

Summer 2022



NATIONAL LIGHTHOUSE MUSEUM NEWS



200 The Promenade at Lighthouse Point
Staten Island, NY 10301
718-390-0040

MUSEUM ADMISSION

Adults: \$7.00

Seniors and Military: \$5.00

Students: \$4.00

Children Under 12: Free

Members: Free

HOURS

Wednesday-Sunday

11:00 AM - 4:00 PM

Closed Major Holidays

Call to Arrange Group/Class Tours.

www.lighthousemuseum.org

[www.FB.com/NationalLighthouseMuseum](https://www.facebook.com/NationalLighthouseMuseum)

[@nationallighthousemuseum](https://www.instagram.com/nationallighthousemuseum) [@NLMSINY](https://twitter.com/NLMSINY)

New Black History Permanent Exhibit Installed

These two are the panels for the new permanent exhibit featuring Willis Augustus Hodges the first African American Lighthouse Keeper of Cape Henry Light and Captain Richard Etheridge and the Pea Island Life-Saving Station.



Juneteenth Celebration a Success!

The National Lighthouse Museum hosted the Juneteenth Celebration in collaboration with The Jubilee Collective.



Cast-Iron Sanctuary: How Galveston's Bolivar Point Lighthouse Saved 120 Lives During its Catastrophic 1900 Hurricane

By Wade R. Gorla

Few persons today, save some historians and Galveston's rather more proud and informed citizens are likely to give concerted thought to the city's once glorious past. Galveston's stunning economic assets, so much in evidence prior to the monstrous hurricane of September 8th 1900, reveal a maritime city of vast wealth, great beauty, enormous power and high status. Before the ruthless onslaught of the greatest natural disaster in US history, one that killed more than 6,000 people, the city held a very distinguished place as America's fourth most important concentration of wealth. After the hurricane struck Galveston, the city lay in desperate ruins.

Our purpose here is to explore the roots of Galveston's meteoric rise and, of its sudden catastrophic fall. We then pay tribute to the exceptionally brilliant role played by Bolivar Point Lighthouse, and of the actions of its Keeper, Harry C. (HC) Clayborne during the 1900 Galveston hurricane to save 120 lives.

The City of Galveston, Texas

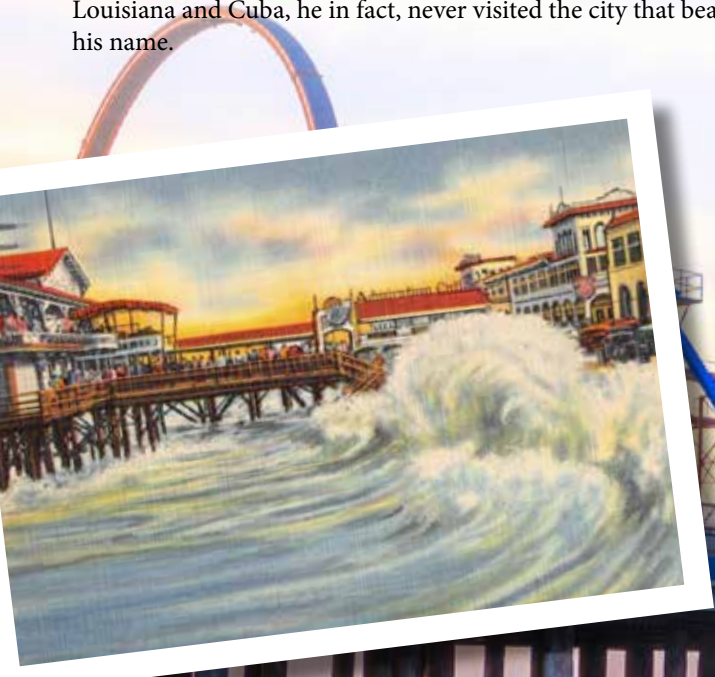
Galveston was originally given its name by a Spanish Surveyor, Jose de Evia, in honor of an important and fascinating military and political leader: Bernardo Vincente de Galvez y Madrid, who served Spanish Louisiana and Cuba as its first Colonial Governor and, later as Spain's powerful Viceroy. While De Galvez will always loom as a towering figure in the history of Spanish Louisiana and Cuba, he in fact, never visited the city that bears his name.

