

106 SUCCESS STORY

Keeping the Lights Shining: Saving Coast Guard Lighthouses

Nationwide



“The romance of the lighthouse keeper has faded as the lights have become automated, but we really have to preserve the lighthouses for our kids and their kids.”

— COAST GUARD REAR
ADMIRAL RICHARD A. BAUMAN
*noted historic lighthouse expert
(1982)*



THE STORY

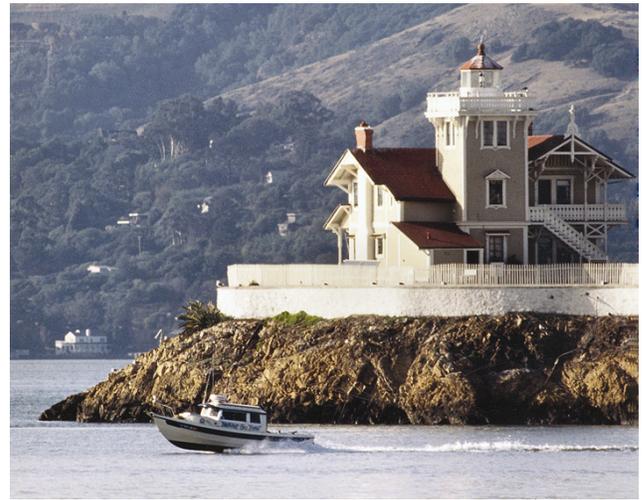
For almost three centuries, the countless commercial vessels, naval ships, fishing fleets, and pleasure craft sailing America's coasts have relied on lighthouses as key navigational aids warning of danger or marking safe harbor ahead. Today, lighthouses are among the nation's most evocative and beloved historic properties. Located in 31 states, they range in size from the 13-foot Portland Breakwater Light in Maine to the iconic 210-foot Cape Hatteras Lighthouse in North Carolina. In recognition of their historic and architectural significance, 10 have been designated National Historic Landmarks (NHLs), and hundreds are either listed in the National Register of Historic Places or are eligible for listing. Most federally owned lighthouses (276 currently) are managed by the United States Coast Guard, which was made responsible for aids to navigation in 1939. In the 1960s, the Coast Guard launched its Lighthouse Automation and Modernization Program, which saved money by eliminating the need for lighthouse keepers. The program quickly had unintended consequences. Without daily onsite personnel, deferred maintenance and vandalism threatened lighthouses throughout the country, compounding deterioration caused by their location in harsh maritime environments.

THE PROJECT

In 1969, the Coast Guard automated the historic East Brother Light Station north of San Francisco and considered its demolition, moves that alarmed local residents. Discussions regarding preservation of the structure finally bore fruit in 1979, and the Coast Guard issued a no-cost, 20-year renewable license to a non-profit organization to restore and maintain the lighthouse and associated historic buildings. The Coast Guard retained control over the property's aids to navigation (lamp and fog signal). Based on this successful precedent, Coast Guard headquarters ultimately embraced “outgranting” (issuance of leases and licenses) as a viable management strategy for historic lighthouses. For all its benefits, however, outgranting had the potential to harm the very properties it was supposed to protect. Unless the Coast Guard took steps to ensure otherwise, grantees would have no obligation to avoid harming the historic character of the lighthouses under their management.

Photos: Above, Jupiter Inlet Lighthouse in Florida is leased to the Loxahatchee River Historical Society. The restored lighthouse complex features a local history museum. (photo courtesy Palm Beach County Convention and Visitors Bureau); Left, student groups visit Cape Ann Light Station, an NHL on Thatcher Island, Massachusetts, several times a year; Right, Cape Ann Light Station is a rare set of twin lighthouses. The Coast Guard leased and later transferred the south tower to the Town of Rockport. The north tower is owned by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. (photos courtesy Thatcher Island Association, a Preserve America Steward)

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Photos: East Brother Light Station in California was the first historic lighthouse outgranted by the Coast Guard for preservation. It is shown here before and after its rehabilitation as a bed and breakfast. (photos courtesy East Brother Light Station, Inc.)

THE 106 PROCESS

The Coast Guard is responsible for conducting the Section 106 process under the National Historic Preservation Act for each of its outgrants. Section 106 requires that federal agencies identify historic properties and assess the effects of the projects they carry out, fund, or permit on those properties. The Coast Guard wisely elected to address the effects of outgrants comprehensively rather than on a case-by-case basis. The Coast Guard, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP), and the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers consulted and developed a Programmatic Agreement (PA) establishing how the outgranting program would be administered to minimize negative impacts to historic lighthouses. Signed in 1985, the PA addressed several key issues: the need to identify which lighthouses are historic and good candidates for outgranting; how best to publicize the availability of the lighthouses to be leased or licensed; necessary grantee qualifications; the process for grantee selection; what preservation standards grantees must follow; and how the Coast Guard would monitor the activities of grantees. The PA was amended in 1996 and 2002 to further strengthen and clarify aspects of the outgranting program's historic preservation requirements.

Consulting Parties:

United States Coast Guard
ACHP
National Conference of State
Historic Preservation Officers

THE SUCCESS

Many lighthouses have been outgranted over the past three decades, and 56 currently are leased or licensed to non-profit organizations. The PA's consistent, predictable framework and its preservation provisions have enabled the Coast Guard to establish successful collaborations with non-profit partners while protecting the historic character of these iconic properties. The outgranting program's success also laid the groundwork for passage of the National Historic Lighthouse Preservation Act (NHLPA) in 2000. The NHLPA goes a step beyond outgranting and authorizes transfers of historic lighthouses at no cost to government agencies and non-profit groups, as well as public sales in some cases. Through both outgrants and transfers of historic lighthouses, the Coast Guard is helping to ensure that the general public can continue to appreciate these unique and cherished historic properties and experience the role they have played in safeguarding centuries of maritime traffic.

For more about Section
106 and the ACHP go
to www.achp.gov

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