



Newsletter of the Faulkner's Light Brigade

March 2001

Below are some articles from our newsletter for March 2001. The name "The Octagon" refers to the shape of the historic lighthouse on Faulkner's Island.

If you [become a member](#) of the Faulkner's Light Brigade you will receive The Octagon each month. Each issue has current news, a calendar of events and features about the island's fascinating history.

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Work Proceeds Despite Storms and Setbacks

Crews battle wind and waves to rescue island from erosion



Under sunny mid-September skies, work crews of Zenone, Inc. traversed the still warm waters of Long Island Sound to begin work on Phase 1 of the construction of the massive stone wall that will protect Faulkner's Island and the lighthouse perched precariously on its eastern erosion-ravaged bluff.

First, they built a floating wharf by fastening two barges to the end of a heavy ramp connecting to a temporary access point built with small rock fill extending approximately 100 feet from the southwestern shore of the island. The barges form a "T" with the barge connecting to the ramp as the vertical stem tied to a second barge placed horizontally. They are held in position by giant, mechanically driven posts. It was this concept of building a wharf out of stationary barges that enabled Zenone to submit the low bid by avoiding costly dredging operations to gain access to the island.

Using this wharf, Zenone landed heavy equipment including three 10-wheel dump trucks, two CAT 350 excavators, a bulldozer, a compactor, a 2000-gallon fuel truck and a CAT-982 front end loader. A temporary road was built across the island to the edge of the bluff on the eastern shore. Barges could now land at the floating wharf and unload their cargo of stone for Phase 1 of the project -- the building of the bulwark from the north tip of the island to a point 250 feet south of the lighthouse.

Delivery barges filled with processed stone tie up to the outermost barge and are unloaded by an excavator into waiting dump trucks which then back across the ramp and up a slope to the eastern end of the island (there is no turnaround). They then unload and proceed frontwards to the end of the wharf for their next load.

Stone for the job arrives by barge from Tilcon, Connecticut, the subcontractor supplying igneous basalt or traprock for the project. Small stone and gravel is shipped from Tilcon's Pine Orchard dock in Branford, while the large chunks of armor stone each weighing 1.5 to 3 tons are shipped from the Gateway Terminal in New Haven.

Because the island is home to one of the world's largest breeding colonies of the endangered roseate tern, the contract demands that work be phased around their nesting cycle. The nesting season runs from May through August, meaning that construction can only occur during the difficult months from September to April.

The sunny skies of mid-September darkened in early October and high west winds and stormy seas battered the floating wharf. Waves pulled up four of the posts holding the outer barge in place and hurled it out of its position, causing it to list. Weeks were lost while the landing barges were repositioned to make them less susceptible to the westerly winds that were broadsiding and punishing them. The barges were moved to a more northerly position with the vertical barge being positioned obliquely to soften wave attack.

Then, on December 12 a southwesterly storm again ripped into the barges. Icy gale-force winds of over 60 mph, coupled with high tides and seven-foot waves, hurled both barges to the island's shore, swamping them. One of the barges was severely damaged and the roadway access was washed out.

Work on the island again came to a halt. Mike Keegan, project manager for the Army Corps of Engineers, says the very harsh conditions restrict access to the site.

Jim Zenone, president of Zenone Inc., calls the working conditions "very cruel." He said the weather makes it very hard on the crews and that winter is a very difficult time to work on the water. But despite the hardships and setbacks, Zenone said in early January that about 70 percent of the work had been accomplished and he expects to complete the project on schedule and within budget. Zenone, a sailor who competes in the Newport to Bermuda race every other year, says he likes the idea of saving lighthouses.

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Tomorrow's Lighthouses

by Jason J. Marchi

In 1992 the first issue of *The Octagon* was published. As founding editor, I was deeply honored when Joel Helander invited me to share with the members of Faulkner's Light Brigade. I was preparing to fly to Los Angeles at the time, so it was during this long flight -- which brought me three-thousand miles west and six

miles closer to the sun -- that I decided what , exactly, I would write about.

As the pilot turned into the landing pattern, I peered through the port window at the flashing beacon on the airport's flight control tower, at the brilliant airfield lights that looked like scattered jewels gleaming their reds, yellows and blues. I could not help but think back to my summers of boating, and to the lighted buoys and white beacon of Faulkner's Light that helped me safely ply the nighttime waters of Long Island Sound.

When we settled down on the runway, I realized that amidst all the technology of invisible signals guiding this plane safely across the continent -- RADAR, GPS, VOR -- beacons of visible light were still an important aid to navigation.

