



THE POMHAM GLOW

Friends of Pomham Rocks Lighthouse,
A Chapter of the American Lighthouse Foundation
Mission Statement

To ensure the historic restoration and preservation of Pomham Rocks Lighthouse and to improve public awareness, appreciation and access to Pomham Rocks Lighthouse.

OCTOBER 2021

POMHAM'S FRESNEL LENS COMES HOME



POMHAM ROCKS LIGHTHOUSE'S ANTIQU BEACON WELCOMED HOME

Built on an island in Narragansett Bay in 1871, Pomham Rocks Lighthouse is celebrating its 150th birthday in a special way. Its antique classic fourth order Fresnel lens, the iconic lighthouse beacon, removed from the tower in 1974, was returned the first week of September. It will be the focal point of the lighthouse's museum exhibit. It is one of only about 250 fourth order lenses in existence in the United States. Only two others can be seen in museums in RI.

The return home was a bittersweet journey for Dennis Tardiff. As a young U.S. Coast Guardsman, Tardiff received his first assignment at Pomham Rocks Lighthouse in 1971, the year that it turned 100. There was no hoopla or celebration, just two weeks on and one week off, with a three-man crew performing official keeper duties, including maintaining the fourth order Fresnel lens in the tower. He left the year the lens left, in 1974, when the Coast Guard decommissioned the light station. As Officer-in-Charge, Tardiff handed over the keys to The Lighthouse to the civilian family which next occupied it. Now, 50 years later, as The Lighthouse turns 150, Tardiff is Chair of the Board of Directors of Friends of Pomham Rocks Lighthouse, the volunteer group that has restored and maintains the lighthouse. He was instrumental in facilitating discussions with the U.S. Coast

Guard, which owns the lens, and Custom House Maritime Museum, where it was displayed for 46 years. Those discussions ultimately resulted in its return home.

One of only a handful of Coast Guard certified lampists in the country, Kurt Fosburg brought a wealth of knowledge and experience and a Jeep full of tools to Riverside in early September. The Michigan owner of Superior Lighthouse Restoration, he has restored more than 100 Fresnel lenses across the country. He was entrusted to move, repair, clean and polish the antique optical equipment. Every job is unique, he noted, and has its challenges.



Holding the 225-pound antique glass lens by its brass frame, the moving team lifts it off a high platform onto a table in the first step of the move in Newburyport.

On September 1, 2021, the chime of a Coast Guard bell from an adjacent room of the lens in the Custom House Maritime Museum marked the historic move. Lifting the 225-pound glass lens off a four-foot-high platform in the Newburyport Museum and carting it down the granite steps of the 1835 Custom House took a well-designed plan, teamwork and a lot of muscle. The lens was placed on the base of a wooden crate that Fosburg created for the historic transfer. Once cushioned in protective wrap and

quilts, the moving crate was assembled around the beehive-shaped lantern and was carried, Egyptian-style, on two wooden poles. Assisting in this effort were two Coast Guard Boatswain's Mates from nearby Coast Guard Station Merrimack River. Board members of Custom House Maritime Museum and Pomham Rocks Lighthouse were on hand to witness the transfer. The lens was lifted into a Jeep, which carried it back to its home in Riverside, RI. Upon arrival in Riverside, RI, the same technique was used to transport the lens to the volunteer group's boat, and after arriving on the island, to bring it into the lighthouse.



The lens being crated for the trip back to Pomham



Carrying the crated lens back into Pomham Rocks Lighthouse are Gary Point, Kurt Fosburg, Alex Dias and Dennis Tardiff

Fosburg installed the Fresnel lens on a pedestal in Pomham's lighthouse museum. A replica brass oil lamp, which he made, was placed inside. The lamp originally produced the light inside the lens. Creating replicas of lamps and pedestals is another one of Fosburg's areas of expertise. In 2019, he built the rotating lens pedestal and lamp for the Academy Award nominated motion picture, "The Lighthouse," starring Willem Dafoe and Robert Pattinson.