Galveston is located just 50.9 miles from Houston, presently the largest city in Texas. It is comprised of a large flat southeastern Texas Gulf coastal area and port that includes Galveston and Pelican Islands. The Port of Galveston was formally established by an act of the Congress of Mexico in 1825. A Customs House that was subsequently constructed in 1830, presaged the city's emergence as a potent economic force.

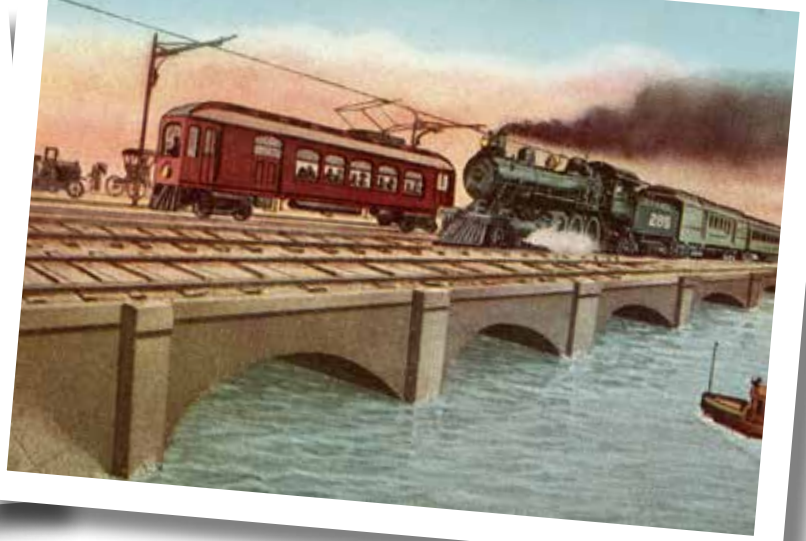
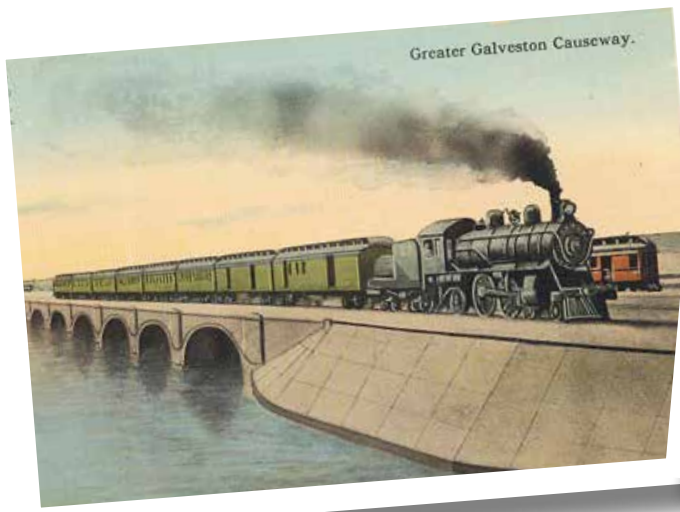
Following the achievement of Texas' independence from Mexico in 1836, Galveston served as the capital of a newly created Republic of Texas. Another Texas capital would eventually be established on a site located further west in recognition of the growing need to more effectively accommodate the state's rapid western expansion. The site chosen for the new capital would be named in honor of Stephen F. Austin, "the Father of Texas." In spite of its loss of capital status, Galveston's economy continued to grow exponentially. As a major cotton exporter, it carried on an immensely profitable cotton trade with Britain.

Galveston During the Civil War

The city was blockaded by the Union Navy during the Civil War, but would serve the Confederacy, both as a region of fierce defiance, and, as an entry point of goods critical to the survival of its population. In this regard Confederate blockade runners from Galveston played a valuable role. Ashton Villa was a mansion located in Galveston. It became the city's first brick house built by slaves in 1858, and the scene of the first Juneteenth celebration on June 19th 1865. At that time, Union Army General Gordon



Present Day Galveston, TX



Granger announced, via his transmission of General Order #3 to African Americans living in Galveston and throughout Texas, that slavery was no longer legal. Juneteenth has been established by the US Congress in 2021 as a National holiday, although it took place nearly three years after Lincoln's issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation.

