The Beacon©

Editor's Corner . . .

Lighthouse Excitement

This issue is filled with exciting lighthouse news and interesting upcoming events like the November 6th State of Michigan workshop for lighthouse preservation and the February 13th-14th Winter Conference in Mackinaw City co-sponsored by GLLKA and the Great Lakes Lighthouse Museum. The long-awaited PBS documentary series on lighthouses begins in October--with the Great Lakes episode set to run in November.

Actually, several GLLKA members may develop theatrical aspirations after appearing either in the documentary or in member Don Hermanson's new video.

High-quality lighthouse publications, videos, calendars and replicas are being introduced at a fast pace to keep up with all of the lighthouse interest out there, so hang on to your wallets!

The October 17th Lake Ontario Conference & Cruise that will contain GLLKA's annual meeting will cap a year of successful GLLKA events--including our August 15th Anniversary Celebration in Mackinaw City.

New lighthouse groups such as the one for DeTour Reef Light have had a successful year. Although it was disappointing to have the National Lighthouse Museum go to Staten Island instead of the Great Lakes, plans for the Great Lakes Lighthouse Museum are going full steam ahead! The fate of many "excessed" Great Lakes lights is unknown, with many efforts underway.

Enjoy this BEACON! Your comments are always welcome.

About Our Cover . . .

This issue's cover is an original painting by noted maritime artist Leo Kuschel of the DeTour Reef Lighthouse. The light is located where the St. Mary's River meets Lake Huron near DeTour village and Drummond Island in Michigan's eastern Upper Peninsula. The DeTour Reef Lighthouse Preservation Society, formed less than a year ago, has enjoyed a successful year, so we thought it would be an excellent cover choice. More information on page 7.

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The BEACON, the official publication of the Great Lakes Lighthouse Keepers Association (GLLKA) is published quarterly. Membership dues are: Individual $25, Family $30, Sustaining $75, Patron $100, Life $500, and Grand Keeper-Life $1,000. (Both Sustaining and Patron memberships receive their BEACON by first class mail.) GLLKA is a non-profit organization operated almost entirely by volunteers. No portion of this publication may be reproduced without the permission of the editor. Opinions within may not reflect the views of the organization.

A Great Year for DeTour Reef Lighthouse!

Marking the entrance to the St. Mary's River at the northern end of Lake Huron, the DeTour Reef Light is well known to ship captains and pleasure boaters who sail the upper Great Lakes of Michigan.

Since 1847, a lighthouse, either on shore or on the nearby DeTour Reef, has provided a beacon to guide vessels for generations. According to U.S. Coast Guard officials, modern shipboard navigation systems have rendered the DeTour Reef Light obsolete. Government regulations, however, do allow for private groups to obtain long-term leases on such excess property for the purpose of preservation.

On January 4, 1998, civic leaders from DeTour Village and Drummond Island met to form the DeTour Reef Light Preservation Society, a non-profit organization.

The purpose of the Society is to establish, support and promote efforts in the preservation and restoration of the DeTour Reef Light; to achieve the safe keeping of the building, artifacts and records; to educate and inform the public on its history; and to raise awareness about the importance of volunteers in maintaining and protecting the DeTour Reef Light for all present and future generations.

The officers and directors include president Bob Jones, assistant director of the Eastern Upper Peninsula Transportation Authority; vice-president Jim Charles, head of the DeTour Village Chamber of Commerce; secretary Jeri Baron Feltner, co-author of two books on Great Lakes maritime history; treasurer Barb Snider, owner of two DeTour businesses-- the Fogcutter restaurant and Barb Snider's Travel Specialists; director Denny Bailey, owner of Drummond Island Yacht Haven and head of the Drummond Island Tourist Association; director Dick Moehl, GLLKA president; memorabilia committee chairperson Barb Gusfa; finance committee chairperson Carol Melvin; director Sandy Planisek from the Great Lakes Lighthouse Museum; and membership committee chairperson Mary Rogers.

Both Moehl and Jones visited the lighthouse in the summer of 1997 and found the structure to be in excellent condition. Moehl said "the paint is chipping away inside, but a good scraping and paint job will have it looking like new."

Jones said that the present art-deco structure was completed in 1931 and a lot of effort will be required to restore the building and maintain it on a long term basis. "We need people to join the DRLPS as well as help us in fund-raising and restoration work on the lighthouse," said Jones. Another goal of the DRLPS is to broaden the public's appreciation, understanding, and support of our Great Lakes lighthouse and maritime heritage. The group currently has over 300 members.

The group is honored to have their light on the National Trust for Historic Preservation's 1998 list of American's Most Endangered Historic Places. Number six on the list is "Michigan's Historic Lighthouses, Exemplified by DeTour Reef Light, Chippewa County, MI." This is the first time a lighthouse has been included on the list.

Application has recently been made to Michigan's Department of Environmental Quality for a lease of the bottomlands on which the light sits. The Coast Guard is preparing projects to repair damaged plaster and encapsulate plaster containing asbestos in preparation for the proposed lease of the lighthouse.

The membership drive and fund-raisers continue for the group. Plans are to restore the light to its original appearance, including furnishings. The original foghorn will be restored and returned to the light. An interpretive traveling display of the light and other area maritime history will be developed. The group hopes to eventually offer boat tours to the lighthouse.

For more information, contact the DeTour Reef Lighthouse Preservation Society, P.O. Box 519, DeTour Village, MI 49725-0519. (906) 297-8888.

Information from DRLPS literature and Jeri Baron Feltner.