The 175-pound steel and brass pedestal that the Fresnel lens is now displayed on,

was brought down from Pomham's tower using a block and tackle technique. It is the same pedestal that held this lens from the time it first arrived at Pomham Rocks around 1926 until it was removed in 1974. A good polish was needed on the pedestal before being paired back with the Fresnel lens. To replace it, Fosburg created a replica of a pedestal, similar to one that would have held Pomham's first lens, a smaller sixth order Fresnel lens, when it was first lit on December 1, 1871. The replica pedestal now holds the LED light installed and maintained by the U.S. Coast Guard as an active aid to navigation.



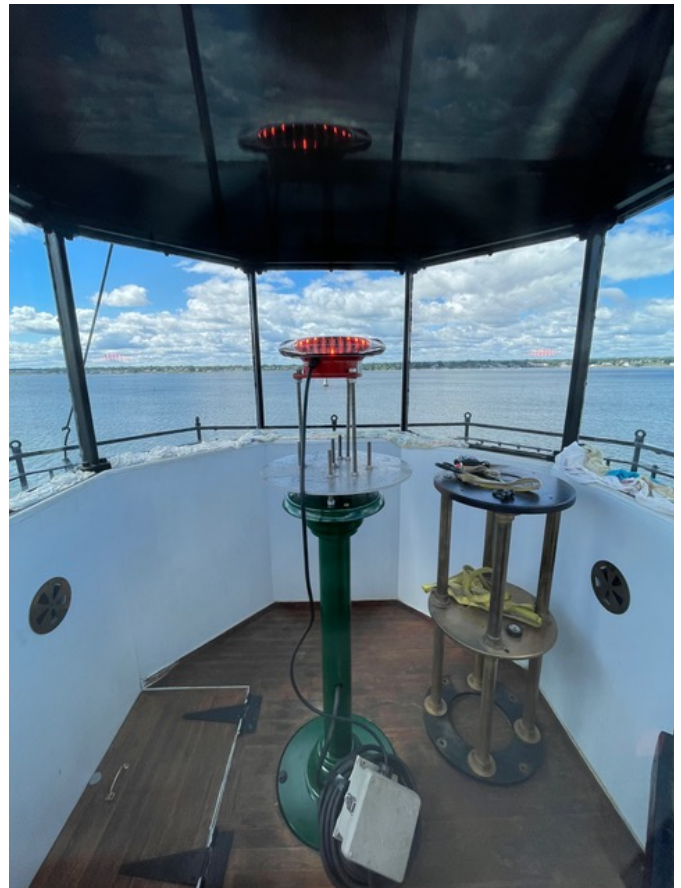
Polishing the brass pedestal



The original 4th order pedestal being lowered from the lantern room by block and tackle



Carrying the replicated 6th order stand to the lantern room where the current LED optic will be placed on



The current LED light, placed on a replica of the 1871 pedestal, contrasts with the original 4th order pedestal

“This is a beautiful fourth order Fresnel lens,” Fosburg stated. “My job is to restore it and stabilize it,” he said, as he masterfully removed decades-old paint drips and applied a crystal-clear solution to resolidify the lethargic, the putty-like substance holding the 54 pieces of glass in the brass frame. Everybody loves lighthouses, he noted. But lighthouses are really all about lenses, he explained. The house was there only for the keeper and his family. And the keeper was there only to tend to the light. It was the multiple glass prisms of the lens that bent all

the light to produce one strong beam that provided safety for those at sea. And it was Augustin-Jean Fresnel who created this revolutionary specialized lens.



Lampist Kurt Fosburg cleans decades-old paint drips off the surface of the lens.

