

NELL NEWS



May/June

NELL Members If you have not yet paid your dues please read below...

2019 NELL Membership Dues are past due.

Send your check, \$20.00 for single membership or \$30.00 for a dual membership to:

NELL, c/o Kathy Santucci, 38 Lime Kiln Road, Tuckahoe, NY 10707.

If you would like to pay your NELL dues by PayPal click on the link below and follow the instructions.

<http://www.newenglandlighthouse lovers.org/membership-form/>

The 2019 membership directory will be sent to all members in June. Please check the directory for accuracy. Let me know if there are any corrections to be made. Some members have asked that some or all of their information not be included in the directory. Shortly after the membership directory is issued Jean Zunda will be taking over the responsibilities of membership. Thank you, Jean.

If you are signing up for the fall trip in September your dues must be paid in full.

Walter Mills - Membership

NELL Spring Event 2019

Saturday 18th – Sunday 19th May - Lake Champlain

There is still time to sign up

See attached information

If you have signed up and sent your payment to Kathy for this trip and have not received a lunch order spread sheet please contact me.

Other Lighthouse News

Barnegat Lightship

A narrow dirt path yards from a public playground in North Camden was cluttered with the hulls of several boats propped up on stacked cinderblocks on a recent weekday morning.

They were a few of what seemed to be dozens of other water crafts strewn about a sprawling graveyard of junk, many without even the dignity of cinderblocks.

Several others were partially submerged in what is billed as the Pyne Poynt Marina. The narrow dirt path wound around a jungle of vegetation, shells of cars, a thick rope hanging from a tree and other items that would make swell props in a horror film.

What wasn't readily visible was a historic vessel at the center preservation effort. An aerial photo of the marina recently posted on social media showed the Barnegat, a 668 ton, 130-foot long ship, was in fact still there, surrounded by nearly three dozen boats at the edge of the Delaware River across from Philadelphia.



The Barnegat Lightship, docked in rundown marina in Camden, was included in a list of the state's top 10 endangered historic places. (Courtesy of George Dilworth)



A historic photo of the Coast Guard ship Barnegat. (U.S. Coast Guard)

"I just think it's sad that it's sitting there rotting when it's historic and should be restored and on display and lit up," said George Dilworth, who posted a recent aerial, drone photo of the boat.

The Barnegat was built in 1904 a few miles south in Camden's New York Shipyard. It is one of the few ships of its kind to survive and a state preservation group included it last year in its list of the 10 most endangered historic places.

"It's a part of our maritime history," said Courteney Mercer, director of Preservation New Jersey. "I don't think there is any concerted effort to do anything about it, at this point. We list them. We aren't the ones who have a lot of capacity to save them."

The Barnegat is the only ship on the 2018 top 10 list.

The vessel was acquired by Rod Sadler, the owner of the marina, in the early 1990s, Mercer said. His plan then was to raise money to restore it and make it an attraction on the Camden waterfront, she said. That never happened and Mercer and other preservationists wonder if it ever will.

Efforts to reach Sadler by phone were not successful. His address is listed at the marina. A gate surrounding a home there had a sign posted that said: Keep Off by Order of Police Department.

Sadler is also listed as the chairman of the Camden city department of development and planning. A phone call there was directed to the mayor's office, where a spokesman said he did not have his contact information. The planning position is not a paid job.

Michael Lang, director emeritus of the Camden Shipyard & Maritime Museum, said he thinks Sadler is getting a bad rap. "He saved it from the scrapyards," Lang said Tuesday. "I'd be shocked if there was any money involved. He offered to let the Barnegat stay there. He's being vilified because it's not doing well there. It's not easy to save these ships."

Lang said Sadler has been active in teaching the maritime history of Camden. Sadler agreed to take the vessel when the Heritage Ship Guild on the Philadelphia waterfront disbanded in the early 1990s, Lang and Preservation New Jersey said. The Guild had acquired it in the 1970s from a Maryland group that displayed it after the Barnegat was decommissioned in 1967.

Lang said he couldn't put a price on how much it would cost to restore the ship. But he said the cast iron hull is susceptible to rust. Mercer said she has reached out to a list of potential donors to help pay for the preservation but no funds have been raised so far.

