

Fall 2024



NATIONAL LIGHTHOUSE MUSEUM NEWS



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

MUSEUM ADMISSION

Adults: \$7
Seniors/Military & Veterans/Students: \$5.00
Museums for All: \$3.00
Children Under 12: Free
Members: Free

HOURS

Tuesday-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)

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NLM Gala Recap



Niall McKensie, HMTc/His Majesty's Trade Commissioner, North America and wife Fiona, first and third from left, Nicholas Dianto, second from left, Donald and Roseann DeRosa and Linda Dianto.



Clockwise from the left, Doreen Cugno, Brian Laline, David Gaskin, Teresa Cirelli and Luanne Sorrentino.



Dr. Alejandra Marraccino and Dr. Frida Kleiman



National Lighthouse Museum Board President Joe Ahlstrom and his wife, Carolyn.



Barbara Pezzengrilli, Great, Great Granddaughter of Keeper of Robin's Reef Light, Kate Walker with Wade Gorla, Museum Historian

A Tidal Wave of Change

By Wade R. Gorla

Wade R. Gorla is the principal lecturer for all National Lighthouse Museum Boat Tours. He is the NLM Historian, an author and a former Professor of International Relations at New York University.



The Bergen Point Lighthouse 1849-1951

In contrast with Old Orchard Shoals Lighthouse that was completely obliterated by the power of nature in the form of Tropical Storm Sandy in 2012, Bergen Point Lighthouse, which, once stood proudly near to the city of Bayonne's Bergen Point, is further away and more protected from the potentially monstrous direct impact of a high tidal surge coming from the the Atlantic. Nevertheless, it too would succumb in 1951 to the onrushing tide of another sea change of a decidedly global economic nature.

This lighthouse structure would be the razed in 1951 by man made bulldozers and wrecking balls, manifestations of global forces and developments that led directly to its ultimate demise. Let's explore why.

The Bergen Point Lighthouse was situated in a portion of the Kill Van Kull waterway that potentially blocked the safe passage of increasingly large sized cargo ships and tankers traveling along it: those headed starboard into Newark Bay, or ships heading south to the Arthur Kill on the port side.

The Army Corp of Engineers, acting in conjunction with the Port Authority of NY and NJ, has always played a significant role in shaping the environment of NYC waterways. High on the agenda of both organizations is the advancement of infrastructure in order to serve and strengthen the region's economy and prosperity.

Towards this end, a principal task of the US Army Corp of Engineers is to clear harbors and waterways of any possible impediments to the safe passage of shipping so as to advance the conduct of commerce and trade, which, forms the vital life blood of the US, and, of the global economy.

The Bergen Point Lighthouse was situated close to the present day Bayonne Bridge, at a point where increasingly larger ships, built during WWII, entered Newark Bay's port facilities over and back to the massive, highly productive shipbuilding facilities of the naval yard of Kearney Point, located in the center of Newark Bay.

By turning to the port side and heading south along the Arthur Kill, commerce and trade was advanced from the Kill Van Kull to the Raritan Bay, and, to the Raritan River west, past Perth Amboy, where numerous important war time munitions plants were located. A ship heading that

way could also steer in the direction of the Atlantic, which, gave the Kill Van Kull access to the rest of the world. By heading east into New York Harbor, ships connected with port facilities in Manhattan and Brooklyn or south to the starboard side could head out of the Narrows and Lower NY Harbor then also, directly into the Atlantic.

In view of its prime location, and its potential for impeding the free flow and safety of increasingly larger ships being built that were entering in and out of the Kill Van Kull, it was only a matter of time before the Bergen Point lighthouse would no longer be in a position to serve in the interest of its intended purpose and would therefore be condemned to certain destruction.

Still, the Bergen Point Lighthouse lasted a solid 102 years of service on behalf of mariners before its demolition in 1951, much to the consternation of some of the eminently worthy Keepers who had worked and lived in it during their lives. Local residents and onlookers on either side of the Kill Van Kull, in Bayonne, or in Staten Island, had always enjoyed looking out at this quite handsome structure and the light that emanated from it.

After its demolition in 1951, the light was gone, and a new era of container shipping was poised to be launched at Port Newark and later at Port Elizabeth. Ambitious plans would be effected to eventually transfer port facilities and shipping based in Red Hook, Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Hoboken, to NJ. cities such as Newark, Elizabeth and eventually to Bayonne.

Container facilities require large stretches of land on the waterfront that neither Brooklyn nor Hoboken nor Jersey City, with its very massive railroad network located on the Hudson River waterfront was able to accommodate. Newark and the Elizabeth port provided generous swaths of land for use by leading container companies along Newark Bay.

As the decade of the 1960's began, increasingly larger ships entered the Kill Van Kull, and this energized the revenue and economies of Newark and Elizabeth as the waterfront of these cities were being economically transformed.

Today, the former site of the Bergen Point Lighthouse lies near to a former Texaco Refinery that itself has been transformed into a 75 acre Brownfield land site, upon which, exciting plans for the construction of a giant new art deco styled Hollywood East film studio complex is now underway.