Working hand in hand with the lampist was Friends of Pomham Rocks Lighthouse Vice Chair Alex Dias. It was Dias who led the search for a lampist. Classic Fresnel lenses are rare, fragile and require expert care. They can only be moved and restored by a U.S. Coast Guard-certified lampist. In 1871 when Pomham Rocks Lighthouse was built, there were hundreds of active

lighthouses lit by Fresnel lenses in the country, and the United States Lighthouse Service employed lampists to care for them. A century and a half later, the number of both has declined sharply. Dias researched and provided essential information for the fabrication of replica pieces and construction of the display platform. As one of the final steps for display, he carefully positioned the red glass chimney, which produced Pomham's distinctive glow, on the replica oil lamp and placed it inside the restored lens. In constant communication with the lampist in preparation for the move, he also volunteered as his assistant on the job. As Chair of the Museum Committee, Dias considers Pomham's Fresnel lens as the showpiece of the museum's collection and a valuable tool for educating visitors.



The replicated 4th order Funck lamp

Jeremy D'Entremont, president of the American Lighthouse Foundation (ALF), and his wife, Charlotte, drove down from Maine to witness and chronicle the final stages of lens restoration. In 2010, ExxonMobil donated Pomham Rocks Lighthouse and the island it occupies to the Foundation, the national organization dedicated to preserving lighthouses. Friends of Pomham Rocks Lighthouse is a chapter of ALF. Historian for the U.S. Lighthouse Society, D'Entremont is author or co-author of more than 20 books. First-time visitors to the newly restored lighthouse, the

D'Entremonts admired the attention to historic detail throughout the building.

At the completion of the project, with Pomham's Fresnel lens bolted to its highly polished original pedestal, volunteers who had helped facilitate the move and Kurt Fosburg, the lampist who had meticulously planned and implemented the process, made a circle around the newly restored lens.



Lampist Kurt Fosburg performs restoration work on the Fresnel lens

Dave Kelleher, one of founders of Friends of Pomham Rocks Lighthouse, led the group in a champagne toast, honoring all, who

since 2004 have helped make this moment possible, giving thanks for the return of Pomham's lens – the soul of the lighthouse – and pledging to preserve and care for it forever.

It was the culmination of a journey that started in 1974 and ended just in time for The Lighthouse's 150th anniversary.

Public tours of the lighthouse are planned for 2022.



*The completed Fresnel lens display with replica
Funck lamp*

ANNUAL MEETING

**SAVE THE DATE: NOVEMBER 14th,
12:30 P.M.**

Our Annual Meeting, to be held during Pomham Rocks Lighthouse's 150th year of "guiding ships along the Bay" will take place on Sunday, November 14 at the Hillside Country Club in Rehoboth. While it doesn't command a water view, it is a lovely venue that can accommodate our increased membership numbers! The club is on one floor making access easy for all. And there is plenty of parking!

Sadly, we outgrew the RI Yacht Club, which served us so well these past few years, but look forward to the space that Hillside Country Club provides.

The menu choices will be: Chicken piccata sautéed in lemon caper butter sauce, traditional New England baked cod in seasoned bread crumbs & white wine sauce, or seasoned vegetable ravioli. The accompaniments include: rolls and butter, mixed green salad, chef's vegetable medley and red bliss mashed potatoes. Tea and coffee will be served. Dessert will be a 150th celebration cake. And for those seeking more exotic imbibing, there will be a cash bar. The ticket cost will be \$35. A separate flyer has been mailed out to every member with more information.

Aside from the business meeting, there will be a special video presentation of the return voyage of our Fresnel lens from its "vacation" at the Customhouse Maritime

Museum to its home on Narragansett Bay. It's a heartwarming story, and a splendid sight!

We look forward to being together again and hope you will be part of our special 150th anniversary annual meeting.

For everyone's comfort and safety, we are asking any guest who has not been vaccinated to please wear a mask when not eating. We will be seating no more than 8 people to a table which seats 10, and tables will be spaced comfortably apart. All servers at Hillside will be wearing masks.

POMHAM SANTA

Following tradition, Santa will once again make his appearance on the Providence River to herald the holiday season this year. Weather permitting, he will climb aboard the Lady Pomham II at around 1:00 pm on December 11th from the docks at Haines Park, make the trip around the Terrace of Riverside, and cruise along the shoreline until his arrival at Pomham Rocks Lighthouse. The best viewpoint of Santa's journey will be at Sabin Point Park in Riverside, where volunteers from our events committee will be waiting. There will also be an opportunity to purchase special ornaments commemorating the return home of the Fresnel lens at the park, sold by our events committee.



