The Lighthouse at Pemaquid Point
Docent Information

(May, 2026)

Historical Timeline:

1822 – Fresnel lens invented by Augustin Fresnel in France.

1826 – John Quincy Adams, 6th President of the U.S., commissioned a lighthouse at Pemaquid Point, and Congress authorized $4000 for its construction.

1827 – Sarah and Samuel Martin (descendants of survivors of the *Angel Gabriel* shipwreck at Pemaquid Harbor in 1635) sold several acres at Pemaquid Point for $90 to the federal government to build the lighthouse. The area marks the entrance to Muscongus Bay to the east and Johns Bay to the west.

1827 – Isaac Ilsley, Superintendent of Lighthouses for Maine, contracted with Jeremiah Berry, a bricklayer from Thomaston, to build the lighthouse and keeper's house. Ilsley contracted with Captain Winslow Lewis of Boston to "fit up the lamps for the lantern."

The original lamps burned sperm whale oil. Before the current Fresnel lens was installed, light was projected out to sea by utilizing a series of ten Argand lantern systems set in a semi-circle. The mirrors, positioned behind the flame, reflected the light, and the curvature of the mirrors focused and magnified the light.

The tower, built of stone, had a diameter of 16 feet at the bottom and 10 feet at the top. The walls were 3½ feet thick at the base and uniformly graduated to 2 feet thick at the top. There was a circular stair of hard pine, with an iron ladder at the top, reaching to the scuttle. An octagonal shaped lantern room sat atop the tower. The lantern stood 79 feet above sea level.

The original keeper's house was built of stone (34 by 20 feet) and consisted of two rooms with a fireplace in each room and a chimney in the middle. A kitchen, with its own chimney, was attached; it had an iron crane, a trammel, an oven, a sink, and gutter. The original lighthouse and the keeper's dwelling were completed for $2800.

Soon the stone tower started to disintegrate and needed rebuilding. The original mason used salt water to mix with lime to make the mortar; the salt caused the mortar to crumble.

1835 – To rebuild the tower, a new contract hired Joseph Berry, a Georgetown mason, rumored to be the nephew of Jeremiah Berry, the first builder. The specifications were the same as the original tower, except for two important changes: 1) The mortar was to be mixed with ONLY fresh water, and 2) The walls were to be built solid with mortared granite blocks on the exterior and mortared granite rubble between the exterior wall with an interior wall of mortared brick. [There's an opening inside the tower on the water side that shows the tower's construction.] Keeper Isaac Dunham, who oversaw the construction, wrote "a Better Tower and Lantern never was Built in this State."

The cost to rebuild the tower was $1395; it stands at 38 feet tall and has an iron spiral staircase with 31 steps and an 8-rung ladder leading into the lantern room. The light beams its beacon at 79 feet above sea level.

1852 – During the 1850s, much was accomplished in the construction of lighthouses. Ship captains complained that America's lighthouses were inferior to those in France and England. A nine-member Lighthouse Board created by Congress aimed to improve the poor navigational aids. The result was to install Fresnel lenses in all lighthouses in the country.

1856 – The Lighthouse Board allocated funds for a 4th Order Fresnel Lens for Pemaquid Point Light along with funds for rebuilding the Keeper's House. A 4th order lens cost $428 at the time.

1857 – The current Fresnel lens was installed at Pemaquid Point Lighthouse. The newly constructed keeper's house was built of wood and looks very much the same as it does today. The present-day picket fence was originally a stone wall.

1863 – Records show that sperm whale oil still was delivered to the lighthouse, thus the fuel of choice. However, shortly thereafter, the fuel source switched to liquid lard because of the rising price and scarcity of whale oil due to the Civil War and overharvesting of sperm whales.

1868 – Susie Lawler was the only baby ever born in the keeper's house. Her parents were Keeper Joseph Lawler and his wife Sophronia.

1896 – Around this time, kerosene became fuel for the light. Kerosene gave off eight times as much light as the old wick lamps with less fuel consumption. In 1896, the red oil brick house was built for the storage of kerosene. A tender steered as close to the oil house as possible and tossed a line ashore to transport the fuel to land. Even today, on hot summer days, you may detect a whiff of kerosine emitting from the oil house!

1897 – The fog signal bell tower was built to employ a hand operated bell, which was replaced in 1898 and 1899. During this time, the lighthouse employed two assistants to share the work of maintaining the signal. Initially, keepers took turns banging the bell with a hammer at set intervals to warn mariners.

1899 – The white wooden tower was built to house the counterweights that functioned like a grandfather clock mechanism to automatically run the system. Keepers and family members learned to pull the cord that lifted the counter balanced weight to the highest position that kept the bell ringing for six hours. In heavy storms or in dense fog, ships could not tell the direction of the clanging bell, because sound bounces off fog and is masked by heavy rain and wind. The system of fog bells failed and was abandoned.

[The tower that held the bell counterweights was toppled during Hurricane Bob in 1991. On January 10 and 13, 2004, storms destroyed two walls of the bell tower, which have been rebuilt utilizing some of the bricks salvaged from the debris.]

1910-12 – All lighthouses were under the charge of civilians as the U.S. Lighthouse Service organized to take responsibility.

1923 (August 16) – Edith, daughter of lighthouse keeper Herbert Robinson married Sergeant George A. Simpson on the front porch of the keeper's house, often highlighted as a rare personal moment in the life of a lighthouse keeper. Robinson and his wife, Mary "Mae" Myers, had 10 children; another daughter married a lighthouse keeper and lived at West Quoddy Head and Petit Manan.

1934 – The last light keeper was transferred to a Portland lighthouse when Pemaquid became the first lighthouse in Maine to be automated by virtue of switching to an acetylene gas flame for the light source.

1937 – The Lighthouse Service removed the original fog bell; its whereabouts is unknown. [The bell on the lawn by the keeper's house facing the parking lot is like the one that hung at the Pemaquid Point but it is from another lighthouse that was decommissioned.]

1939 – The U.S. Coast Guard assumed responsibility for all U.S. lighthouses.

1940 – The town of Bristol purchased Lighthouse Park from the U.S. government. [The town rejected an offer from the U.S. Coast Guard in 1993 to assume the lease of the lighthouse.]

1985 – Pemaquid Point Light was placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

1991 – The fog bell house and white triangular tower were destroyed by severe storms and then by hurricane Bob.

1992 – The bell house and tower were reconstructed.

