



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.

SPECIAL EDITION

POMHAM'S ORIGINAL 4TH ORDER FRESNEL LENS TO RETURN HOME



POMHAM TO RECEIVE A 150th BIRTHDAY GIFT LIKE NO OTHER

A lighthouse's Fresnel (fray-NEL) lens is sometimes referred to as its very soul. Constructed of multi-faceted glass prisms arranged in concentric circles, the lenses are both an engineering masterpiece and a priceless work of art. In 1851, Congress ordered Fresnel lenses to be installed in all existing and newly constructed lighthouses. Pomham Rocks Lighthouse, built in 1871 on an island off the coast of Riverside RI, was first lit with a 6th order Fresnel lens, visible for about 7 to 8 nautical miles.

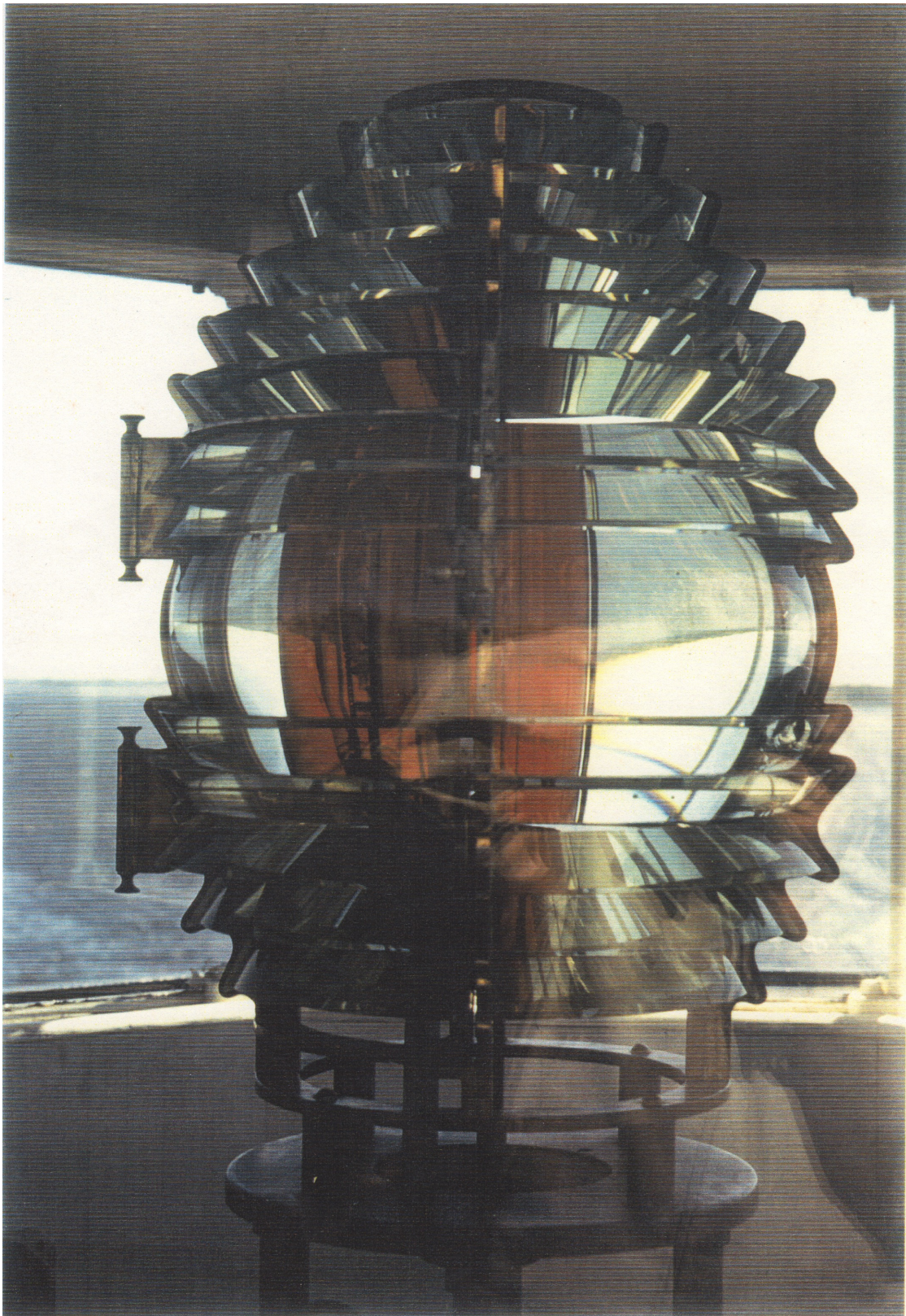
In c.1926, a more powerful 4th order Fresnel lens was installed, greatly improving the safety of shipping to the port of Providence and in upper Narragansett Bay. This lens remained in operation until 1974 when the U.S. Coast Guard decommissioned The Lighthouse. It was replaced with an external light on a metal-framework tower placed next to the building. Pomham Rocks' Fresnel lens was sent to the Lightship Museum at Boston's Constitution Wharf where it was on display. It was later loaned by the Coast Guard to Custom House Maritime Museum in Newburyport, MA, where it has been on display for more than four decades.