Ornament for sale

LIGHTHOUSE EXTERIOR MAINTENANCE AND PAINTING

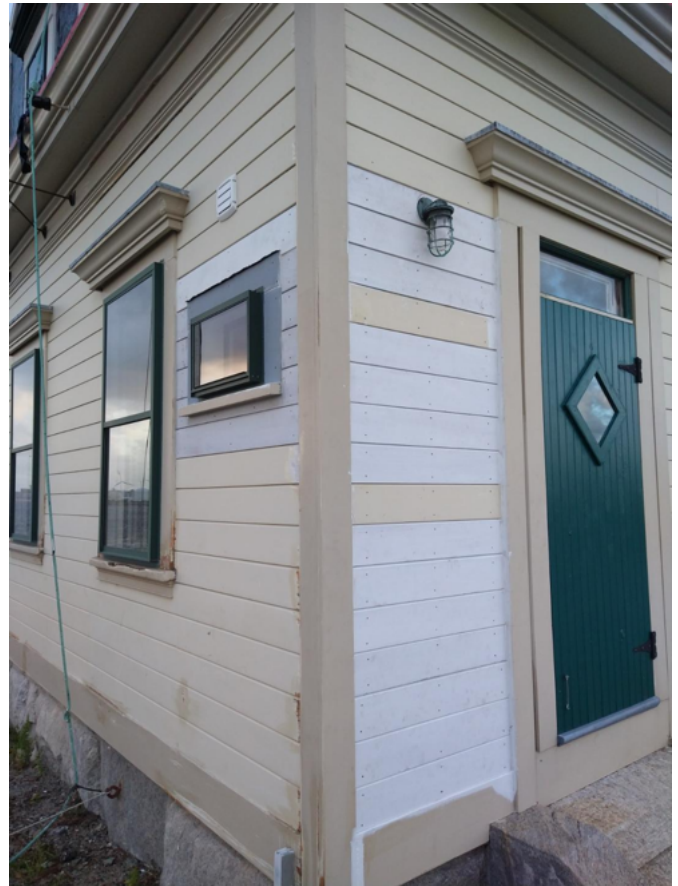
ABCORE Restorations, led by Keith Lescarbeau, began the preparation and transportation of repair materials to the island to start exterior maintenance in mid-September, where work is still on-going.

The first project was to strip the tower of shingles and seal it with a weather wrap. The historically accurate trim boards were installed, and the casings of the three tower windows were replaced as well. Next was the installation of the ship-lap horizontal boards to finish the tower, except for painting.



Watch room being sealed with weather wrap, trim to be added.

All the material being installed on the tower, window casing, trim boards and ship lap is PVC. PVC cuts, forms and looks like wood but is impervious to rot. We will never have a problem with wood rot on the tower again. Other work that has been completed is the replacement of rotted ship-lap and trim boards on the lower areas of the lighthouse. The boards used here are clear grain cedar to better blend with the adjacent existing ship-lap and trim boards. All of the boards were primed and sealed on all sides before installation and installed using stainless steel fasteners. Keith went around the entire lighthouse exposing all the rotted and cracked boards and trim to determine if repair or replacement is needed. You can see some exposed areas in this picture.



Exposed wood rot and repairs on southwest corner

On the dormer casing and trim replacement, Keith took great care replicating the trim detail to match our historical pictures using PVC for the dormers as well. The 6 dormer casings and trims are completed, except for painting. The east side stairs are rotted to the point where a complete overhaul is needed. Repairs to that staircase have begun but are not completed as of this newsletter update.



Replaced window dormers and trim

The cast iron lantern room maintenance, which will include rust removal and other various repairs will start after all other wood repairs are completed, with a complete painting of the entire lighthouse being the last step of the contract. The repairs should be complete within 2-3 weeks.