The expansion of the container industry in Port Newark and Port Elizabeth, generated by the Port Authority of NY and NJ has been phenomenal. More recently, the emergence of new giant container facilities at the Bayonne Port with the recent, massive expansion of the French shipping company, CMA/ CGM, headquartered in Marseilles, signals a firm commitment by this multinational corporation to further advance the growth in the area of this vital multi-billion dollar container industry. The impact this will have on Bayonne's economy is predicted to be nothing less than stunning!

These developments explain the ongoing effort over the decades of the Army Corp of Engineers to dredge and deepen the Kill Van Kull. It further highlights the swift, eminently wise and efficient action taken by the Port Authority of NY and NJ to raise the clearance of the span of the Bayonne Bridge from 151 to 215 feet between 2013 and 2019 in order to enable giant Panamax and other ultra large container vessels to enter the Kill Van Kull into Newark Bay thus providing the NY metro area one of the most important systems of maritime trade to be found on the Atlantic coast of the US.

Serious people concerned with such issues of trade and commerce recognize the incredible achievement of the Port Authority and the Army Corps of Engineers. Irish born engineer John Wolfe Ambrose's (1838-1899) ultimately successful project aimed towards clearing the channel that bears his name today, forms another important example of this process. Without the astounding indeed heroic effort of Ambrose at the end of the late 19th century to launch his plan to create a viable clear channel leading from the Atlantic Ocean past the Brooklyn waterfront and into Manhattan, an accomplishment Ambrose tragically never lived to see completed, New York City's trade and commerce would have suffered irreparable harm. With the Ambrose Channel, the safe passage of ships generated an astounding degree of vigorous and highly profitable commerce and trade that's beyond the comprehension of the average citizen to adequately process.

There is a further reason accounting for the ultimate demolition of Bergen Point Lighthouse. Two documents we shall refer to here, reveal some of the structural difficulties that the Lighthouse Board encountered with this lighthouse from the time it was built. In 1855, a Major Delafield surveyed the Bergen Point lighthouse six years after its construction and wrote: "The structure consists of a two-story frame building, from the centre of which arises a wooden tower, surmounted by an octagonal lantern. It rests upon a quadrangular wharf of crib-work, filled partially with stone, and sheathed in the outside

with four-inch plank placed vertically. The wharf rises about six feet above high-water mark, and, is, in a very precarious condition, being constructed of very light stuff, and negligently framed. The house is settled at the centre, causing great injury to the ceilings both in the hall and upper rooms, and, is so badly built that even admitting the foundations to be good, it is doubtful whether it would be proper to attempt any repairs.” Another inspector’s report in 1855 was even more scathing about the condition of the lighthouse at Bergen Point. “The cribs on which these buildings were originally built in the slightest manner possible, without being entirely filled in. They are now decayed, or worm-eaten, and settling inwards; walls of the buildings are settling, and the whole fabrics are in such a state as to be liable to be swept away by a heavy pressure of ice at any moment. I would recommend that both be rebuilt.”

From the outset of its existence, we see that Bergen Point Lighthouse had structural difficulties that were quite possibly the result of less than stellar workmanship rendering it more vulnerable to harsh weather conditions.

It was a handsome, even beautiful lighthouse. Bergen Point Lighthouse contained a sixth-order Fresnel lens that along with seven Argand lamps with 15-inch reflectors, created a powerful light.

Along with the Passaic River Lighthouse, also built in 1849 in a similar architectural style in conjunction with Bergen Point Lighthouse, the Passaic River lighthouse was situated further north on Newark Bay at the approach of the Passaic River. It was put out of service and abandoned in 1914 and, in 1935, it was destroyed by fire then completely demolished in the same year.

These reports tell us that expensive maintenance of the Bergen Point Lighthouse over the decades was ongoing, and it doubtlessly constituted a source of anxiety and frustration for the Lighthouse Board, the Lighthouse Service and eventually for Coast Guard, which, eventually assumed control of US lighthouses in 1939.

The Coast Guard tended to be less sentimental about the preservation of such structures, regardless of how architecturally pleasing they appeared to be on the surface. The management of the Coast Guard also more readily grasped the importance of eventually eliminating the lighthouse altogether in keeping with the critical agenda of the Port Authority and the Army Corp of Engineers to make the Kill Van Kull as navigable as possible.

On September 15th 1958, just seven years after the brutal razing of the Bergen Point Lighthouse in 1951, another familiar and fascinating nearby infrastructure, the vertical lift, four tracked Newark Bay Railroad Bridge, built by the prolific and great bridge builder John Alexander Lowe Waddell in 1926, suffered a ghastly and somewhat mysterious derailment of a train operated by the Central Railroad of New Jersey out of Elizabethport. This disaster led to the death by drowning of 49 people. Included among the victims was 39 year old Snuffy Stirnweiss, the popular, recently retired, NY Yankee 2nd baseman.