2000 – The U.S. Coast Guard leases the tower to the American Lighthouse Foundation for its care.

2003 – The tower was opened to the public by Friends of Pemaquid Point Lighthouse under the leadership of Dick Melville. Docents offer guided tours of the Lantern Room.

2007 – Bristol placed all power lines underground to improve the appearance of the park.

2007 – ALF secured a grant of $50,000 from Lowe's Charitable and Education Foundation in partnership with the National Trust for Historic Preservation and a $10,000 grant from the Maine Historic Preservation Commission (New Century Community Program). With that $60,000, FPPL contributed $46,000 from visitors' donations to restore the lighthouse.

2010 – Using funds from a 2009 Federal Appropriation, the interior of the tower and the lantern room were restored.

2020 – An electric 1000-watt Halogen lamp was replaced with an LED light source.

2024 – Extreme storms in January almost destroy the Bell House, which was rebuilt.

2025 – New England Lighthouse Lover's Grant allows Friends of Pemaquid Point Lighthouse to replace broken hinges on the gallery scuttle door.

2025 – StationKeeper, a marine safety and conservation network, powered by an automated identification technology, is installed in PPL's lantern room. StationKeeper

units monitor vessel activity and broadcast automated safety messages to ships in nearby waters, encouraging safer navigation and protecting sensitive coastal zones.

2027 – Friends of Pemaquid Point Lighthouse celebrates the 200th Anniversary of a Light Station at Pemaquid Point!

The Lantern Room and the Light:

Until 1857 a bank of 10 lanterns that was developed by Captain Winslow Lewis's variation of the Argand lantern system; the lanterns were arranged in a semicircle

The Fresnel Lens:

In 1857, the Lighthouse Service (pressured by sea captains who found the lights in France and England superior to ours) installed a Fresnel lens at Pemaquid Light. In time, Fresnel lenses were installed in all lighthouses in the U.S.

There are six sizes of lenses for lighthouses, called "orders," which refers to size and brightness (distance from the flame).

1st order: 8.7 - 12 feet in height with a diameter of 6 feet (found in large coastal/ocean lighthouses. There is only one in Maine (Seguin Island Light Station)

2nd order: 6.1 - 6.7 feet in height (found in Great Lakes, reefs, sounds)

3rd order: 4.8 - 5.2 feet in height (bays, channels, river entrances)

4th order: 2.3 - 2.8 feet in height (most common; harbors and shoals

5th order: 1.6 - 1.8 feet in height (breakwaters and river lights

6th order: 1.4 - 1.5 feet in height (small piers and harbor markers

Pemaquid Point's lens:

The Pemaquid lantern has a 4th order Fresnel lens. A 4th order lens generally weighs between 440 and 660 pounds. It looks like a giant glass beehive with a flame in the center. Pemaquid's prisms form a 310-degree arc to focus its light towards the sea; the cut-out section keeps the light from shining onto the land in that 50-degree arc with no lens. Land-based lighthouses are constructed in this manner. [Guests ask if we cut a section out of the lens to better show the LED light, but the lens was manufactured in France for the Pemaquid Peninsula to shine the light only into the Gulf of Maine. Island Fresnel lenses beam their light in a 360-degree arc; some are stationary, some rotate.]

4th order lenses are about 28 inches tall and have an inside diameter of about one foot eight inches. Pemaquid's light has an LED beacon installed in December 2020. Its light has a solar detection system that turns the light on and off at dusk and dawn. The white light flashes every 6 seconds. Its beam can be seen for 14 nautical miles (about 15 miles). At present, the light has no back-up power system installed.

Early Fresnel lenses got their light from sperm whale oil lamps that burned constantly from dusk to dawn. They had no blinking or flashing light, which made it difficult for mariners to distinguish one lighthouse location from another. Fresnel lenses have multiple rings of

glass prisms that collect and divide light rays to produce large beams shining outward. The flash pattern of a lighthouse is called a "characteristic."

The funnel in the ceiling of the lantern room served as a chimney to send smoke from burning oil and kerosene lamps to the outside.

A mariner entering Muscongus Bay sees the Monhegan light on his right (starboard) rotating every 15 seconds and the Pemaquid light on the left (port) blinking every 6 seconds, thus alerting the sea captain that s/he is entering Muscongus Bay. Soon, Franklin Island light appears towards the east; also blinking every 6 seconds, but the configuration of the prisms (the lens design) distinguishes it from Pemaquid.

Local Buildings and Lighthouses:

Bird's Eye View of the Pemaquid Point buildings:

- Fishermen's Museum
- Bell tower: 2 buildings. For operating the fog bell, the white building held the counter weights. This bell is smaller than the original.
- Red brick oil house: stored the kerosene safely away from the keeper's house and tower during the years when kerosene was the fuel source used in the lantern room
- Artists' gallery: juried artists exhibit their work for sell
- Education Center: may be rented for meetings, wedding receptions, etc.
- Seagull Shop and Restaurant (privately owned)
- Restrooms
- Bell on lawn (one like the original at PPL but from another lighthouse; no one knows what happened to Pemaquid's bell.)

Looking Out at Surrounding Island and Lighthouses

On a clear night, if you stand at Pemaquid Point, you can see the lights of Franklin Island Lighthouse, Monhegan Island Light, and in the distance, Seguin Island Light Station. If you are offshore and look back at land, you can see Ram Island Ledge Light Station and Cuckolds Lighthouse.

Monhegan Island is located 10 to 12 nautical miles off the coast of Pemaquid Point. The island is almost 2 miles long and 1/2 mile wide; it has some of the tallest cliffs on the Maine coast. Less than 100 residents, mainly lobstermen and their families, live all year on the island. Monhegan has a larger summer population and has been a favorite spot for many artists, including Jamie Wyeth, Rockwell Kent, and Edward Hopper. There are a few dirt roads on the island with some old cars and pickup trucks using them. There is a museum in the lightkeeper's house that is maintained by the Monhegan Historical and Cultural Museum Association. Most of the population on the island is located in a small area on the western shore where the dock is situated. Three-quarters of the island is uninhabited. Beyond the village, Monhegan has some spectacular scenery, especially on the eastern shore. Hiking trails abound and trail maps are available on the ferries that transport visitors to the island from New Harbor, Boothbay Harbor, and Port Clyde.