In the wake of the Civil War, in which Galveston had put forward a particularly ferocious, often successful resistance against Union forces on land and at sea, Galveston emerged as one of America's leading ports. It continued to strengthen its position as the largest city in Texas, and it would justly earn the sobriquet: "Queen City of the Gulf."

The city's powerful cotton trade now competed favorably with New Orleans for primacy. Sugar and a vast array of other very lucrative Caribbean commodities reached its Gulf shores, and the effects of its commercial activity generated great wealth that spread to the interior of Texas and beyond. Its many banks and trading houses located along Galveston's Strand were regarded as "the Wall Street of the South." Its retail houses, also located on the Strand were legendary. On the eve of 1900, Galveston stood second only to New York City as America's busiest port, and also ranked second to Ellis Island as a primary US point of entry for immigrants. Before the devastating 1900 hurricane, it had fully acquired distinction as the richest city in Texas and, as the second wealthiest city, per capita, in the United States.

The Galveston Hurricane of September 8th 1900

Galveston's phenomenal prosperity was obliterated as a consequence of the September 8th 1900 hurricane. This was an exceedingly terrifying day for those who survived it. The horror of the Galveston hurricane would be re-enacted as a popular attraction at Coney Island's Dreamland Amusement Park until Dreamland itself ironically fell victim to a fire that destroyed it in 1911.

The Galveston hurricane is very skillfully described by Erick Larson in his book: *Isaac's Storm: A Man, A Time and the Deadliest Hurricane in History*. The city after September 8th 1900 became a vast ruin. Yet its stouthearted surviving residents exhibited an unyielding passion to rebuild Galveston anew and would subsequently work tenaciously to rebuild their city and fortify its coast with sturdy sea-walls in order to prevent a repeat of its 1900 calamity.

Bolivar Point Lighthouse

Nine years after achieving its independence from Mexico, on February 3rd 1845, the leaders of the new Republic of Texas, cognizant of the importance of providing a vital aid to the often unnavigable Gulf waters leading to Galveston port, earmarked \$7,000 for the construction of a new lighthouse on the eastern portion of Galveston Island at Fort Point. Before construction began, however, Texas would be annexed by the United States under the presidency of James K. Polk. As a consequence of this dramatic political development, the US Lighthouse Service assumed jurisdiction over this anticipated lighthouse project.



Continued on next page

Featured Article

Now in charge, the US Congress moved rapidly to provide \$15,000 in order to complete the structure at the western end of Galveston Island at Bolivar Point, overlooking Matagorda Bay.

A series of vexing delays involving protracted negotiations with the existing landowner, and with members of Congress, determined that the lighthouse would not be completed until Christmas, 1852. The sturdy 65 foot tall cast iron structure was forged in Baltimore by the distinguished firm of Murray and Hazzlewurst, a mechanical engineering and fabrication company that among many of its outstanding and numerous accomplishments, had built the SS Republic in 1849 for the Baltimore Steam Packet Company. Modifications to the tower were added in 1858 that included a 3rd Order Fresnel lens.

During the Civil War, most Southern lighthouses were darkened by Confederate forces. In the case of Bolivar Point, it was completely dismantled. Not a single part of the iron contained in the original lighthouse has ever been discovered. It is generally believed that iron, derived from the lighthouse, was eventually welded upon Confederate naval ships during its desperate campaign to break the stranglehold of the Union blockade.

The Second Bolivar Point Lighthouse

Constructed in 1872, this lighthouse replaced a temporary wooden structure built in 1865 to replace the dismantled 1852 lighthouse. The new lighthouse was superior in strength, height and design to the original 1852 version. It was fabricated at a cost of \$40,000 by the highly respected firm of Bailey and Debevoise which, has continued to operate from its headquarters in New York City to the present day. It provided the iron plating that was shipped to Point Bolivar to be assembled under the direction of US Lighthouse Board engineers. This second permanent lighthouse was day-marked with white and black stripes and equipped with another 3rd Order Fresnel lens that had a range of 17 miles. The 1872 structure towered 117 feet over the uniformly flat landscape that surrounded it.