By 1980 that same bridge, which, had connected Elizabethport and Bayonne by rail was put out of service altogether.

In 2012, the Army Corp of Engineers removed the very last vestige of the Newark Bay Rail Bridge from the Kill Van Kull, and this would signify in a meaningful way, the end of one economic era for Bayonne, Elizabeth and Newark, that had been characterized by industry, manufacturing and railroads, in favor of the powerful onrushing economic tide creating a global economy. This was a veritable sea change affecting the area in which giant container facilities and companies would eventually receive enormous numbers of goods manufactured outside of America.

What became known as the intermodal shipping container was ingeniously invented and patented by North Carolina native, Malcolm McClean, who, in 1956, initiated the first container shipping voyage on the vessel: The Ideal X, from Houston to Newark. McClean’s trucking company would evolve into Sealand, and would dominate the container industry. In August 1963, McLean opened a new 101-acre port facility in Port Newark-Elizabeth Marine Terminal. His Sealand company would be eventually be absorbed by the Danish owned Maersk Company in 1990. Today, the Moller-Maersk corporation is the world’s largest container company and maintains a very strong presence in the old Sealand location.

Container shipping as a principal means of bringing goods from abroad to the Newark-Elizabeth ports would fully emerge as a preeminent source of the area’s commerce, trade and revenue, while gigantic distribution facilities such as those operated by Amazon.com in the area would deliver many of these goods directly to American consumers.

With all of the exciting global economic infusion entering this area of New Jersey, the existence of a lost light in 1951, once provided by the erstwhile Bergen Point lighthouse would be almost entirely forgotten.

Upcoming Events



NJ Model Ship Club

Saturday, November 16th, 2024

Demonstrations & Displays

11am-3pm

Museum Store Sunday

Sunday, December 1st, 2024

Holiday Shopping Party & Open House

FREE ADMISSION!

Nautical Gifts

Refreshments and Cookies

**MUSEUM
STORE
SUNDAY®**

Holiday Golf Outing

Friday, December 6th, 2024

11:30am Kick Off with Bagels, Donuts & Coffee

12:30pm Tee Off

Raffles, Best Ball Scramble, 50/50 Raffles, Longest Drive, Closest to Pin, Straightest Drive, Lowest Score Prizes

All You Can Eat and Drink, BBQ Lunch with Hot Dogs, Hamburgers, Chicken, Hot Chocolate, Coffee.

\$100.00 Per Golfer • \$50.00 BBQ Lunch Only

Sponsorships Available!

Fathom Exhibit

Opening Saturday, December 14th, 2024

2pm

Fathom, a video installation created by Caleb Hammond, reflects on the passage of time and contemplates the everydayness of life. Runs through January 11, 2025.

USCG and Prohibition with Timothy Dring

Sunday, January 12th, 2025

2 - 4 pm

Timothy Dring presents on the U.S. Coast Guards role during the Prohibition era

Holiday Golf Outing

9 Holes of Frosty Fun

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2024
Grand Oaks Country Club
(South Shore Golf Course)
200 Huguenot Avenue, Staten Island, NY 10312

Sponsorships Available!

Lighthouse PointFest Recap

At the Lighthouse PointFest, the soup contest a smashing success! Peter Botros from numerous restaurants around town was once again a First Place winner - lots of wonderful soups and a great turnout from the FDNY in joining us for the first time and bringing their soups into the mix....they promise to come out full force next year!

Other delicious soups were the Pumpkin Spice Soup and the Artichoke Soup. Interns helped out from St. Joseph Hill Academy and Staten Island Academy with Irish Step Dancers entertained the crowd.



NLM Visit Pete Davidson

Pete Davidson of Saturday Night Live history and now owner, along with Colin Jost of the Staten Island Ferry - the John F. Kennedy visited the Museum on one of his film shoots and posed for a pic with our new crew - Joe Conte; Kenzie Grogan and Jeffrey Bryant.

Pete also enjoyed hearing the story about Gladys, our petrified raccoon that always comes out of the loft around Halloween to visit!.



National Lighthouse Museum Featured in a New Book by Bob Eckstein

Bob Eckstein is an award-winning writer, illustrator, NY Times bestseller, New Yorker cartoonist and world's leading snowman expert. His new book is *Footnotes from the Most Fascinating Museums: Stories and Memorable Moments from People Who Love Museums*.

It is a love letter to museums and museum-goers, filled with lush and whimsical illustrations paired with stories and anecdotes from curators, museum workers, museum visitors, and more.

BobEckstein.com



Lighthouse Recognition Week



Sunset Cruise View with the Statue of Liberty



Magnificent rainbow culminated our Lighthouse Recognition Weekend



Staten Island Ferry Hawks Game during Lighthouse Recognition Week - out for a fun night with NLM Team.



*NLM Staff Team on LH Recognition Boat Tour
Kim Lewis- Bianca Cipriani- Cezanne Bies*

In
Memory
Of



Jean Coombs

May she rest in peace!
Instrumental in helping the
Museum grow from Day One!