHOP

1st & Central Ave., North Wildwood
609-522-4520

DAILY TOURS OF THIS
HISTORICAL LANDMARK

Save the Date!

2nd Annual Maritime Festival
SAT & SUN July 16th & 17th
Vendors, Historic displays,
artists, music, food
9 AM - 5 PM

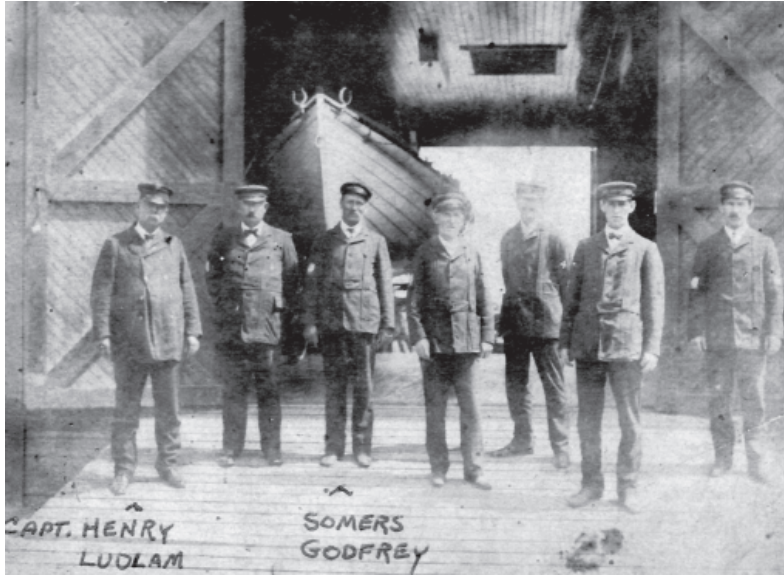
www.herefordlighthouse.org



Hereford Inlet CG Station, near Hereford Inlet Lighthouse {Anglesea, North Wildwood}. The station was built in 1849 and was moved in 1882 because of the threatening ocean. In 1888, a new station was built. The building onsite today dates from the 1936-1940 period. The station closed in 1964.



Local Anglesea residents in front of the Lighthouse after the storm of 1913



Hereford Inlet Lifesaving Crew in front of the station, c. 1900



Wrecked Schooner off the coast of Anglesea in the late 1800s



US Coast Guard, WWI



Hereford Inlet Lifesaving Crew in front of the station, 1890



Mounted USCG
Left~ WWI
Above~ WWII