Monhegan's lighthouse has a rotating white signal that appears to flash every 15 seconds, which can be seen for about 20 nautical miles offshore. It is solar powered and has an acrylic lens. The lighthouse sits on the highest point on Monhegan Island, and because of

this, it is the second highest lighthouse in Maine. It was first built in 1824. The present lighthouse was built in 1850 and automated in 1959.

Franklin Island is located 5 miles east of Chamberlain and 6 miles south of Friendship. The island is a 12-acre, rocky, desolate, uninhabited National Wildlife Refuge in Muscongus Bay. The island supports nesting gulls, eiders, black crowned night herons, and osprey. Franklin Island can only be reached by boat and is open to the public during daylight hours between September 1 and March 31 and closed during nesting season.

Franklin Island, the 3rd oldest lighthouse in Maine (following Portland Head and Seguin), was built in 1807. The present structure, a 45-foot brick tower, was built in 1855. It had a 4th order lens that is now on display at the Coast Guard Station in Boothbay Harbor. The tower and the oil station are all that are left of the original buildings. The Franklin Light Preservation, Inc., has a contract with the U.S. Coast Guard to maintain the light as an active aid to navigation. Its signal is also a white light flashing every 6 seconds.

Looking Out at Islands past the Bell Tower

Due west looking across Johns Bay, visitors see **Thrumcap Island and Ledges.** In the distance, if looking southwest on a clear day, one may see the faint outline of **White Island** and **Outer Heron Island**. For more information, view the NOAA Navigational Chart.

Seguin Island is located 6 miles out to sea at the mouth of the Kennebec River. Seguin is a Native American word for "a place where the sea vomits," denoting the tumultuous seas that occur when the incoming tide meets the outgoing river current. This light has a 53-foot tower; because of its high perch, the light stands 180 feet above sea level. Seguin has Maine's only 1st order Fresnel lens, and is Maine's 2nd oldest lighthouse, after Portland Head and before Franklin Island.

Its 1st Order Fresnel Lens is slightly more than 12-feet in height and has the same LED light system that Pemaquid Light has. Its beam can be seen for 21 miles. Its lens is so large that keepers had to step inside to light it. Its "characteristic" is a constant non-flashing 360-degree white light. It was electrified in 1957 and is currently maintained by the Friends of Seguin Light. Boat trips to view Seguin Island from the water are offered by the Maine Maritime Museum and by charter boat companies in Bath. One may arrange to camp there, but you must provide your own transportation on and off the island.

Allen and **Brenner** are the islands located to the east between Franklin and Monhegan islands five miles south of Port Clyde in Muscongus Bay in the Gulf of Maine. For decades, these islands were the summer home of American artist Andrew Wyeth and his wife/business manager, Betsy. Wyeth's paintings were inspired by the islands and he painted there, including his final painting, "Goodbye," of a 19th-century sail loft. Betsy, a conservationist, cared for the islands and re-established a working waterfront for locals. In 2022, Colby College acquired the islands "as its newest steward utilizing this 500-acre campus for learning, research, and creative inspiration across disciplines—long-term climate monitoring, biodiversity and bird research, photography and cinema, and much more." There is now year-round access to the undisturbed environments.

A Day in the Life of a Lighthouse Keeper

From 1827 until 1934, 14 lighthouse keepers tended the "Light" at Pemaquid Point.

Keepers were called “wickies” because of the time they spent trimming candle and oil lantern wicks in the days before switching to electricity.

Being a keeper was a dangerous job with much responsibility, attention to detail, and physical endurance. First and foremost, keepers were assigned to keep the light burning at night and ring the fog bell during the years when this warning system was used, mostly unsuccessfully, so thereby discontinued.

Many keepers saved lives, rowing to sinking ships to rescue sailors, sea captains, or locals in small boats who were overpowered by rough seas. Saving the lives of those who were commercial sailors was not a keeper’s job, but as one keeper explained, he could not watch from shore as someone was drowning and not try to save them even if it meant risking his own life.

A keeper had to be able to read and write, row a skiff, keep records, work around the clock, and be a male between the ages of 18 and 50. However, women became keepers, often after working with their keeper husbands, but no woman ever served as a keeper at the Pemaquid Point Lighthouse. Undoubtedly, they helped when they could with chores and keeper duties.

The list of responsibilities for keepers and their families was endless. Keepers kept the lights burning, windows and glass lenses cleaned of soot, brass polished, wicks replaced and trimmed, broken windows fixed, lighthouse and keeper’s house painted annually, and the premises spit-spot clean. Often they had to grow their own food and raise farm animals. Keeping animals, children, and keepers from blowing off ledges into the ocean during inclement weather involved tying themselves and others onto solid surfaces with rope to avoid a mishap. Rowing to rescue a person from a ship or grabbing the line from the tender to fill the oil house with fuel were treacherous jobs. One of Pemaquid’s keepers wrote that one night his cat slipped out with him as he was going to the tower, and sadly his kitty was blown out to sea. Ice posed difficulty when it covered steps leading to the lantern room and the windows around the lantern room, inside and out. And, do we dare mention the difficulty of maintaining safe drinking water and the challenges of visiting an outhouse before the days of indoor plumbing?

Keepers were expected to keep logs that included each repair they made, amount spent on maintaining the lighthouse, time of sunrise and sunset, a daily weather report, and a listing of each ship that passed by the lighthouse. These reports in turn justified a keeper’s salary. A record of ship sightings in April of 1886 —April being the busiest month for commercial ships— included the listing of 340 vessels (sloops, brigs, ships, schooners, and steamers) that passed by. Possibly wives and children helped with this recording task.

Keepers and their families endured cold, windy, wet, and slippery conditions. Before electricity was installed, the keeper carried a lantern in one hand and the fuel plus tools or whatever else he needed with him as he climbed the 31 spiral steps and 7-rung ladder to the lantern room to do his work. There was no heat in the lighthouse; wind chills created harsh working conditions. Removing ice and frost from the lantern room windows so the light could pass through them was a difficult task. Replacing broken windows during a violent storm was challenging.

At any time the Lighthouse Service would arrive for unscheduled inspections. Once telephones were installed, keepers from one lighthouse would call ahead warning the next keeper that an inspector was headed their way. The keeper would quickly change into his official uniform while family members, especially wives, frantically tidied the keeper’s house. Keepers said that they got the “white glove treatment,” often to the dismay of their wives. They received commendations for abiding by the rules of cleanliness, tidiness, and doing their jobs. After

three years of receiving excellent scores, they would get a reprieve from the impromptu inspections.

