

Wave of the Future

By Timothy Harrison

Whaleback Lighthouse has become the first lighthouse in Maine to be outfitted with a new fog signal system that responds on cue when prompted by a mariner at sea. Additionally, the lighthouse now also has a new VLB-44 LED beacon that replaced the modern VRB-25 rotating light.

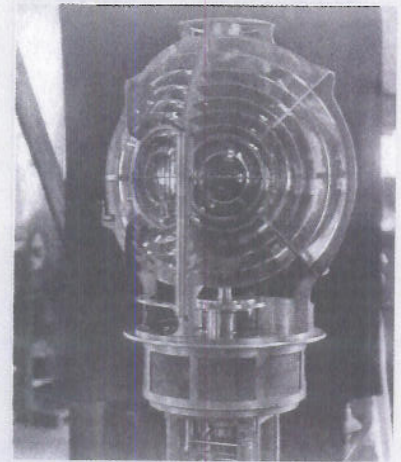
While the new beacon may look ugly compared to what was previously in the lighthouse, many preservationists feel that at least the tower is still being used for its intended purpose. However, it is doubtful that most lighthouse groups that raise money from people climbing the tower would want their lens replaced by this new LED light. But, in the end, they may have no choice. However, we would guess that there will be resistance by many lighthouse groups.

The upgrade to the fog signal system and the beacon at Whaleback Lighthouse was prompted by the failure of the

submarine cable, which supplied power to the lighthouse. Both the fog signal and beacon are now totally solar powered with batteries.

The appearance of the new fog signal system is unlikely to cause a stir among preservationists; however it will operate entirely different than the current modern fog horn. In the case of the mariners at sea, all they need to do, in a time of fog, is turn on their VHF radio to channel 79 and press the microphone five times to activate the fog horn. This is one more reason that even small boaters should always have a working VHF radio with them, even if it is a hand held device.

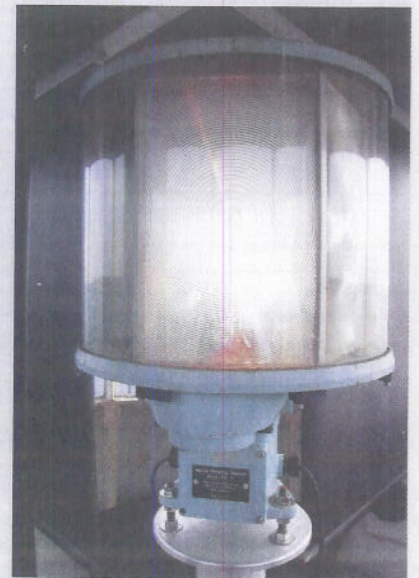
This 4th order Fresnel lens was removed from Whaleback Lighthouse in the 1960s. It is now in storage at the Peabody-Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts. It was replaced by a DCB-224 that was also later removed from the tower. (Photograph courtesy of Jeremy D'Entremont.)



Whaleback Lighthouse on the Maine and New Hampshire border is owned by the American Lighthouse Foundation and is managed by its chapter, The Friends of Portsmouth Harbor Lighthouse. (Photograph by Timothy Harrison.)



The new and futuristic looking VLB-44 LED beacon, which is now in use at Whaleback Lighthouse. I can't imagine anyone climbing the tower at a lighthouse and saying, "Wow what a beautiful light", as they would with a Fresnel lens. Even the VRB beacon, although modern, at least has character, unlike the new LED beacon, which has absolutory no character at all. Modernization is not all it is cracked up to be. (Photograph courtesy United States Coast Guard.)



The rotating VRB-25 beacon that was in Whaleback Lighthouse until its recent removal. This type of light is quite common and is in use at many lighthouses around the nation. However, that may change in the future. Although these are considered modern lights, we hope that they are saved for exhibit purposes because they will someday become historical artifacts. (Photograph by Jeremy D'Entremont.)

