



KELLY'S CORNER by Jan Kelly

Provincetowners are ever seeking more time on the dunes, the Back Beach, fishing, beachcombing, a day of sketching or writing, fill in some gaps, but to stay for the succession of day to night, night unto day is the rounded desire. One, two, three days and nights into a week seem to be the limit for us. Thanks to Peaked Hill Trust and some private ownership we can manage that, but if your name is not chosen in the trust's lottery, you're back to the fishing, beachcombing and the generosity of a few friends.

Left with no dune time for the coming millennium summer, I decided to pursue a more touristy approach. I thought I would rent Race Point Light for a night and invite the friends I usually shared the Peaked Hills Trust time with each year. When I phoned the quest turned inside out. I was invited to be a host to other visitors at the Race Point Lighthouse.



Spend a Night

At Race Point Light

I was transported—along with 15 tiny children and perhaps 30 adults—to Race Point Light for our orientation and workshop on being a host at the lighthouse and the Keeper's House. A high level of interest and steadied enthusiasm pervaded this group; even the small children were calm and serious beyond their years, interacting and consciously keeping apace not to miss anything. They were helpers, too. Passages of time like this are gratifying.

The U.S. Coast Guard owns the lighthouse and the Keeper's House. They maintain the all-important lighthouse, but the Keeper's House was in an abandoned state for 20 years. Cape Cod National Seashore owns the land and the beach access road. With each passing year, the Keeper's House

became a sadder sight, holding on to the sand through many a storm, alternately parching in direct sun. Many of us were upset

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and had ideas, but talk was so easy. Once we had passed the grounds and came to the beach, the conversation moved on as well to fishing or gannets or seals, except for a few...

Members of N.E.L.F., the New England Lighthouse Foundation, strategized a plan and a proposal which was presented to and accepted by the U.S. Coast Guard. NELF would restore and make livable the Keeper's House and open it to the public as a tool of education, enrichment and enjoyment in a unique experience on a most unique spot on the globe. The Coast Guard awarded a 15 year lease to NELF, a non-profit organization dedicated to the protection and educational benefits of lighthouses.

The volunteer crew of NELF put into their dream goal action—to return the Keeper's House to a functional and welcoming dwelling. The work took one year and the pride in that work is just as evident today in the members we met through our training.

Jim Walker, the chairperson, lives in Hyannis. Bill Collette serves as Treasurer. Len Hadley serves as Treasurer of the umbrella group, the American Lighthouse Foundation. Up until now, Leo Bedard, a teacher from Sandwich Technical School has been host and reservations manager. In January, Leo passed the torch to local Cathy Skowron, recently retired from the Provincetown Elementary School System. Cathy also taught a children's art course at the Art Association for five years.

There were many volunteers who had helped in the restoration who were on hand to guide us through our upcoming duties, mechanical and social. We were first shown a film on driving over the sand, on respect for the outer beach—both the terrain and the inhabitants—and on the intricacies of four-wheel drive.

Next we had to pass through four maintenance stations: First, Dick Davidson explained and demonstrated the proper lighting of the gas lamps. The lights and refrigerators run on gas; a generator takes up the task of water pressure, hot water and electric

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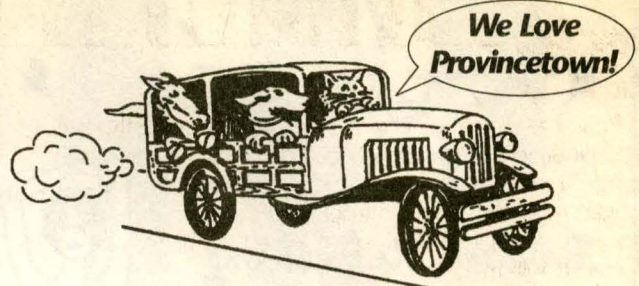
lights. Dick's explanations were spotted with humor and his penetrating voice implied a kindly "get it or else." We all got it.

The generator provided our next lesson stop presented by Sidney Bamford. That generator proved to be manageable even to those of us who thought of it as "boy talk." Instructions are posted over the machine in case of doubt. All the fuels are labeled and nearby there's a cell phone and a contact number in case of an emergency.

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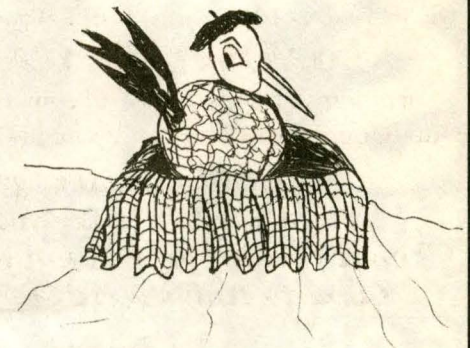
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Critters of the Sea

The Bagpiping Plover

(*Pluvius tartanus*)



Unlike the Plover we have all grown accustomed to seeing, the Bagpiping Plover has a large guttural pouch which helps it create a sound unlike any ever heard in the avian world.

This Nova Scotia native sings with amazing grace and can often be heard in the stillness of country cemeteries piping its plaintive tune. The Bagpiping Plover nest can be readily identified by an unusual skirt woven of colorful cotton and flax threads. The species has long been thought to originate in the Loch Ness area of Scotland.

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One can also use an outside hand pump in case of failure. Priming and pumping were part of the water availability talk. The available water is too salty for drinking, but can be used for washing dishes, flushing toilets and showers. Sidney's calm manner and his invisible talent for making his listener confident made the session painless and successful.

From the generator we moved on to the "gift shop." The "Gift Shop" is also the host's bedroom—one double bed, cups, tee shirts, sweatshirts and lighthouse memorabilia all about. All is neat and tidy and I gasped as I realized "when I am host this will be my view." Scott Branco guided us through the honor system sales, keys and use of the cell phone. Scott, his wife and his three small boys were spending the day and night there as part of the welcoming. Tom Branco, Scott's father, was the last keeper of this house and Scott lived there as a child.

Our fourth station, led by Leo Bedard, was in the living room. A toasty stove, lighthouse motified creweled curtains, a comfortable couch and chairs relaxed us into an overview, the details and unanswered questions. All these consenting adults (and children) were respectful and eager to take on responsibility for the maintenance of a coastal and, for us, a Cape Cod tradition. People love new vistas. They respond and grow right before your eyes. The negative in life washes out and away before new learning and social experiences. The solitude and the privacy of creation is the other response in this universe. The day went well. No child whimpered. Intense learning looks and smiles covered the faces of the day.

Now you know that a unique vacation awaits you as a guest of NELF and a competent keeper. You can rent one or all of the three upstairs rooms. You can stay a night, two nights, a week living in this spot of beauty far from "civilization" but equipped with the amenities of lights, hot and cold running water and heat. Dreamlike, you will be driven to and from the house 2.5 miles over the sand with the Atlantic as your view. Whale watching, bird watching, fishing, swimming and beachcombing are steps from your porch. The sunrises and sunsets will become a long-remembered part of your life.

The prices are moderate, the experience unequalled. Such a small request we all have: to spend more time on the dunes; but it takes much skill and organization to develop this opportunity. The New England Lighthouse Foundation has availed itself of this opportunity for you. Cathy Skowron can help you get out there if you call her at 508-487-9930 or email her at racepointlighthouse@mediaone.net.

When I asked Cathy how she was enjoying her new career, she answered "I love it. It's fun. I can work at home and when I do have to go to work I get to go to Race Point Light—wonderful!" The Keeper's House is open from April 15th to October 15th. Some dates are still available.