To mark the 150th anniversary of Pomham Rocks Lighthouse this year, the nearly century-old Fresnel lens will be brought back to its original home. It will be disassembled in Newburyport and

reassembled in its island light station in Riverside. These highly specialized procedures will be performed by a professional Coast Guard lampist, one of only six skilled artisans in the country experienced in conservation of this historic optical navigational equipment.

The Fresnel lens will be the centerpiece of the museum exhibit at Pomham Rocks Lighthouse, where it will proudly greet all visitors. We hope our members and the local community join us in celebration as we prepare for the return of this historic artifact, as the perfect birthday gift for our 150-year-old landmark.

- Friends of Pomham Rocks Lighthouse
Board of Directors



*Pomham's 4th order Fresnel lens in use in the lantern room
Date Unknown c.1956-1974*

**STATEMENT FROM THE CUSTOM
HOUSE MARITIME MUSEUM
NEWBURYPORT, MA**

The Fresnel lens has been an unwavering object at the Custom House Maritime Museum since it was installed in the late 1970's. Many people have seen it lit at night while strolling the boardwalk, while out in the harbor in their boat, or while visiting the museum. Many of our visitors, and the residents of Newburyport, may well believe that the lens is in the permanent collection of the Museum. However, through our wonderful relationship with the US Coast Guard, the Fresnel lens has actually been on loan to us for almost 40 years. Installed in the downstairs hallway, it lit our visitors' paths for decades as a symbol of the merchant shipping industry in Newburyport, and an homage to our very own lighthouses. After such a wonderful extended engagement, it is now time for our beloved Fresnel lens to make its way back to its original home: the Pomham Rocks Lighthouse in Riverside, Rhode Island.

Our 4th order Fresnel lens was originally installed in the Pomham Rocks Lighthouse in c.1926, and it was used there until June 1974 when the lighthouse was decommissioned by the United States Coast Guard. The Friends of Pomham Rocks Lighthouse is a 501(c)3 non-profit that was established in 2004 to restore and maintain the 1871 historic landmark. We, as a Museum, believe that this Fresnel lens would better serve the Friends of Pomham Rocks Lighthouse as they work to ensure the

historic restoration and preservation of Pomham Rocks Lighthouse. While we have had the pleasure of being good stewards of this object for the time that we have had with it, we feel that this lens is an integral part of their history and it fulfills their mission clearer than our own. As a professional Museum, it would be an unethical decision to keep it at this site purely for sentimental value (no matter how much we will miss it!).

The Pomham Rocks Lighthouse was first lit on December 1, 1871 with a 6th order Fresnel lens showing a fixed white of Pomham Rocks Lighthouse was formed, and the historic preservation began. In 2006, the lighthouse was relit after having been dark for 32 years. Exxon Mobil Corp transferred ownership of the island and its light. Just over a year later, the color was changed to a fixed red light, which it remains today. That 6th order Fresnel lens was replaced by our beloved 4th order Fresnel lens as an upgrade in c.1926. The Fresnel lens is a compact lighthouse lens developed by French physicist Augustin-Jean Fresnel (1788–1827). Fresnel produced six sizes of lighthouse lenses divided into 'orders' based on their size and focal length, First-Order being the largest. The lens uses prisms arranged in concentric circles, which greatly reduced the size and weight of the lens, and were far more powerful, throwing light much further than previous lighthouse lens designs. Although we currently broadcast a white light through it, it always broadcasted a red light while it was placed at the Pomham Rocks Lighthouse. The lighthouse itself was operated by six civilian lightkeepers, before the Coast Guard took over operations in 1956 and operated through 1974. In 1978,

the property was purchased by the Mobil Oil Corporation with the intent of preservation.