Camden County officials said they want to see the vessel preserved.

"We hope that its current owner finally gives the Barnegat the attention it needs or finds a new owner who will," said Freeholder Jeffrey Nash, who is also the vice-chairman of the Delaware River Port Authority, which has funded economic development on both sides of the Delaware River. "It is not too late for this piece of history to be saved, as we've seen examples of light boat preservations in New York with the Light Ship Nantucket, and in Delaware with the Light Ship Overfalls. The Barnegat was born in Camden it's time that it gets a proper celebration of its more than 115 years of service."

The steam-propelled ship was deployed by the Coast Guard to help ward ships away from shallow waters and shorelines off the Jersey coast, near Barnegat, long before the advent of GPS navigation. It had a second life during WWII as a vessel used for boarding ships and patrolling a coast line crawling with German submarines. It was retired in 1967 and quickly fell into disrepair. But it continues to exist when only a handful of a similar class of boats do.

"It's been almost a year since we listed it," Mercer said. "Most people didn't even know it existed. We were shocked when we found out it was there." Other historic ships also dot the waterfront near here.

A preservation effort is ongoing for the SS United States which sits docked on the waterfront in South Philadelphia. The vessel, 100 feet longer than the Titanic, debuted in 1951 and once owned the speed record for crossing the Atlantic. It continues to deteriorate as preservation efforts are ongoing.

The Battleship New Jersey has been docked on the Camden waterfront since 2001 and is a floating museum as one of the most decorated warships in history. A private fundraising effort is ongoing for its preservation and restoration.

The battleship is two miles south of the Barnegat but there is currently a world of difference between the two historic vessels. Lang thinks a restored Barnegat would be a welcome addition near the battleship.

"It's the epitome of the former industrial might of Camden," Lang said. "It protected our freedom against Germany during World War II. It's an important artifact. When it's gone, it's gone. It would be wonderful to still walk the decks to hear of its heroism."

New London Harbor



The historic New London Harbor Light reopened for public tours Wednesday 13th March for the first time in years.

"It's something that New London should be proud of. It's the oldest and tallest lighthouse on Long Island Sound," said New London Maritime Society Executive Director Susan Tamulevich.

The New London Maritime Society owns the lighthouse that dates back to 1761, before the nation declared its independence.

It's one of the first established lighthouses in the United States and was rebuilt in 1801.

Visitors will now be able to take a 119-step journey through the lighthouse on Pequot Avenue.

It's been a long time to get to this point. A 2015 cease-and-desist letter from the city because of increased activity at the lighthouse put the tours on hold. The Society also reached a settlement with a neighbor over a property line dispute.

Nicole Thomas and her two daughters, 7-year-old Natalya and 15-year-old Aliyana, got the very first tour. "We have been listed as one of the first, longest living African American families in New London. But my mother bought a house about 16 years ago. It had a plaque on it and I got off and running from there." Thomas is a proclaimed lover of local history. She reached out to Tamulevich after seeing a post online about New London Harbor Light Tours starting up

again. "We have to teach the younger generation what it is to appreciate the things that have always been available to them. And for me, that means a lot because I've lived my whole life seeing this lighthouse," Thomas said.

At the top of the lighthouse guest will get to see a Fresnel lens and Tamulevich said on a clear day, seven or eight other lighthouses.

Tours are now limited to a total of six people between the hours of 10 a.m. and 6 p.m.

No more than five tours can be given in a day, or a maximum of 12 tours in a week.

You Can VISIT INSIDE HARBOR LIGHTHOUSE.

Email or call (860) 447-2501 & leave your contact information.

\$30, \$25 NLMS members, \$15 youth to age 18.

For more information: <http://www.nlmaritimesociety.org/index.html>

International Lighthouse News

Brendan's life in the spotlight

Brendan Conway was a lighthouse keeper for 33 years and then spent a further 23 years keeping an eye on the lighthouse at Wicklow Head, Ireland



'People are always buying me lighthouses,' laughs Brendan Conway. And it's true, the Conway home in Wicklow Town is well stocked with ornaments and night-light holders in the form of lighthouses. Not only that, but there are photos and pictures of lighthouses too, and an illustrated [map of Ireland](#) showing where all the lighthouses are located. Brendan hardly needs assistance of the map to find his way around as he has served on most of them in his time. They have wonderful names - Raithlin O'Birne, Mew Island, Kish, Skellig Michael, Fastnet and so on.