Lights.

Lights flashing. Lights burning a continuous bright. Lights rotating to pierce the night. Yes, lights. What a simple technology when compared with all the instrumentation available to guide modern ships. Here, the pilots of this multimillion dollar jetliner used lights to help find a safe landing on a distant runway in a city that's never heard of Faulkner's Island Lighthouse.

I envision a future where space travel will be as easy and as frequent as sea and air travel. Silver and white ships will whisk us to the moon, to Mars and Venus, to human-dreamed and robot-built colonies in space, or, in time, to the indescribable worlds we will see one day meet at far Alpha Centuri.

Greeting us in this inevitable future will be space lighthouses, their beacons guiding the solar sailing vessels of tomorrow.

The offspring of the world's ancient marine lighthouses, in whatever form they may take in the future, will still welcome travel-wary passengers and light-year worn ships. It will be this way as long as there will be travelers to other worlds and distant shores.

Shine on bright beacons! And call Earth's far-travelers safely home.

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Success Rewards Decade of Effort to Preserve Faulkner's

In January 1991, a ten-member grassroots citizens group calling themselves the "Friends of Faulkner's" met at the Guilford Free Library and began to coordinate efforts to preserve the island and its light. This organizational meeting did not occur spontaneously but grew out of the efforts of a small group of concerned volunteers. It started as a dream and now -- ten years later -- that dream is coming true with each stone put into place in the bulwark protecting the island.

Years earlier, Joel Helander, a Guilford historian with a life-long affinity for Faulkner's Island, acquired an acute sense that neglect and erosion were threatening the lighthouse revered by mainlanders and mariners. He realized that an action campaign was needed to halt the runaway erosion that was endangering this historic landmark. Believing that such a campaign must begin with awareness and appreciation, he published a definitive account of the island's history in 1988. It sounded the alarm. In August 1989, he followed up by coordinating an "open house" on the island. This had never been done before and is now a

celebrated annual event.

In October 1989, Helander visited the island with George Gdovin, Guilford's building inspector, whose association with Faulkner's began with his service with the Search and Rescue Division of the U.S. Coast Guard's Group Long Island Sound. Gdovin's Coast Guard duties had frequently brought him to the island to deliver provisions. Seeing the extent of the erosion on his visit with Helander, Gdovin organized the Faulkner's Island Research Project in February 1990 to develop a topographic survey map of the island. The project was affiliated with Little Harbor Laboratory, a non-profit marine research organization owned by Sally Richards. An intensive geomorphic study of the island in transition became the subject of Gdovin's masters thesis at Antioch University. The project, completed over five years in Gdovin's spare time, provided critical scientific data that would support the cause of island preservation.

While Gdovin acquired the data needed to prove the need for erosion control, Helander sought to gain recognition of the island by the National Register of Historic Places. With aid and advice from Al Hollingsworth, then president of the Guilford Preservation Alliance, and from the Connecticut Historical Commission, this effort was successful and Faulkner's Island was listed on the National Register of Historic Places on May 29, 1990. This listing provided recognition of Faulkner's as a cultural resource worthy of preservation at the national level.

Throughout that year, Hollingsworth persuaded the Preservation Alliance Board to create a bond with those who were then beginning to move the Faulkner's Island effort forward. As a result, Faulkner's Light Brigade became a commission of the Guilford Preservation Alliance and the GPA backed that relationship by providing seed money at this critical time.

At Montauk Point Lighthouse on the South Fork of Long Island, friends at the Montauk Historical Society introduced board members of Faulkner's Light Brigade to their innovative technique of erosion control in June 1991. Instead of fighting Mother Nature, it harnesses her, with the use of stone toe walls and terraces of vegetation.

The Light Brigade organized a "summit conference" on the island in September 1991, bringing together all the various groups and agencies that had interests in island preservation. Among those participating were representatives from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, owners of the island, and representatives from the U.S. Coast Guard, owners of the lighthouse, and Greg Donahue, Montauk's erosion control contractor. Upon seeing the island first hand, Donahue concluded that the lighthouse could be saved. He was hired as a consultant to draft a master plan of preservation for Faulkner's, based on the Montauk model. Eventually that plan was accepted by federal authorities.

In 1993, at the invitation of Faulkner's Light Brigade, Senator Christopher Dodd, a blue water sailor, visited the island and inspired the group. He issued a "charge" to the Light Brigade encouraging the formation of more partnerships before the federal government could become involved. He reminded us that Uncle Sam could only serve as a partner -- not principal -- in the campaign of preservation. His sound advice led to the formation of the chain of partnerships that now protects the island.