A supply list of deliveries to the lighthouse in the early 1860s included: 86 gallons of sperm oil, 3 rods lamp wick, 9 linen towels, 40 pounds of soap, 2 lamp chimneys, white wash, and 9 pints “spirits.” (Obviously, the Lighthouse Service wanted to provide a little levity for the keeper!) Another log showed a delivery of “200# of pork, 100# of beef, rice, dried beans or peas.” The government would move a keeper to his next post if he had been assigned, but if a keeper requested a new posting, he would bear all expenses for renting a transport boat for his family and possessions.

Every three months, the keeper received from the Lighthouse Service a packet of library books on a 3-month loan. The books were passed along to another lighthouse in three months and the keeper received a new supply. Loneliness was a problem for keepers, especially those on islands; however, they were kept quite busy during the warmer seasons. Winters were the solitary time. Those with families fared better than those who lived alone in lighthouses. Our first keeper lived alone for a decade at PPL. Of note, the road down the peninsula to Pemaquid Point was not built until the mid-1800s, so keepers before then traveled by boat to get supplies.

To check on keepers, a Lighthouse Service tender would at random times cruise close to shore and blow a whistle or ring a bell. The lighthouse keeper had to blow a whistle or ring a bell in response. If there was no response, the Service would continue until the keeper responded, or they would come ashore to check on the keeper’s whereabouts and safety. Someone was to be at the lighthouse most of the time; however, keepers were granted several hours off periodically to row to another area or to shore to collect supplies or mail. Often, they left a wife and/or family member behind in case of an emergency—and to ring that bell or horn in response to the Lighthouse Service. As a government employee, a keeper was an admired servant of the U.S. maritime economy and was held to strict regulations.

During the 107 years that the Pemaquid Point Lighthouse had keepers, from 1827 until 1934, no keeper lost his life or had an unfortunate event happen to a family member. There were shipwrecks in violent storms, but the keepers were stalwart public servants, willing to sacrifice their lives to save ships and mariners. For their service, they are now remembered for their skills, dedication, and bravery that honored a profession from a bygone era. The last lighthouse keeper in the United States retired in December 2023; she was not replaced. (Sally Snowman at Boston Head Light)

Keepers of the Pemaquid Point Light

NAME	SALARY	APPOINTED
Isaac Dunham	$350	November 3, 1827
Nathaniel Gammage, Jr.	-	June 13, 1837
Jeremiah S. Mears	$350	August 17, 1841
Ephram Tibbetts	-	March 31, 1845
Robert Curtis	$350	July 31, 1849
Samual C. Tibbetts	$350	April 8, 1853
John Fossett	$350	February 12, 1858
Joseph Lawler	$350	March 29, 1861
Marcus A. Hanna	$560	July 30, 1869
William L.Sartell	$560	January 31, 1873
Charles A. Dolliver	$500	September 8,1883
Clarence E. Marr	$500	September 1, 1899
Herbert Robinson	$520-$1320	July 1, 1922

PPL's Most Famous Lighthouse Keeper:

Marcus Aurelius Hanna (11/3/1842-12/21/1921) is the only person in history to have earned both the Medal of Honor and the Gold Lifesaving Medal—the highest military and civilian decorations for heroism awarded by the United States. Hanna was born in Bristol, Maine, as the son of the keeper at Franklin Island Light; he helped his father as keeper until going to sea at age 18 as a ship's steward. When the Civil War began, he enlisted in the Navy, and after serving his time, was discharged, but he volunteered again to serve in the Army where he did various jobs. While a sergeant with the 50th Massachusetts Infantry in 1863, he volunteered to carry water behind enemy lines to his company during some of the heaviest fighting during the war, for which he earned the Medal of Honor.

After the war ended in 1869, Hanna served as keeper at Pemaquid Point Lighthouse until 1873 when he was transferred to Two Lights in Cape Elizabeth, where he risked his life in freezing temperatures in a blizzard to save two sailors from the schooner *Australia* that had capsized in front of the lighthouse. He brought the sailors to the signal house where he was able to warm and revive them, for which he was awarded the Gold Lifesaving Medal on April 25, 1885.

[Note: Following the Civil War, soldiers were honored for their bravery with a lighthouse keeper posting, whether they were qualified or not; however, Hanna was competent: His salary was increased from the previous keeper's salary of $350 to $560 in 1869, probably because he was a war hero. A man could appear at a lighthouse with a letter from the government stating that he had been appointed keeper and that the one in the position must vacate. The time of political appointments as keepers ended at some point when the Coast Guard aimed to hire qualified men for the job.

Pemaquid History

First explorers and settlers

During Captain John Smith's visit in the early 1600s, he penned in his journal that "Pemaquid" in the Abenaki language meant "situated far out." (*map on foyer wall shows rocky coast, the peninsula, and other lighthouses in the area)* And, by foot or animal, it was a 15-miles journey to travel from Damariscotta to Pemaquid Point at the tip of the 15-mile peninsula.

Captain Smith discovered an intriguing rocky coast with tall pine trees, abundant wildlife, fish, and birds, despite the lack of fresh water. The sky would darken with flocks of birds. If his sailors dipped their baskets into the sea, they would fill with cod.

Smith described the three-mile ledge of granite and pegmatite sheets at Pemaquid Point. The landscape was formed by the igneous rocks (light color) and metamorphic rocks (dark color). Other minerals among the layers include feldspar, quartz, and black mica, each adding different colors to the stunning landscape.

Pemaquid Point has a rich history, dating back thousands of years. The Abenaki people were the first to inhabit the area, and they used it as a summer fishing and hunting camp. In the 1600s, English colonists arrived and established a trading post at Pemaquid. This post was a major center of commerce for the region, and it played an important role in the development of Maine.

The British were explorers and entrepreneurs. Captain George Weymouth and 29 men sailed from England in 1605 stopping on Monhegan Island before sailing on to Pemaquid, predating the excursion to Jamestown in Virginia. Weymouth and his men established a year-round colony at nearby Fort William Henry to dry and salt cod to ship back to England.

Between 1607 and 1622, 109 ships entered Pemaquid Harbor discharging and receiving cargo. Some took settlers on to Jamestown and stopped at Pemaquid on the way back for furs and cod to transport back to England. For 300 years, the status of a British male relied on sporting a beaver skin hat; consequently, trappers almost extinguished the local beaver population. By 1622, at least 30 ships regularly traded and fished in the Pemaquid region. In 1631, more settlers arrived from Bristol, England, with plans to settle a permanent colony.