Nowadays they send out their warning beams from towers that no longer require resident human presence but Brendan's career commenced amidst the smell of old-fashioned paraffin. The business of maritime safety has since been electrified and automated to the point that he was one of the last to leave the profession of light keeper - and he has already been retired for 24 years, though he remained in watchful position as attendant at Wicklow until last year. He and wife Miriam reside happily together in a house with a pleasing view out over the sea and on towards the distinctive peaks of the two Sugar Loaves. It was in this same house not far from the Black Castle in which the young Brendan grew up, one of three boys, attending St Joseph's de la Salle school, playing Gaelic football and rugby as well as soccer with Wicklow Town.

His father William was a lightshipman, serving on vessels anchored off the coast where crews of nine men spent six weeks on board before being allowed home for a fortnight.

When it came to choosing a career, William had firm views on the course he felt his son should steer: 'I wanted to go to sea but he would not have it. He said that Irish Lights were there for me,' Brendan recalls. The older man had done his share of globe-trotting as a sailor with the Liverpool based Blue Funnel Line which took him to far off Australia and China. He had no illusions about sea-faring, aware that it was a tough existence, and he did not hesitate before sending Brendan for an interview with Irish Lights at their Dublin HQ in D'Olier Street.

After that, there was a medical and then a swimming test, which was no problem at all for someone who had grown up splashing around in the harbour of his home town. The company signed him up and, in March of 1961, at the age of 18, Brendan arrived in Howth ready to commence training - a move that was to prove fateful.

The teenager certainly fell on his feet as he secured not only a career but also a wife as it was in Howth that he met Miriam Cooke, whose family quarry the unique Howth stone. The pair encountered each other when the trainees ventured out to the local shop to purchase a few groceries and they tied the marital knot in 1964. From the start their relationship had its periods of enforced separation as the trainee was dispatched to provide cover whenever regular staff members fell ill. His recollection all these years later is that his first such posting was to Loop Head which protrudes out into the Atlantic from County Clare. After the sophistication of the capital, life at the furthest extremity of the River Shannon estuary was like stepping back in time for the young Wicklow lad.

His second residency was in another beautiful but wild spot, Raithlin O'Birne off County Donegal, an island so small that it is known for little else except its lighthouse. The scent of the paraffin there lingers with him to this day, along with memories of the great fishing that he enjoyed off the shore. The routine of tending the light was divided into three four-hour shifts - 6 to 10 p.m., 10 p.m. to 2 a.m. and then the graveyard shift from 2 to 6 a.m. The job was done by a team of three - one principal keeper and two assistants: 'It was a different era. I was with some great men.'

Near Castletownbere in West Cork he first gained experience of a site that is both remote and completely isolated, for the Bull Rock is exactly as advertised - a great lump of rock washed by the ocean. Brendan Conway had no objection to such assignments and speaks fondly of many of them, though he has no hesitation in nominating the worst of the lot. Black Rock in Mayo was a hell hole as far as he is concerned and there is a collective shudder around the cosy kitchen table in Wicklow at the mere mention of the place. Brendan once found himself stranded there for three months when sustained bad weather meant no boat could reach the wretched place. Meanwhile he and his colleagues survived on iron rations of tinned meat and vegetables with powdered milk.

The rock has gained wider notoriety in recent times through the R116 helicopter disaster which claimed the lives of four rescue service personnel.

The crew did not realise the rock was there and, when they struck the unexpected obstacle, the fatal collision damaged the Irish Lights housing which sits 300 feet up on top of the rock.

'We were so upset at the news,' muses Miriam Conway. 'The helicopter hit the lighthouse accommodation - Brendan lived there for four or five years.'

Her husband had a narrow escape there one evening many years ago when he and colleague the late Jimmy Ward went fishing on an apparently calm sea. Then they heard a roar signalling an abrupt change and the pair took off, running up the face of the cliff, only for a giant wave to catch the other man and suck him back into the suddenly raging waters. 'I thought Jimmy was gone but then the sea boiled once more and he landed back at my feet. His shirt was in shreds because of the barnacles.'