Wood rot replacement nearly complete

WORK PARTY UPDATE

2021 has been an exceptionally busy year for ground maintenance, and one of our most successful. After the oil tank was removed, volunteers have been busy restoring the uncovered 19th century stone wall that wraps from the north side to the west side of the island. It took many days to fully excavate the old stones, which were toppled over from decades of weathering. Once completely uncovered, all the stones had to be built up and aligned again, before being mortared into place. There were two layers of wall that had to be tended to. The last step in getting the walls to their former glory was to paint them white.



View of stone wall from lantern room



Stone wall almost complete

With the entire lighthouse getting a fresh coat of paint by ABCORE, the oil house, bell foundation, south walk path, and south retaining wall are also getting a new coat of paint, with only finishing touches still to be done in the next few weeks.



Freshly painted south retaining wall

On the inside of the lighthouse, the perfectly operating 1946 General Electric refrigerator's exterior needed a refinish due to thin paint and some rust coming through. The refrigerator was prepared and repainted using appliance white enamel. The door gasket was replaced as well.

And of course, routine lawn maintenance such as grass mowing, brush cutting, and other interior and exterior cleaning continue.

The ongoing restoration of the grounds has been brought closer to its 19th century charm. Work parties will resume in Spring of 2022 to begin preparing the grounds for tours.

Thank you to all work party volunteers for the 2021 season: Sandi Barber, Denise Caron, Mary Chace, Nate Chace, Jay Dent, Sonya Dent, Adam Dias, Alex Dias, Joanne Donahue, Jennifer Estrella, Pat Estrella, Charles Gruetzner, Dave Kelleher, Deborah Laughlin, Andy Leddy, Rick Lux, Stephanie Lux, Fred Mikkelsen, Louise Ornstein, Louise Paiva, Don Paiva, Gary Point, Judianne Point, Matt Skowronek, Dennis Tardiff, Alex Tiernan, and Nikki Tiernan.

150TH YEAR PUBLICITY

To educate the public about the history and significance of Pomham Rocks Lighthouse during its special anniversary, a year-long publicity plan was developed. Topics publicized included: January – membership; February – 150th celebration announcement and teen volunteer recruitment; March – photo/art contest announcement; April – Lighthouse Run; May – Fresnel lens return announcement; June – RI Hospital nurses' pin link to Lighthouse; July – keeper grave marker ceremony; August – community information booth and merchandise sale at The Looff

Arts Festival, interview with lampist and 150th display at City Hall; September – Fresnel lens transfer/welcome home and sale of Deneen mugs; October – Fresnel lens Christmas ornament sale; December – Pomham Santa, and the 150th anniversary lighting.

We shared our story through print, electronic and social media, appearing in local publications, media in towns and cities throughout RI and southeastern MA, on WJAR-TV, on the front cover of the East Providence Reporter, and on the front page of the Providence Journal. We were featured in a podcast of American Lighthouse Foundation's president, Jeremy D'Entremont, appeared on the United States Lighthouse Society website and were featured multiple times in the national publication, Lighthouse Digest.

In all, articles about Pomham Rocks Lighthouse appeared more than 200 times this year. As a result, new members joined the Friends. Participation in the photo/art contest and Lighthouse Run helped to increase awareness for the lighthouse and merchandise sold well. Most of all, we were able to share our passion for preserving a 150-year-old house on a rock to thousand of individuals who recognize the importance of preserving an important historical landmark and its impact on our community's maritime heritage.

A big thank you to Louise Paiva, whose efforts and outreach have helped raise

awareness of Pomham Rocks Lighthouse on a broader scale for the Lighthouse's 150th celebration.