Pine trees were a valuable commodity for building British ships and for the ships' masts; so captains rigged a system to transport native pine logs in the hold of their massive sailing vessels by carefully managing the weight and movement of cargo below.

Those residing in the New World were happy to trade their natural resources in turn for English goods from their homeland. Therefore, increasing numbers of ships sailed into local harbors. The newly founded colonial government was apt to fund a lighthouse to protect valuable ships with their supplies from crashing into the rocky coastline.

It was a difficult beginning for these settlers in many ways—harsh climate, incurable diseases, poor relations with the native population, plus rocky soil that made farming difficult. The town of Bristol wasn't incorporated until 1765, 134 years after the first settlers claimed this land to be the new Bristol in America.

In the 18th century, Pemaquid was a major shipbuilding center. During the American Revolution, the British attacked and burned the town of Pemaquid. After the war, Pemaquid Point was rebuilt, and it continued to be a shipbuilding center until the early 19th century.

Today, Pemaquid Point is a popular tourist destination that has something for everyone. Visitors enjoy the stunning scenery, the historic sites, and the recreational activities that the area has to offer (sailing, canoeing, rowing, kayaking). Seal and whale watching is enjoyed. During the summer, boat tours from New Harbor journey daily to Monhegan Island for hiking and to Eastern Egg Rock Island to see nesting Atlantic Puffin, once almost rendered extinct by the fashion industry who used their beautiful feathers for hats. Now, the puffin population is thriving, thanks to the efforts of Steve W. Kress, Ph.D., who in 1973 launched the Puffin Project through the National Audubon Society to save the endangered species.

Battle of the USS Enterprise and the HMS Boxer during the War of 1812

https://www.history.navy.mil/our-collections/art/exhibits/conflicts-and-operations/the-war-of-1812/uss-enterprise-vs-hms-boxer.html

(*drawing of the two ships is on one of the laminates hanging on the ring in the vestibule to show guests)*

The only battle of the War of 1812 (1812-1815) that was fought in Maine occurred on September 5, 1813, between four and nine miles off the waters of Pemaquid Point.

The battle was bloody and quick, lasting only 30 minutes.

The *USS Enterprise* (a 16-gun naval brig that sailed from Kittery Naval Yard to protect American ships from British attacks) captured the *HMS Boxer* (a 12-gun brig). The *USS*

Enterprise captain, William Burrows, age 28, was mortally wounded and died eight hours later; at the site; a sailor was killed, and four of the eleven men injured would later die. In the *Boxer*, the captain, Samuel Blyth, age 29, and 14 of his men died and another 14 were wounded. Samuel Drinkwater, age 70, the pilot of the *USS Enterprise,* knew the winds in the area and was able to advise the captain, giving advantage to the Americans.

With uncooperative winds, it took all day for the ships to position themselves to fire their cannons. At the time, it was difficult to say who won the battle according to those on shore, but the newspapers and history accounts report that the Enterprise was victorious after a half hour of gunfire. Locals sat on rocks at Pemaquid to watch the battle, and they reported in the local newspaper that the battle was boring. The British captain's sword was presented to the American captain before English Captain Blyth died en route to Portland. The damaged ships limped into Boston Harbor where the American Captain Burrows died, as well. Both captains were buried side by side in Portland's Eastern Cemetery.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow as a 6-year old boy watched the injured ships enter Portland Harbor with the dead captains and sailors on board. He never forgot this event and wrote a poem a few years later. Lines from stanzas two, five, eight, and nine tell the story of the trade blockade, impressment, war liberation, and expanded commerce. It was Pemaquid's story in 1815. His poem was named *Spirit of 1812:*

You first confine our commerce
And said our ships shant trade;
You next impressed our seamen
And used them as your slaves…

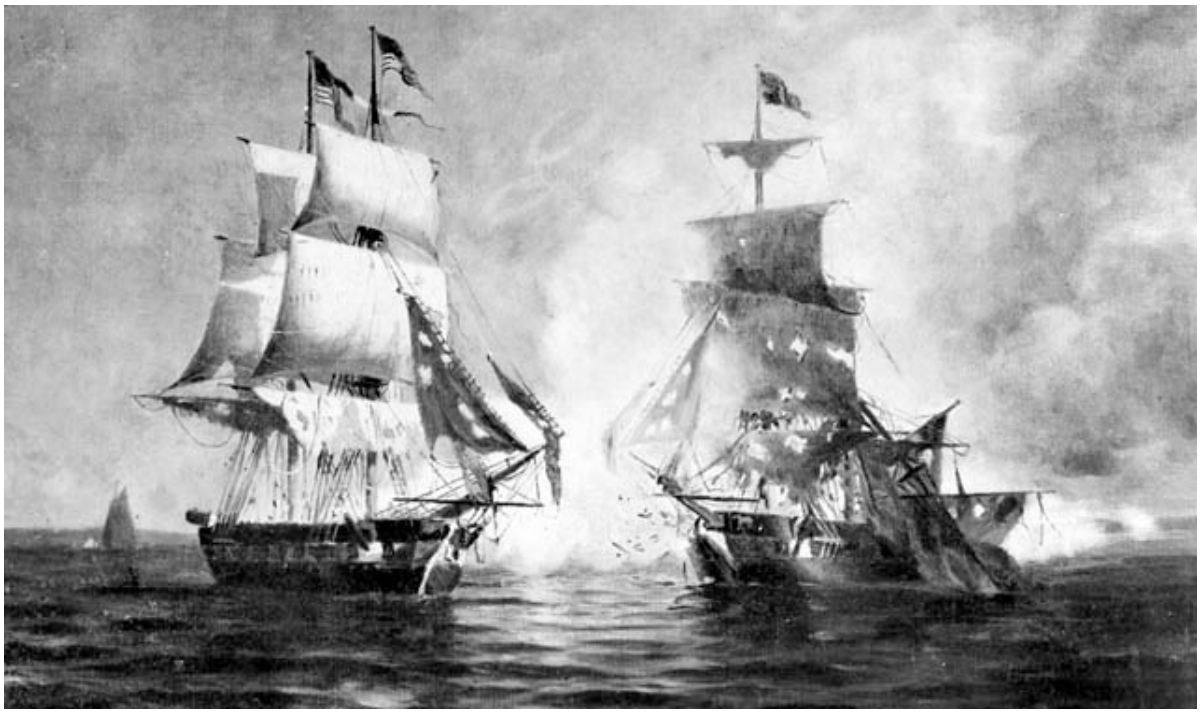
The next you sent your Boxer,
To box all about,
But we had an "enterprising" brig
That beat your Boxer out;

We boxed her up to Portland
And moored her off the town,
To show the Sons of Liberty
The Boxer of renown.