On the day of the terrible Galveston hurricane, a Gulf and Interstate railroad train emanating from Beaumont, Texas

containing numerous passengers from Louisiana, rolled with excruciating slowness along the flooded tracks of the Bolivar Peninsula, just a quarter mile from Bolivar Point Lighthouse.

The train, destined for the heart of the city, had been scheduled to meet a ferry named: The Charlotte M. Allen, (incidentally the name of a famous Texan woman known as “the Mother” of Houston, Texas). This vessel routinely made the short and easy voyage across the bay to the main part of Galveston Port. But amid the horrendously lethal hurricane conditions of September 8th, the Captain of the Charlotte M. Allen deemed it impossible to navigate the waters separating Galveston Island from the main port. Immersed in water, the train came to a halt as its passengers were now offered two alternatives: to remain in place, in the hope that their powerful train could shelter them by withstanding a ferocious hurricane, one they hoped would subside, or, to exit the train, then seek a sanctuary within the towering Bolivar Point lighthouse, the only structure not inundated by the tremendous surge of eight foot high water that engulfed the peninsula.

Eighty-five passengers elected to remain in place while another ten people opted to take the treacherous walk towards the lighthouse and enter its tall and sturdy cast iron tower. The ten people who vacated the train would be joined by another group of people who had already entered the cast-iron shelter. The number who survived varies according to the account one reads, but a figure of 120 may not be far from the mark.

Lighthouse Board Keepers led by Henry C. (HC) Clayborne, with the support of his wife Virginia, took command of the tumultuous situation and swiftly organized a disciplined and efficient rescue of the ten passengers from the train. In order to make sufficient room inside for people desperate to obtain sanctuary, two persons were seated together upon each of the cast iron steps of its spiral stairway, one that led to the lantern room, a total of 117 feet in height.

Six feet of water had already entered the tower. It was highly fortunate that the 1872 lighthouse had nearly doubled the height



of the original 1852 lighthouse allowing many more people to survive upon the steps of its cast-iron spiral staircase.

In spite of the incessant, vicious and maddening pounding of wind and rain upon the lighthouse throughout the day and night, Bolivar Point managed to withstand the impact of America's deadliest natural hurricane. When the storm ended, all persons inside the lighthouse that included members of Clayborne's family, had survived, while all of the eighty-five passengers who had chosen to remain inside of the train had perished. There were also dead bodies found outside of the lighthouse of people who had attempted to enter the lighthouse during the worst hours of the hurricane. After the hurricane was over, Keeper Clayborne and his wife Virginia continued to assist the survivors with food and drinking water until further relief arrived. Some survivors walked near to the area where they had abandoned the train and observed corpses strewn across the landscape.

Keeper Clayborne and had performed a marvelous feat of disciplined organization and the rescue of 120 people. It should be noted that this rescue effort would have been impossible if the firm of Bailey and Debevoise of NYC had delivered a ready to assemble cast iron structure that was inferior in its fabrication. But the cast-iron lighthouse produced by Bailey and Debevoise met the highest standards of design and construction. Ferocious winds crashing against the lighthouse had reached 120 mph, but the cast-iron tower remained solidly in place. The Keepers' and Oil houses were destroyed.

Bolivar Point lighthouse continued to operate until its light was extinguished in May of 1930. The long awaited opening of the Galveston Jetty Light that experienced endless delays, finally began operation on November 12th 1918, one day after Germany agreed to an Armistice. The construction of the Galveston Jetty Light made Bolivar Point expendable, especially at the outset of the Great Depression.

Two years after WW II in 1947, the War Assets Administration auctioned off the lighthouse, the Keeper's houses and its surrounding property for \$5,500 to Texas rancher, EV. Boyt and his sister, Iya Maxwell. In 2015, Descendants of the Boyt family, notably, grandchildren Mark Boyt and Amy Maxwell Chase, established a 501 (c) (3) non profit historical and preservation organization. The Bolivar Point Lighthouse Foundation seeks to strengthen and fully restore Bolivar Point Lighthouse, eventually opening the structure to visitors. In 2008, the lighthouse was damaged by Hurricane Ike. Serious and expensive repairs to the lantern room and to the cupola are needed.