STORIES FROM THE LIGHTHOUSE PART 4 - STEAMING INTO THE 20th CENTURY

At the turn of the century, Providence was the richest city in America and the waters surrounding the five lighthouses were busier than ever. People were moving from farms to the city for better jobs at Brown and Sharpe and Gorham Silver, and more immigrants were arriving daily for the same reasons. Labor Day had become a holiday a few years earlier to recognize these workers. After thousands marched in the first Labor Day parade, 10,000 people crowded the wharves to head for celebrations at Rocky Point and Crescent Park. Soon the river was churning with steamers racing to and from as the amusement parks and shore dinner halls filled up. It was the height of activity for the lighthouses.



Mount Hope Steamer, Courtesy of Ewen Collection

Riverside's resorts were booming as Rhode Island workers had better pay and their families had more leisure time. Besides the locals, tourists from New York and Boston flocked to the resorts that offered beaches and swimming, fishing, dancing halls, amusement parks, sailing, shore dinners, and escape from the hot cities to the cool breezes of Narragansett Bay. Thanks to the parks like Vanity Fair, Rocky Point, and Crescent Park, the area became known as the "Coney Island of New England". When Vanity Fair opened in Riverside in 1907, there were 40,000 visitors on the first day! Passenger steamers sailed by Pomham Lighthouse all day, and she heard about such wild attractions that it almost made her turret spin! Roller coasters with children screaming, people flying down a towering water chute, wild animal zoos, and even an attraction called "Fighting the Flames" where performers jumped out of a smoking building and into a net held by make-believe firemen! Pomham Light wondered why people would put themselves in such danger when she was doing everything she could to keep them safe!



"Shooting the Chutes. Vanity Fair, East Providence, R.I." (1915)

But the story she liked most was about Charles Looff, a wood carver from New York City who liked to carve wooden horses as a hobby. He invented the first steam powered carousel and built his first one for Coney Island. A few years later, Mr. Looff came to Riverside with his family, and eventually he wound up running Crescent Park. He turned it into the top amusement park in New England! Pomham Light wished she could see those beautiful hand carved horses on his carousel. The tourists were always talking about their favorite ones. But most of all she was just happy that such a beautiful (and safe!) ride was right there at Crescent Park.