Go tell your King and Parliament,
By all the world 'tis known,
That British force by sea and land
By Yankees is o'er thrown.

Use every endeavor
And strike to make peace,
Fo Yankees ships are building fast,
Their navy to increase

They will enforce their commerce,
The laws by heaven were made
That Yankee ships in times of peace
To any port may trade.



https://warfarehistorynetwork.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/M-May19-Weapons-4.jpg
The Enterprise is "crossing the T" — a classic maneuver that allows a warship to fire broadside into the other, which can only fire a few guns back. This strategic move, a deciding factor in the battle, forced the British to surrender.

Pemaquid Point Lighthouse History

Flying Santa Program

https://www.flyingsanta.com/HistoryOrigins.html

(*There is a large and interesting display on the Flying Santa program in Rockland, Maine, at the Maine Lighthouse Museum.*)

Captain William Wincapaw, a native of Friendship, Maine, flew amphibious planes during the early days of aviation. In December of 1929, he found himself flying blind in an unexpected snowsquall. He flew at a lower altitude and was able to spot the gleam of Dice Head Light in Castine, which led him over the lights on Islesboro, Curtis Island, and Rockland. Once he was safely home he thought about how lonely the holidays must be for hardworking lighthouse keepers and their families. To show his appreciation for them, he decided to drop gifts to the keepers around Christmas time each year. Thus began the tradition of Flying Santa.

The packages contained newspapers, magazines, candy, books, mittens, socks, scarves, and other items. The keepers were so thrilled to receive the gifts that Wincapaw extended his flights to include lighthouses throughout New England. His son assisted him after a few years and then one of his son's teachers, Edward Rowe Snow, joined the effort. By the 1930's they were visiting nearly one hundred lighthouses.

When Wincapaw was transferred to Bolivia in 1938, Snow carried on the tradition with Bill, Jr., until 1946 and on his own until 1980. Snow wasn't a pilot, so he hired a pilot and a plane while he dressed as Santa and jettisoned the packages. He often brought his wife and daughter along to share in the fun of dropping packages. Many of the gifts were donated but he still had

to pay for the pilot and plane. He was visiting as many as 250 lighthouses and Coast Guard stations from Sable Island, off Nova Scotia, to Florida, by the mid 1950's. After Snow's death, the Hull Lifesaving Museum in Massachusetts sponsored the Flying Santa, and currently a nonprofit group, Friends of Flying Santa, keeps the tradition alive. They visit New England lighthouses and Coast Guard stations annually, but by helicopter rather than by airplane. The Friends of Flying Santa fly by helicopter to Pemaquid Point each year around mid-December. Bristol Fire and Rescue are on site to assist as local children receive gifts.

The Maine state quarter

The Pemaquid Point Lighthouse graces the Maine state quarter. Launched in 1999, the 50 State Quarters Program set in motion a 10-year initiative to honor each of the 50 states. The picture depicted on the flipside of each state quarter was chosen by each state to symbolize something from that state.

In 2002, then Governor Angus King asked anyone in the state to submit designs. Four options depicting areas from across the state were selected by a design commission from the 1,500 designs submitted; 100,000 citizens voted in 2002 to select a winner. The options were:

- **Pemaquid Point Lighthouse & Schooner (Winner):** The chosen design features the Pemaquid Point Lighthouse atop a granite coast with the *Victory Chimes,* the last three-masted schooner of the Windjammer Fleet, at sea – both symbols of Maine's maritime history. Daniel Carr designed the entry; Donna Weaver engraved it for the quarter.
- **Mount Katahdin:** This design showcased Maine's highest peak. Initially the most popular choice, it faced controversy after the Mint's revised version, which added a canoe with five people that was criticized by the original artist as "disgusting."
- **"Nation's First Light":** Suggested by Governor Angus King, this concept featured the West Quoddy Head Light in Lubec, which is the easternmost point in the U.S.
- **"Where America's Day Begins":** The concept depicted an outline of the state with a rising sun at Mount Katahdin in Acadia National Park. It included 16 rays to represent Maine's 16 counties and the North Star from the state seal.

(As a side note, *the Victory Chimes was auctioned and purchased for $75,900 in 2023 by restaurateurs from New York City; the schooner that used to sail the Atlantic and then offered tours around Rockland Harbor left Rockland where it was moored since it was launched in 1900. Plans are to make it a floating restaurant.*)

In 2003, Governor John Baldacci and the head of the U.S. Mint attended the ceremony on site to unveil the state's new quarter and honor the opening of the lighthouse's new restoration by Friends of Pemaquid Point Lighthouse. (*A drawing of the quarter is on the wall in the foyer.)* The *Victory Chimes* was to sail in front of the lighthouse during the ceremony, but the fog was thick that day, and, if the schooner did arrive from Rockland, no one would have seen it anyway.

Shipwrecks

Angel Gabriel – (August 14-15, 1635) Five people lost their lives when the ship sailed into the "Great Colonial Hurricane of 1635" as they attempted to anchor in Pemaquid Harbor after disembarking about 95 passengers who had arrived from Bristol, England, to build homes and settle a colony.

The *Angel Gabriel* was a 240-ton, passenger, 16-gun galleon like the Mayflower but 18 feet longer. It was commissioned to Sir Walter Raleigh for his last expedition to America in 1617. The ship left Bristol, England, and made a stop in Milford Haven, Wales, before sailing to Pemaquid.

Annie F. Collins – (May 4, 1891) Three mariners lost their lives. According to the lightkeeper's "Wreck Report," a 14-gun, 70-ton American schooner from New York crashed into the rocks at 2:30 p.m. in a 60 mph gale. On board as cargo was 100 tons of paving stones. On May 6, two men washed ashore in a dory after cutting themselves away from the sinking ship. The boat was full of water and the men had died of hypothermia. As those on shore pulled the boat to safety, it split apart. One body sank and the other was buried. Locals salvaged as many of the paving stones as possible as they washed ashore.