Conclusion:

No other structure in Galveston during the cataclysmic Hurricane of 1900 afforded such an effective sanctuary from the horrors of the hurricane. The lighthouse provided further protection for local inhabitants during another terrible Hurricane in Galveston in 1915 at which time, storm surges equaled those of 1900. This time, however, the construction of sea walls dramatically lessened damage to Galveston. In 1915, Galveston's overall death toll

totaled one hundred and twenty two of whom sixty nine were lost as a result of the sinking of three ships.

On September 8th, 1900, the stubborn durability of Bolivar Point Lighthouse combined with courageous and decisive actions taken by Keeper Clayborne to effectively organize and rescue 120 people as the deadliest hurricane in American history raged. His heroic actions, with the support of his wife Virginia, lent dignity and enormous credit to the US Lighthouse Board in 1900, and during the hurricane of 1915, when he again provided lighthouse sanctuary to 50 people. The US Coast Guard buoy tender WLM-561, HC Clayborne, based in Galveston, honors this legendary Keeper who was born in New Orleans in 1859. Clayborne had served Bolivar Point Lighthouse faithfully and with great distinction from 1894, for a period of twenty-four years, until he died in 1918, while still on duty at the lighthouse.

For its part, Galveston would never return to its position of economic greatness. Today, the city is mainly associated with resorts, hotels, entertainment, beautiful beaches and its boardwalk. The construction of sea walls and extensive jetties after 1900 fortified Galveston during other destructive hurricane events that took place throughout the 20th, and in the present century.

In the face of the unspeakable death, destruction and tragedy wrought by the calamitous 1900 Galveston Hurricane, the case of Bolivar Point Lighthouse stands in shining contrast. The strength of its cast iron construction, and the morally uplifting role played by Keeper Clayborne, deserve our highest praise, gratitude and eternal remembrance.

Wade R. Goria is an historian, retired college professor, teacher and author. He is the principal lecturer for all National Lighthouse Museum Boat Tours.



3rd Order Fresnel Lens from Bolivar Point's Lighthouse that operated in its 2nd Lighthouse in 1900. On display at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History.

A Snapshot of our Boat Tours



2022 National Lighthouse Museum Boat Tour Schedule

Tickets Purchased will include One Year FREE Membership
to the National Lighthouse Museum! *One FREE membership per family*

Sunday, August 7, 2022 • 1-5 pm • Lighthouse Weekend Signature Lighthouse Tour - This popular boat tour familiarizes passengers with key lighthouses that facilitate safe passage from the Atlantic Ocean into Lower New York Harbor.

Sunday, September 11, 2022 • 3-7 pm Hudson River Dinner Cruise - See the Little Red Lighthouse under the George Washington Bridge. *Three course dinner includes salad, chicken or fish, potato and vegetable, dessert, tea or coffee.*

Friday, October 28, 2022 • 6:30-10:30 pm • Haunted Halloween East River Dinner Cruise - Cruise the East River through Hell Gate recalling haunted tales of lighthouses along the way and other points of spooky interest. Hear about the haunting river stories on the way to Execution Rocks. *Three course dinner includes salad, chicken or fish, potato and vegetable, wine, dessert, tea or coffee.*

Boat Tour: \$60 for adults/ \$40 for children

Dinner Cruise: \$90 for adults/ \$50 for children

Order tickets online at www.lighthousemuseum.org/boat-tours

Group rates available. Call the Lighthouse Museum for details.

NLM Spring Events

Golf Outing

June 20, 2022



Besides staying up-to-date with all of the National Lighthouse Museum news, we feature a Lighthouse of the Week!



LIGHTHOUSE OF THE WEEK

Piedras Blancas Lighthouse, San Simeon, CA
Few tall, classic lighthouse towers, typical of the Atlantic Seaboard, were built on the Pacific Coast, since the high bluffs along much of its extent provided most of the necessary height for a light.



Learn more on our Facebook page and Sign Up for our Newsletter.