The Town of Guilford responded to Senator Dodd's charge by joining forces with Faulkner's Light Brigade as a municipal partner. Under First Selectman Edward Lynch, the town applied through the Connecticut Department of Transportation for Intermodal Surface Transportation Act (ISTEA) funding. This won \$250,000 for lighthouse restoration. The Town commissioned Sally Richards as chair of its Lighthouse Restoration Committee, responsible for the administration of the funds.

In 1997, this committee selected architect Walter Sedovic to prepare design plans and specifications and later that year named International Chimney to perform the restoration work. Sedovic and International Chimney had previously worked together on the move of Block Island's Southeast Lighthouse. Under the

administration of First Selectman Sam Bartlett, the town entered into a five-year license agreement with the U.S. Coast Guard to become the new lighthouse steward. Work accomplished under the committee's direction includes making the structure weathertight and restoring original features such as casement windows and weathervane.

A 1994 membership campaign strengthened the Brigade. Notes and letters of encouragement poured in, like the one from Katharine Hepburn of Old Saybrook urging that all lighthouses be preserved. A senior citizen from Milford, Ruth Revet, pledged five dollars every month for the rest of her life. Elliot Wilcox of Guilford wrote that "for those mariners transiting the Sound, Faulkner's is the visible, non-ambiguous waypoint that can be relied on."

A spring lecture series brought in popular speakers and entertainers including author Philmore Wass and Peter Brink, vice president of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The Chanteymen of the Connecticut Ancient mariners even composed and performed a new song, "The Ballad of Faulkner's Light." The Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection issued a bird conservation stamp featuring Faulkner's Island in the background.

Responding to the cry, "Don't Let the Light Go Out," environmental activists, school groups, boating enthusiasts and business rallied. Partnerships were formed with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Coast Guard. What started as a campaign to save a lighthouse grew into a campaign to save both an endangered historic landmark and an endangered species, the roseate tern.

Acting on the strength of the restoration partnership, Senator Joseph Lieberman co-hosted a meeting in Guilford in the spring of 1994 with U.S. Representative Rosa DeLauro. The Senator lined up commitments from various agencies and subsequently drafted proposed language for a line item in the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) for erosion control on Faulkner's. A bill in Congress was now pending.

A presidential election then brought sweeping changes in Washington. Turmoil in Congress over budget reconciliation put the WRDA Bill in limbo.

Not content to sit around waiting, the Faulkner's Light Brigade adopted a sub-project to improve safety and public access to the island. The old concrete stairway leading from the wharf up the island's west embankment was badly deteriorated and in need of replacement. Thanks to generous grants from the Woman's Seamen's Friend Society and the Norcross Wildlife Foundation, construction of a new entry stairway was completed just in time for the annual open house in September 1995. Crafted from a dense tropical hardwood, it rises 31 feet to the crest of the island.

FLB's lobbying continued. Budget battles in Washington were joined, waged, won, lost and waged again. Congresswoman DeLauro championed the Faulkner's Island appropriation when it stalled in the House. She came to the rescue of the appropriation and at a critical last minute, with the bill nearly dead, she saved it.

With help from the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation and the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Congress in September 1996 appropriated part of the WRDA erosion control funds. The balance of the \$4.5 million was appropriated in 1998 securing a future for Faulkner's Island.

The in 1999, when language technicalities in the Connecticut environmental permitting process again delayed the erosion control project, State Representative Patricia Widlitz stepped in and lent a guiding hand.

The U.S. Army Corps plan for preservation, designed to withstand a 50-year storm, became reality in September 2000 with an armada of heavy construction equipment arriving on the island under the direction of Zenone, Inc., low bidder for the project.

The campaign of preservation is far from finished. Phase 1 of the construction project is nearing completion

and Phase 2 awaits. However, at this ten-year milestone, we can reflect on where we are, how far we've come and what lies ahead. Our accomplishments have been many and our rewards great -- all possible because of the chain of partnerships forged with tireless volunteers and supporting members as well as local, state and federal agencies, clubs, businesses and corporations.

The storms of October and December remind us that Mother Nature moves powerfully and relentlessly. It is still a race against time. Hopefully, a new chapter in this story can be recorded at the time of the Faulkner's Light bicentennial in 2002. A new cry can the ring out across the Sound, "We didn't let the light go out!"

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