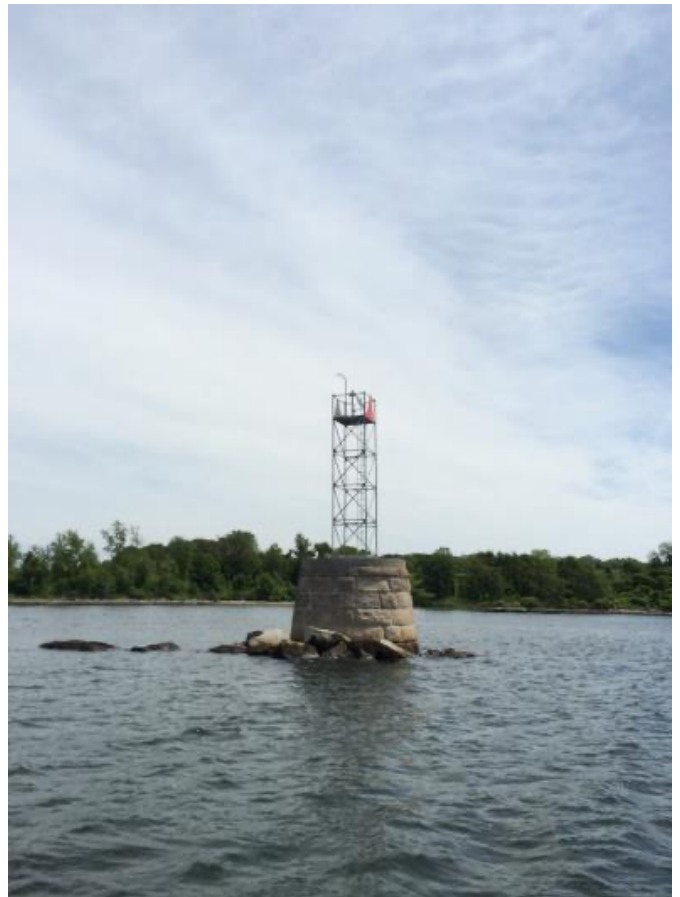


Charles I.D. Looff family at Crescent Park Carousel circa 1900

Of course, not all the boating traffic on the Providence River was tourists. The lighthouses were amazed by the growing number of oil tankers, tugboats, and other industrial ships that floated past day and night. And as 1900 wound its way toward 1920, Pomham Light realized that something was happening – industrial development was taking over on the river. There were more oil tanks, shipyards and train terminals. One sure sign was on July 23, 1912 when Sassafras Lighthouse was discontinued, after shining for 40 years. Pomham could not believe that the lovely beacon, the sturdy granite foundation and the white wooden tower were going to be taken down. And why? To fill in the channel and build an industrial complex. Her keeper, Jack Mullen, had tended Sassafras for 25 years. And as thanks for all that, he was demoted and his pay was cut in half!

Captain Jack still had her twin sister, Fuller Rock to care for, but 1918, he lost that

job too when Fuller was converted to an automated beacon that ran on acetylene gas. Pomham's lighthouse keeper Adolf Aronson was put in charge of Fuller Rock, but there wasn't much to do. The tanks were changed out every six months by the US Lighthouse Service. Pomham felt so sorry - Fuller was a just lonely sentinel now. But then the worst thing happened. In February, 1923, a crew came to replace the tanks and after the job was done, something went wrong. One of the 300 lb. gas tanks exploded, sending the five workers into the air and straight to the hospital. A huge fireball could easily be seen at Pomham Rocks. And along with the loud blast, Pomham knew what had happened – Fuller Rock Lighthouse had been completely destroyed. She was replaced by a metal skeleton tower with a red flashing light. Some said it resembled the new toy of the day - the Erector Set. But in any case, the little twins were both gone, and three sister lighthouses remained – Pomham Rocks, Bullocks Point, and Sabin Point.



Fuller Light post 1923

Then two more events – even more terrible – took place in those years. In 1914, a world war began in Europe. By 1918, the United States was sending troops. Just as these young soldiers were heading for war in the late summer of 1918, a flu pandemic called the Spanish Flu hit Rhode Island. Schools, theaters, movie houses, and all amusements were closed by the Board of Health. Quotes in the Providence Journal in 1918 advised, “*keep away from crowds, the fingers are great carriers of germs, keep them away from nose and mouth, and if you*

have influenza, stay at home so as not to spread the disease.”



Providence Harbor circa 1918

The fighting in Europe ended on November 11, 1918, and in February 1919, the pandemic subsided. But although both crises were over, they had taken a great toll.

Towns all over Rhode Island had lost soldiers in World War I – thirty-three were from East Providence. And many returned home wounded. Towns had also lost at least 3000 citizens to the flu, many of them the family breadwinners. There was plenty of hardship to go around, but with the pandemic over, and the war over, people were starting to breathe a grateful sigh of relief. Pomham Light saw that Rhode Islanders were resilient and ready for life to return to normal. In East Providence there was a joyful celebration to welcome home the soldiers who had survived the war. First a big parade in the streets of Watchemoket, then a shore dinner at the Pomham Club, a special baseball game at Grovesnor Field, and finally a ball at

Hunts Mills - all in their honor. Pomham Light breathed a sigh of relief too.

Join us next time for Part 5 – The Three Sisters and the Gathering Storm to hear lighthouse stories from the 1920's and 1930's, and how the lighthouses faced their greatest challenge from Mother Nature in 1938.

MEMBERSHIP DUES

As a busy and successful 2021 comes to a close, we encourage anyone who has not renewed their membership yet to send theirs in. None of the success the Friends of Pomham Rocks Lighthouse has had would have happened without the dedication from our membership.

EVENTS

- November 14th, 2021: Annual Meeting
 - Hillside Country Club (82 Hillside Ave, Rehoboth MA)
 - 12:30pm – 4:30pm
- December 1st, 2021: 150th Anniversary of The First Lighting of Pomham Rocks Lighthouse
- December 11th, 2021: Pomham Santa
Sabin Point Park at 2:00pm

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