Lighthouse Hunt

May 15, 2022



SAVE THE DATES

Upcoming Events

Sunday, July 24, 2022

6pm - 8pm

Lecture Lighthouses of Antiquity
with Wayne Wheeler

Friday, July 29, 2022

5pm - 10pm

On The Waterfront:

Free Friday Night Films

Friday, August 5, 2022

6pm - 8pm

Lecture with Sally Snowman
Lightkeeper at Boston Light

Saturday, August 6, 2022

5pm

12th Annual Lightkeepers Gala

Sunday, August 7, 2022

1-5 pm

Lighthouse Weekend Signature
Lighthouse Tour

Wednesday, August 17, 2022

6pm-7:30pm

Jazz Performance

Sunday, September 11, 2022

3-7 pm

Hudson River Dinner Cruise

Sunday, September 18, 2022

2pm-6pm

Fig Fest

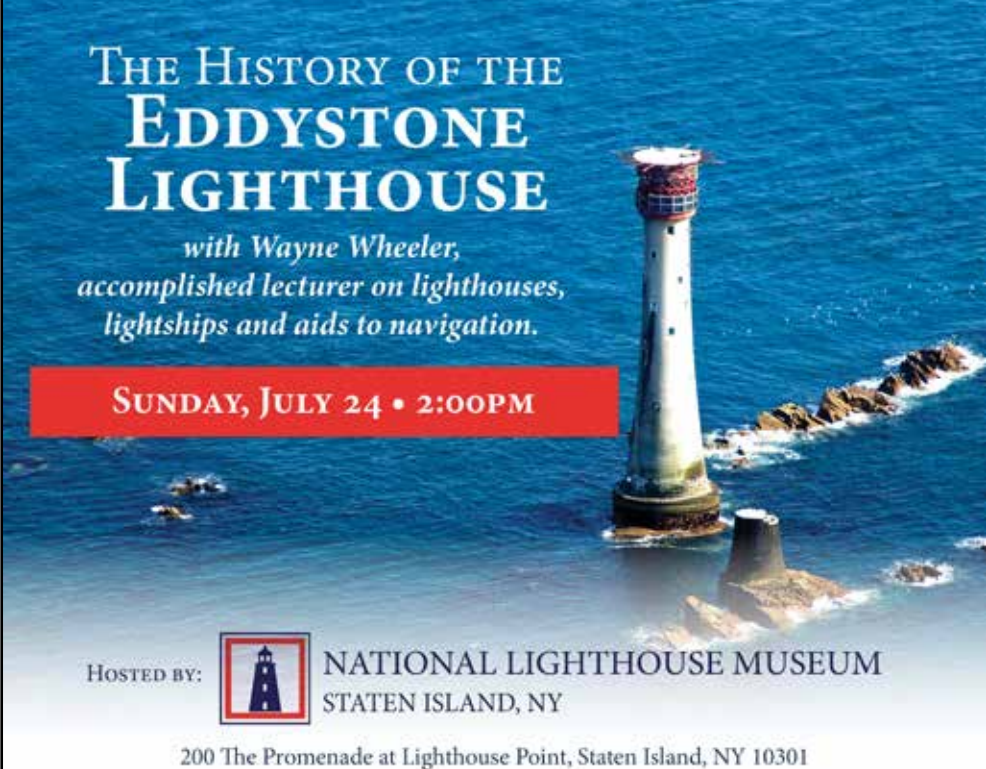
Sunday, October 2, 2022

Lighthouse Point Fest

Friday, October 28, 2022

6:30-10:30 pm


Haunted Halloween East River
Dinner Cruise



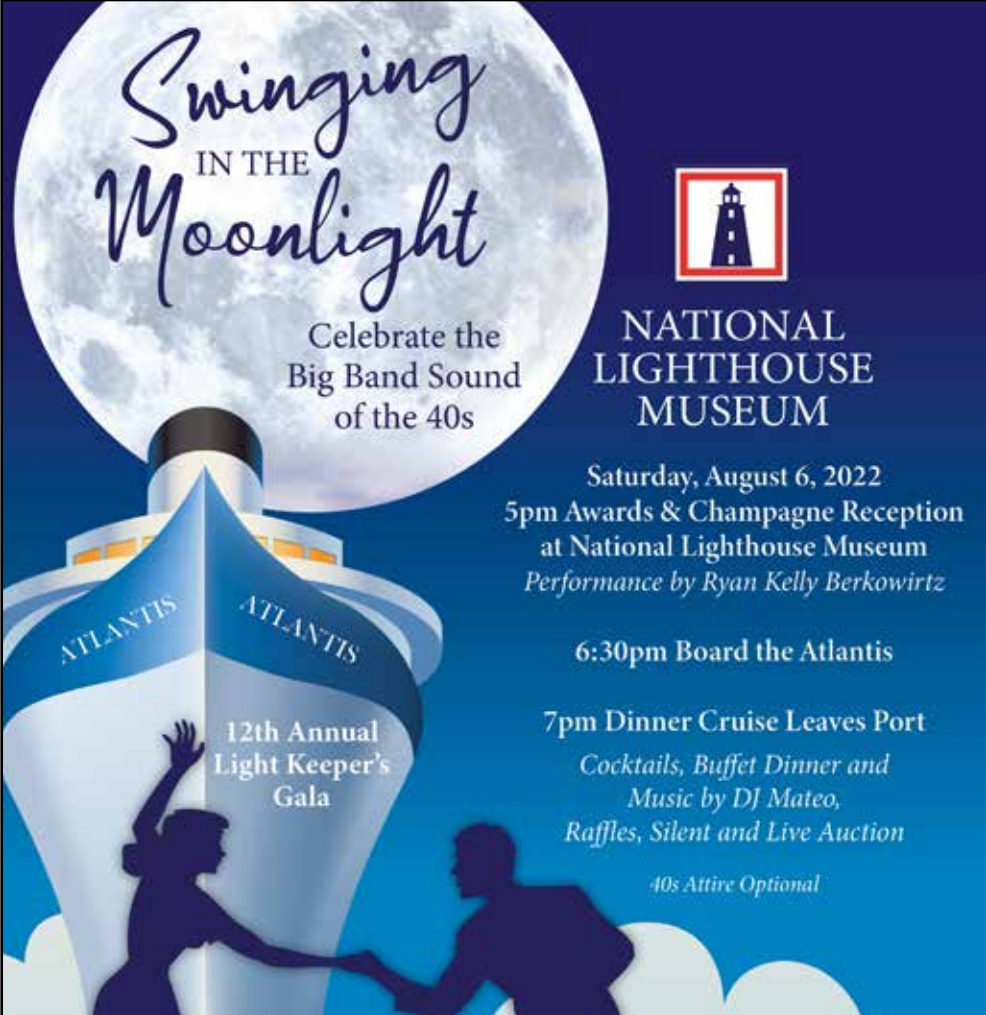
**THE HISTORY OF THE
EDDYSTONE
LIGHTHOUSE**

with Wayne Wheeler,
*accomplished lecturer on lighthouses,
lightships and aids to navigation.*

SUNDAY, JULY 24 • 2:00PM


HOSTED BY:  **NATIONAL LIGHTHOUSE MUSEUM**
STATEN ISLAND, NY

200 The Promenade at Lighthouse Point, Staten Island, NY 10301



**Swinging
IN THE
Moonlight**

Celebrate the
Big Band Sound
of the 40s

 **NATIONAL
LIGHTHOUSE
MUSEUM**

Saturday, August 6, 2022
5pm Awards & Champagne Reception
at National Lighthouse Museum
Performance by Ryan Kelly Berkowitz

6:30pm Board the Atlantis

7pm Dinner Cruise Leaves Port
*Cocktails, Buffet Dinner and
Music by DJ Mateo,
Raffles, Silent and Live Auction*

40s Attire Optional

ATLANTIS ATLANTIS

12th Annual
Light Keeper's
Gala

ILLUMINATING CIRCLE



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LIGHTHOUSE
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- Invite to Illuminating Circle special events
- Commemorative pin and remembrance gift
- Complimentary one year membership to museum

Annual museum membership:

- Free admission to the museum
- 10% discounts in the museum store
- Members' rates for events, programs, presentations, & classes
- Quarterly newsletter



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