Alice P. Higgins – (September 18, 1893) Three onboard rowed a smaller boat to shore, landing at the Pemaquid Point Lighthouse. Similar to the *Annie F. Collins,* the New York ship met with misfortune while transporting stone pavers, but the seamen survived.

Sadie and Lillie – (September 16, 1903) Captain Willard C. Hardy drowned. Two sailors survived; however, they didn't know each had made it to shore until the following morning. Survivors reported that the sea was so violent that they couldn't see the light or hear the bell at the lighthouse. The 64-foot by 23-foot 2-masted schooner was headed to Boston when it crashed into the rocks. They rowed two dories to shore but both crashed, as well. The captain drowned when his rescue line got caught under the jagged rocks below the sea as those on shore tried to pull him to safety. The captain miscalculated his location; he thought he was heading into Kennebec Harbor, which is 40 miles away from Pemaquid.

George F. Edmunds – (September 17, 1903, shortly before 1 a.m.) The rugged, mackerel coastline schooner crashed into the northwest rocks at Pemaquid Point while battling a strong gale. Captain Willard G. Poole miscalculated the entrance into Johns Bay by 800-1000 feet, thinking he was heading towards Boothbay Harbor. He and 14 fishermen died. Two washed ashore and survived. Poole and his crew were well-known locally. This fishing expedition was Poole's last one before retiring. He died within three miles of his birthplace.

The *George F. Edmunds* and *Sadie and Lillie* were 200 yards apart when they hit the rocks, but because the storm was so violent, the survivors didn't realize this until the following day.

The following is the NY Times article recounting the dual disasters:

TWO WRECKS FIFTEEN LOST: Schooners Strike Pemaquid Point, Me. -- Three Men Swept Ashore and Two Rescued by Life Line.

DAMARISCOTTA, Me., Sept. 17 - Fifteen men lost their lives in the violent gale which raged off the coast during the night. The Gloucester mackerel seining schooner George F. Edmunds, in command of Capt. Willard G. Poole, the owner, struck on the eastern side of Pemaquid Point and was smashed to pieces. Fourteen of the crew of sixteen men perished in the breakers. The schooner Sadie and Lillian, Capt. Hardy of Prospect, bound from Prospect Bay to Boston, struck on the western side of Pemaquid Point and her bottom was knocked out on the rocks. Capt. Hardy was drowned, but his crew of two men were rescued.

The gale was unusually severe, particularly about midnight. The Gloucester schooner, which had been fishing off the coast, evidently intended to make a harbor to ride out the storm, but in

the driving rain and thick atmosphere she missed her bearings and, running too near the point off Pemaquid, struck on the eastern side and was battered to pieces by the waves. Of the crew, fifteen besides the Captain, only five crewmen were able to launch a dory. This task was accomplished only after the greatest difficulty, as time and again the boat filled with water as it was put over the vessel's side. Several other dories which were lowered were either smashed to pieces or swept away in the darkness.

Finally, five men, who successfully got their boat afloat, climbed into it, but before they could reach land a tremendous sea overturned the frail craft, throwing the occupants into the boiling breakers. Three of the men were drowned within a few minutes, but a giant wave caught up the remainder of the five and swept them ashore. Although the two survivors did all in their power to assist their fellows on board, their efforts were unsuccessful, and of the entire crew of sixteen men these two were the only survivors.

The Edmunds was dashed to pieces within an hour or two after she struck the rocks, and to-day the coast for a mile or more is strewn with wreckage from her and from the Sadie and Lillian.

The Sadie and Lillian was caught on the west side of Pemaquid Point. When she struck, Western Curtis sighted her and after some difficulty succeeded in getting a line to the wreck. The line was taken out under tremendous difficulties, but had it not been for an accident Capt. Hardy and his men would all have been saved. The two seamen reached shore in safety, but in the attempt by Mr. Curtis and his assistants to save the Captain, the life line became caught in the wreckage and Hardy was drowned.

Willis and Guy – (August 17, 1917) The two-masted schooner ran aground during daylight in thick fog. The crew of three were saved by Lighthouse Keeper Clarence E. Marr. Four days later the ship was destroyed in a hurricane.

The ship's cargo, 216 tons of coal, covered the area. The "great undertow" tossed the coal onto the rocks. Locals salvaged the coal running buckets of it to piles they collected on shore. They had enough to heat their homes all winter plus enough to sell to others. One local said his father gathered 15 tons of coal and sold three tons of them. The newspaper reported that two small communities "got busy gathering the harvest." As many as 75 people were "prospecting," using sacks, pails, baskets. According to William P. Sawyer, who interviewed survivors and reported in the local newspaper, 100 tons of coal washed ashore. Sadly, 42 years later, Sawyer's body washed ashore at Pemaquid Point with no indication as to how he died.

Rescues at Pemaquid Point:

- In 1927, at age 68 and nearing retirement, Keeper Herbert Robinson witnessed three people, an 18-year-old boy and his aunt and uncle, as they were swept off the slippery rocks into heavy sea. Under dangerous conditions in churning water, Robinson exhibited "unusual heroism" in saving the aunt and uncle; however, the boy disappeared after being struck by the initial wave and was never seen again.

- On August 7, 1930, Lighthouse Keeper Leroy S. Elwell rescued teenagers when their sailboat capsized. Three high school students, Chester Neal, Jr., and his 15-year-old sister, Barbara, from Springfield, Massachusetts, were living in Maine for the summer.

They had set sail from Round Pond in a catboat to take 18-year old Betty Carlton who was visiting for the day back to Dr. James Commins' place at Pemaquid Point where Betty was staying. A storm hit and the seas turned rough and choppy, according to a government report; a fierce squall hit the catboat and overturned it. As the boat started to sink, the teens attempted to swim to shore. Keeper Leroy Elwell knew they were getting tired and weren't going to make it without assistance. He made repeated attempts in a small skiff before he finally reached the weary teens. He was finally able to get them into his skiff but the heavy seas "made landing impossible." According to a 1930 press release by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce, "calls for aid brought W.J. Burnside of Pemaquid and also a boat sent by Captain Thomas Bracket of New Harbor." Keeper Leroy Elwell won accolades for his bravery from the Department of Commerce and locals acknowledged him as a hero. When the lighthouse was automated four years later, locals fought to keep Elwell in his position, but the government said that rescuing private citizens was not a keeper's job—they were to keep ships, cargo, and sailors safe.