In 2000, the now Exxon Mobil Corp was approached by local citizens regarding the possibility of a partnership to restore the lighthouse to its 1871 condition, to which they happily agreed, and even funded a large part of it. That is when the Friends buildings by donating them to the American Lighthouse Foundation in 2010, and since then, numerous preservation activities have been completed. Reacquiring the Fresnel lens would be a huge coup for their society and would help to give real meaning to their preservation activities. We, as the Custom House Museum, do hope that the public shares in our excitement as this wonderful object is finally returned home.

- Kate Gilbert
Custom House Maritime Museum



Pomham's Fresnel lens on display in Newburyport, MA



Pomham's Fresnel ID: USLHS 499A



Pomham's Fresnel lens on display in Newburyport, MA

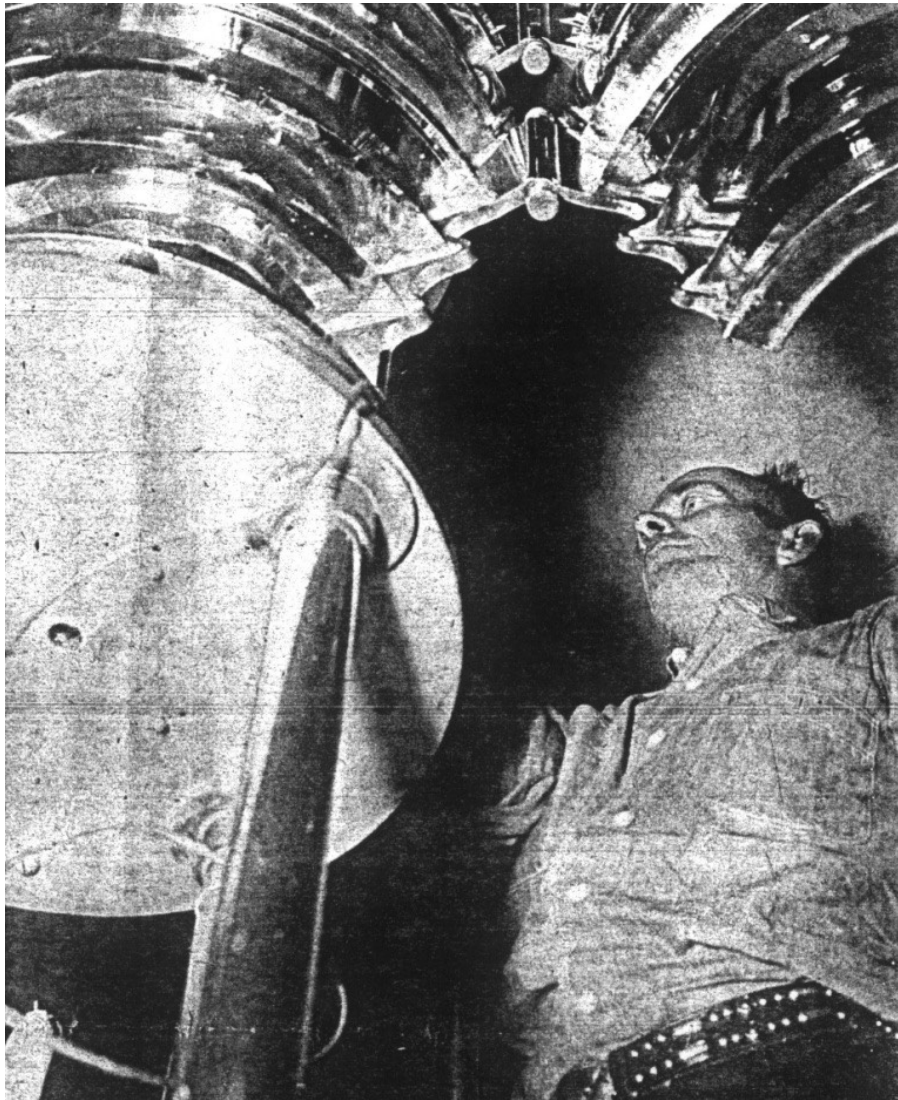


Pomham Rocks Lighthouse Fresnel lens 1971



Pomham Rocks Lighthouse 1970; Fresnel lens in tower

When Covid-19 guidelines allow, the Friends of Pomham Rocks Lighthouse will offer boat trips for the public to tour The Lighthouse and view the iconic lens. For information on upcoming events to celebrate Pomham's jubilee year and updates on the return of our Fresnel lens please visit www.pomhamrockslighthouse.org.



Keeper Howard Beebe tending to the lens in 1951

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