The bloodied survivor vowed on the spot to give up the job and Brendan did not see him for another 25 years.

However, Brendan stuck with it and continued to ensure that sailors, whether aboard tiny yachts or hulking tankers, kept their bearings.

He had little contact passing mariners, though he and the late William Cleary who worked on a ship called 'Tuskar Rock' sometimes arranged to chat via radio telephone whenever his fellow Wicklow man was sailing by.

He had the privilege of living in the ancient tower at The Hook in County Wexford, built by the Normans and reckoned to be the oldest lighthouse in Europe.

Fastnet, the Bull Rock, Galley Head and the Old Head of Kinsale - he worked on all of them, though it was a dwindling occupation. Skellig Michael off Kerry was probably his favourite despite the fact that it was there that he happened to be when Hurricane Charlie struck in 1986. The wind was so severe that it blew in the window of his bedroom, frame and all, narrowly missing his head as it was hurled across the room before smashing into the door.

When he joined the service, Brendan was one among 168 staff who lived in or beside the 80 lighthouses but by the time he called it a day in 1994, he was one of the last.

His son Brendan junior - whose pastimes include making beautiful model light towers - worked for a while as a temporary keeper but there was no future in it for the younger generation.

Brendan senior served all around the coast, on either side of the Border, with stints in such out of the way places as The Maidens outside Larne and Mew Island in Belfast Lough.

Probably the most remote of all was Instrahull, seven miles off Ireland's most northerly point at Malin Head, a little known island with great walks and great fishing for off-duty hours.

Brendan frequently returned from tours of duty along the Atlantic seaboard with a crate-load of cod or pollock to feed the growing family - they have six offspring - but Instrahull was tops for lobster, no less.

Miriam and their children were able to join him full time when he was appointed to Wicklow lighthouse, where they resided before moving into the town.

Through Miriam, the Conways maintain their remarkably strong links with lighthouses as she is supervisor of the well-known tower at Wicklow Head.

The building, with its 109 steps from bottom to top, has not seen active service as a lighthouse in 200 years but it is in great demand as a place to stay.

On the books of the Irish Landmark Trust, it has two bedrooms and it ideal for a quiet getaway.

Among those who have spent nights there was President Kennedy's sister Jean, who arrived amidst great secrecy for a night with friends,

The Conways are a family steeped in the lighthouse tradition and strongly loyal to the lighthouse fraternity.

The dwindling band of brothers who served Irish Lights has occasional re-unions, along with their spouses, the most spectacular five years ago at Hook Head in Wexford. More usually they assemble annually for a meal and reminiscence at a yacht club in Dun Laoghaire.

Happy Birthday

Bob Trapani	5/14	Fran Dollinger	5/14	Tom Cardaci	5/25
MaryAnn Clark	5/27				
Bob Kerber	6/01	Amy Wininger	6/06	Frank DePasquale	6/10
Hilari Seery	6/16	Irma Streeter	6/16	Walt Mills	6/24
David Dingley	6/26	Ellen Granoth	6/28		

Anniversary Wishes

Bill & Odette Kent	5/01	Robert & Sharon Mills	5/09	Bob & MaryAnn Scroope	5/28
Hilari & Jim Seery	6/10	Tom & Arlene Pregman	6/21	James & Nancy Cope	6/24
Henry & Arlene Winkleman	6/29				

Please Note:

The Lighthouse Digest – For each subscription, please use the form on the NELL website. Mail with check to Lighthouse Digest, ATTN: Kathleen Finnegan, P.O. Box 250, East Machias, ME 04630. Be sure to write NELL in the memo section of your check and NELL will receive \$10.00 per subscription to go toward restoration and preservation of lighthouses.

If you know of a member that needs some cheer, get well wishes, condolences or congratulations, please let Cynthia Bosse - Sunshine Chair know at: bossnjc@comcast.net or call 1(860) 688-7347.

If you have any knowledge of an upcoming event or news to share, please send it to me: chapterchatter@outlook.com

All articles and information must be received by the 25th of the month prior to make the publication.

Please let me know your birthday (month & day only) and anniversary so I will be able to recognize you on your special day in our monthly Best Wishes section.