- On August 27, 2009, according to the Lincoln County News (LCN), on a warm Saturday afternoon, seasonal New Harbor resident Sherrie Tucker photographed her son who was perched in a lawn chair on top of the rocks near the shore in front of Pemaquid Point Lighthouse. A rogue wave swept the boy into the ocean; a second rogue wave tossed him back onto the rocks. With only body and ego bruised, he fortunately was unharmed. The mother took photographs of each phase of the accident; four of the photos appeared in the LCN.

- In 2011, a man's artist backpack was swept off the rocks at the lighthouse. He dove into the ocean near the Sea Gull Shop to retrieve his bag. Bristol Fire and Rescue pulled him from the water about 15 minutes after the undertow swept him into the Gulf of Maine. He needed hospital care but survived the ordeal.

- In 2015, a father and son were swept off the point by a rogue wave; they were rescued and survived.

- In January 2016 following a storm, a local woman hiked down the rocks close to the shoreline to look at the waves. She was washed out to sea by a rogue wave, then rescued and hospitalized, but survived.

- In 2025, one of our docents on Saturday duty reported an incident when a rogue wave knocked two tourists off the rocks, sending them about 12 feet backwards toward the shore and slamming them on the rocks. Both were injured; an ambulance transported one of the individuals to the hospital with neck and other body injuries.

Guest Should Heed: The ocean may look calm but rogue waves of all sizes crash randomly onto the rocks. The Pemaquid Point undertow is fierce.

Death of PPL caretaker

On September 17, 1945, the body of Boston lawyer William Sawyer washed ashore 42 years after he witnessed the wrecks of the *Edmunds* and the *Sadie & Lillie* at Pemaquid.

Sawyer was a Harvard law school classmate and good friend of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. As a child, he spent his summers at Pemaquid and for the last 15 years of his life

lived in Pemaquid full time. He was a 66-year-old bachelor and a caretaker of the lighthouse. His body was identified by a key tied to his vest that opened the PPL tower.

He left everything in the lighthouse in perfect condition with the door locked. The lighthouse ledger noted that he had received “15-cent charges for parking” on the day of his death and “Money in secret drawer, $52.74.” (The secret drawer was a simple one anyone could have found.) Sawyer’s cousin said there was a gun in the lighthouse but it was missing. Since the body was missing its head, it was ruled that Sawyer shot himself. His body washed off the rocks and was located 400 yards from the cliff at the point; his cousin identified the body from the clothes Sawyer wore. The gun apparently was swallowed by the sea. The cousin thought that Sawyer was grieving the loss of his close friend FDR who had died five months earlier.

Mother drowns at the lighthouse

On August 10, 1982, Karen Simmons of Fort Plain, New York, vacationed at Pemaquid Point with her family. Her 12- and 13-year-old children were swept off the rocks by a rogue wave. She and her husband jumped in to save them. Those on shore threw life rings to them and pulled the father and two children to safety, but Karen’s line broke and she drowned. (reminiscent of the 1903 accident when Captain Hardy died in the same manner).
https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/178139999/karen-simmons

History and Work of Friends of the Pemaquid Point Lighthouse (FPPL)
(from our history archives)

- The U.S. Coast Guard owns the Pemaquid Point Lighthouse (PPL). They lease it to the American Lighthouse Foundation who in turn trusts the upkeep and care to the non-profit volunteer group of dedicated citizens, Friends of Pemaquid Point Lighthouse.

- PPL was the first land-based Maine lighthouse opened to the public. You can get married, honeymoon in the apartment above the keeper’s house (Fisherman Museum), and pay for your stay in Maine quarters. No other lighthouse can say that!

- In 2000, the USCG granted a lease to the American Lighthouse Foundation (AFL). Richard Melville brought together volunteers to form a chapter, Friends of Pemaquid Point Lighthouse.

- FPPL raised $106,000 to restore the lighthouse through grants and donations. JB Leslie Co. of South Berwick, Maine, removed exterior masonry coatings, cut out the mortar joints along the granite construction, repointed it with a natural cement and applied 2 fresh topcoats. The “lost” window on the east side of the tower that had long been removed and filled in was found and opened.

- Gov. Angus King asked Mainers to create designs for the Maine quarter. In 2003, the quarter was released nationally. A bagpiper played on the catwalk and a local school choir sang. Maine Gov. John Baldacci with the First Lady and ALF Pres. Tim Harrison presented a large replica of the coin to the lighthouse, which is now displayed in the vestibule of the lighthouse. The Victory Chimes sailed offshore during the ceremony but the fog was so thick that no one could see it.

- After completion of the restoration project, ALF and FPPL held a ribbon-cutting. In attendance was: Gov. and First Lady Baldacci, Earle Shettleworth of the Maine Historic

Preservation Commission, ALF 's Exec. Dir. Bob Trapani, Jr, FPPL Chairman Marty Welt, BMC Sean Walsh of the USCG, Roberta Lane of the National Trust, and Chrissy Thibodeau of Lowes.

- The board at the time consisted of: Pres. Marty Welt, V.P.s Bob Kline & Nick Vitale, Treas. Caren Clark, Sec. Melanie Howe, Education Chair Sue Young, Historian Patty Hughes.

- According to Caren Clark, FPPL historian, "When we were fundraising to restore the exterior in 2007, one of the town officials said there was nothing that needed repair in the tower. We determined that the mortar had failed almost six inches in from the outside. With the top thickness being 18 inches, if it had been left to fail three more inches the top stones would have fallen out. The moisture was trapped by the coating placed on the exterior in 2000 by the auxiliary coastguard, which caused the interior to weep with small streams of water. This was especially prevalent in the walkway connecting the entry room to the tower."

- In 2010, JB Leslie completed the job to repoint brickwork, remove coatings and repaint the iron staircase. In FY09 after Trapani worked with US Senator Susan Collins for 4 years, the Federal House Committee on Appropriations approved funds of $380,000 for restoration work on three Maine lighthouses: PPL, Wood Island, and Owls Head. PPL received $83,000 of the money.

- In 2015, FPP spent $11,000 of donated funds from guests who visited the tower to rehabilitate and repaint the lantern's ironwork and exterior masonry (ALF managed the project).

- The interior of the lighthouse was repainted in 2024 and paid for by FPPL with visitors' contributions.

- Over 20,000 visitors visit and climb the tower yearly.