
Lighthouses, Hot Chocolate and You - 2004

Photos by Ron Foster

On January 31, 2004, about 80 NELL members and guests braved the bitter cold and wind to tour 4 lighthouses from Watch Hill, RI through Mystic, CT during our annual winter Lighthouses, Hot Chocolate, and You event. Brrrrr !

This year's event was very special because our group of enthusiasts was able to access several lighthouses not open to the public including the private home at Morgan Point, were met at Watch Hill by Ocean State Video filming our visit for a PBS documentary on Rhode Island Lighthouses, and were accompanied on the tour by Kim Andrews of Harbour Lights who traveled from sunny CA to make a very personal presentation during our concluding hot chocolate gathering at Mystic Seaport's Seamen's Inne.

Many members enjoyed a Friday night dinner in Mystic before car pooling to Watch Hill, RI for an 8:30 AM start to our Saturday. What a wake up call !! The frigid temperature and strong winds on the point nearly blew us over and we quickly sought shelter in the keepers house open for us by Pres. Mike Dush and member/resident Bob Peacock of the Watch Hill Lighthouse Keepers Assoc.. What a beautiful vacant apartment for rent, but consider the seasonal changes and fog horn. :) A NELL attendees donation of \$440 was made to the Keepers Assoc. for their continuing lighthouse preservation work.

Their small oil house museum housed, among other historical information, the original Fresnel lens from that tower with its red sector glass panels which was replaced by a modern optic in 1986. Mark Taylor and two other men of the USCG opened the adjacent maintenance / fog signal building, gave us a toot, and provided access to the tower. What a view out to Fishers Island Sound and back to the ice bound rocks and magnificent summer homes of Watch Hill.

NELL member Louise Pittaway, "keeper" of the Old Lighthouse Museum for the Stonington, CT Historical Society, was on the tour with us. She ran ahead to that Stonington Lighthouse and opened it for our next stop. Although there is no lens in this tower, the stone keepers house and attached tower with granite steps house a museum containing, among other items, a display on Long Island Sound Lighthouses and a fourth order Fresnel lens. The latter is stored under a protective Plexiglas cover paid for by an earlier grant from NELL. A new exhibit of an old cistern seen through a glass covered cut - away floor was particularly interesting. A NELL \$430 attendees donation was made to support their continued preservation efforts.

After lunch members began arriving at the private residential area in Noank, CT at the tip of Morgan Point and toured the very beautiful residence, maritime museum, and lighthouse owned by Jason and Rena Pilalas. Words simply cannot describe this spectacular setting and magnificent home ! The opportunity to make this short visit was very much appreciated by all. Caretaker, James Smith, was a most gracious host and was awarded NELL membership. Membership was also extended to the Pilalas family.

The maritime collection of art, ships bells and name plates, and library were stunningly displayed in and around the tower stairs. The view from the reconstructed lantern room with its covered Fresnel lens was terrific. (I'm running out of superlatives.)

Alas we departed to Mystic Seaport where we split into 3 groups and toured the whaling ship Charles W. Morgan, historic relocated Block Island lifesaving station, and the newly renovated replica of the Brant Point Lighthouse in their seaport village setting. This working light has a fixed continuously lighted Fresnel lens. This stop was a fitting part of our journey back in time to the maritime days of old when lighthouses such as this lighted the way to the safety of home port.

Finally we gathered at the Seamen's Inne for hot chocolate and cookies, to reminisce and meet several new members and first time attendees, to do some raffle fund raising, and book signing by NELL member and author Terry Webb.

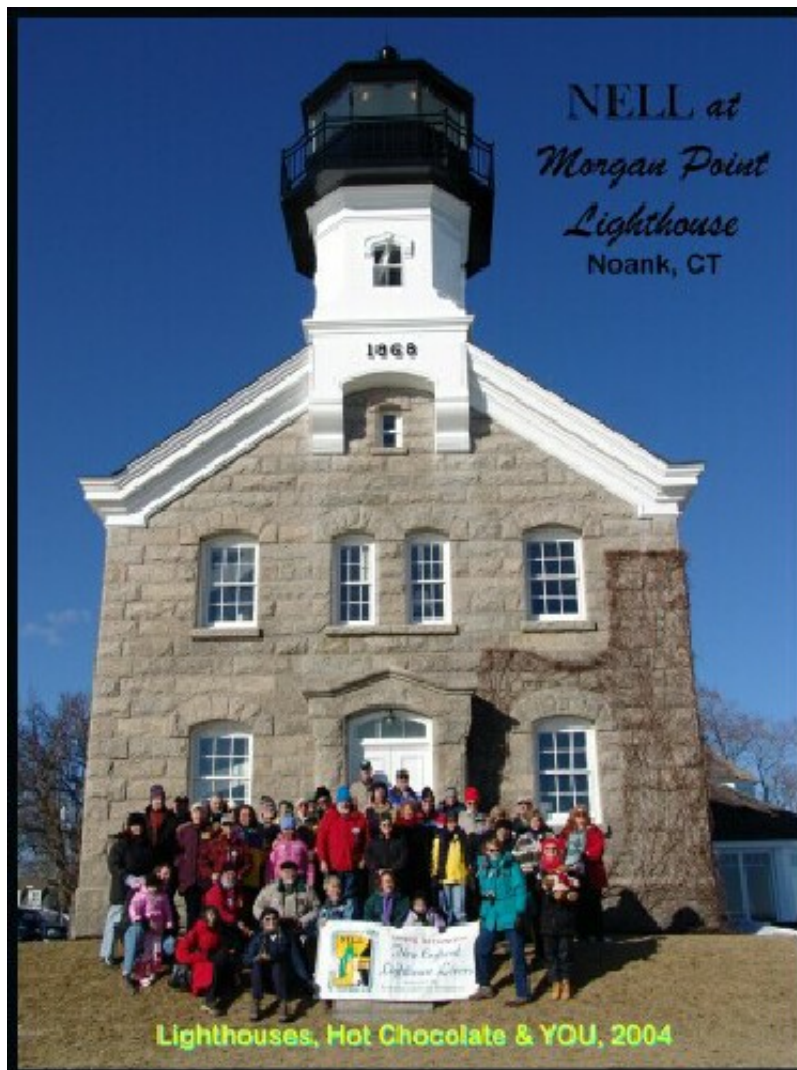
Our dear friend, Kim Andrews, presented Watch Hill LLOM Harbour Lights to all attendees, and donated two rare #9 Harbour Lights of Stratford Point, CT Christmas edition, and the new Rondout, NY. She more specifically made the in-person trip from CA to award the diamond-studded, gold-plated, St. Clair one-of-a-kind Harbour Light to the winner of their drawing from previous St Clair gold winners - our very own NELL Pres. Ron Foster. CONGRATULATIONS, RON!

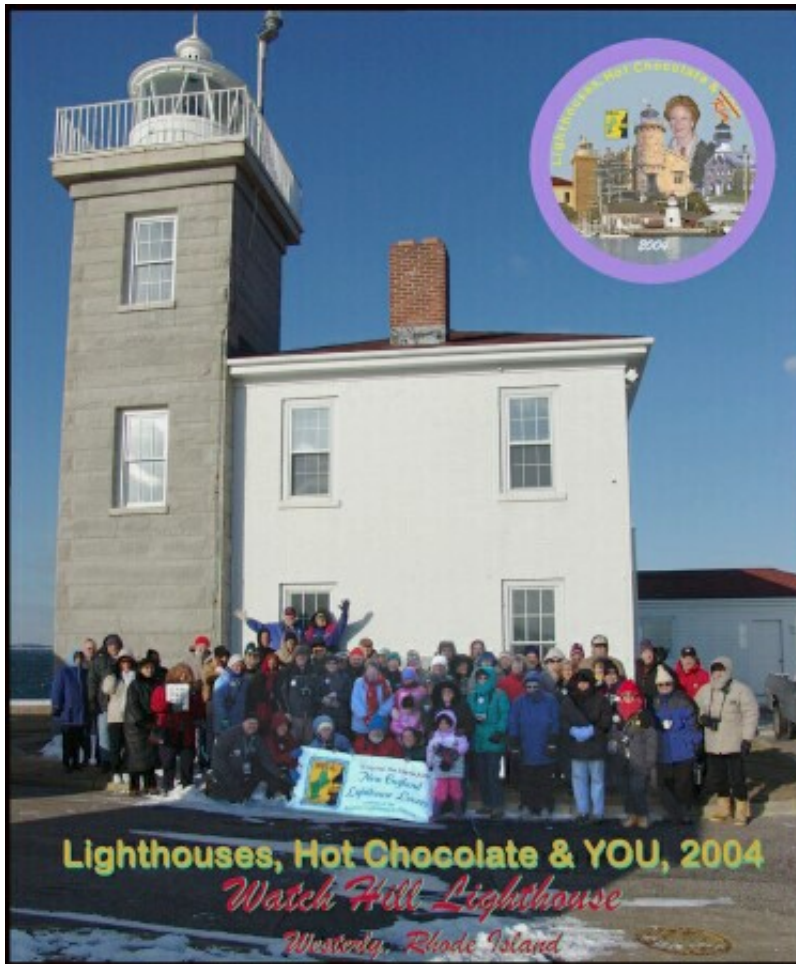
A special THANK YOU to NELL members Linda Jacobson, Jeremy D'Entremont, and Louise Pittaway for their assistance in arranging this trip, To the USCG, Mike Dush, and the WH Lighthouse Keepers Assoc., to the Pilalas family for allowing access to their home and lighthouse, to Mystic Seaport for the tour guides and use of the River Room at the Seamen's Inn, and to Kim Andrews and Harbour Lights.

A great time was enjoyed by all in this most-attended NELL event of all time !

Reservations are being accepted for our Spring meeting / tour to mid-coast Maine and Penobscot Bay for June 12-14, 2004, for members only, except for the cruise. Please see [Coast of Maine - 2004 Spring Meeting](#) for further information.

Tom Pregman, Vice Pres. NELL
Photos by Ron Foster, Pres NELL





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Watch Hill Lighthouse
Westerly, Rhode Island