



Raspberry Island Light



Preserving the Lighthouse and its Stories

More than a century of exposure to the harsh Lake Superior environment took its toll on the Raspberry Island Lighthouse. The roof leaked, the foundation was cracked, clapboards were rotting, and plaster was falling down. Other buildings near the lighthouse had similar problems. The light station known as the “showplace of the Apostles” needed substantial restoration to ensure sustainability. A major project began in 2002 to stabilize the shoreline and rehabilitate the property to preserve its historical, architectural and cultural significance. The historic keeper’s quarters now once again looks much as it did (inside and out) in the early 1920s. Work continues on the other light station buildings and the surrounding landscape.

Lighthouse History

The Raspberry Island light was first lit in July of 1863 to serve as a beacon to the many steamboats traveling through the west channel of the Apostle Islands. The original structure was a single family dwelling surmounted by a square tower. A brick fog signal building was added to the station in 1903, creating a need for additional staff. In 1906 the original lighthouse was rebuilt into a duplex at a cost of \$7500 to house the head lighthouse keeper and his two assistants! The duplex structure is the building we see at Raspberry Island today.



The original Raspberry Island Lighthouse.

Raspberry Island Light Station

The buildings at the light station today are the same ones seen in this 1940s aerial view:

- A - Boat House
- B - Fog Signal Building
- C - Oil House
- D - Lighthouse and Keepers’ Dwelling
- E - Wood Shed
- F - Head Keeper’s Privy
- G - Cabin
- H - Barn/Warehouse



Keeping the Lighthouse

When lighthouse keepers lived at the lighthouse, they regularly maintained the buildings and grounds. Note these entries from the lighthouse logbook in May 1915:

- 5/3 - Washing walls in tower and working in signal.
- 5/4 - Cleaning in signal & mowing the lawn.
- 5/5 - Painting on the dwelling this forenoon.

- 5/11 - Painting on dwelling & out houses.
- 5/12 - Painting boat house, trimmings on fog signal and other work.
- 5/13 - Painting in signal and railing to dock.
- 5/18 - Painting outside and inside of lantern, also verandah floors.

This attention to regular maintenance ended when the Coast Guard automated the station in 1947.

Lighthouse Rehabilitation



Clockwise from upper left: shoreline stabilization, scaffolding on the front of the lighthouse, plastering the walls, painting the new clapboards, replacing the roof, rebuilding the foundation.

Lighthouse historian F. Ross Holland Jr. stated that, “Within the boundaries of Apostle Islands National Lakeshore is the largest and finest single collection of lighthouses in the country.” Raspberry Island Light is the national lakeshore’s most visited lighthouse, hosting thousands of people each year. The National Park Service is undertaking a special effort to make this popular historic site worthy of its title as “showplace of the Apostles”.

Saving a lighthouse is a challenging and costly job. In 2002 and 2003, a \$1.4 million shoreline stabilization project provided rock walls, better drainage, and a revegetated slope to keep the fog signal building and lighthouse from sliding into the lake. A \$1.3 million

project to rehabilitate the lighthouse and keepers’ quarters from 2005 to 2007, involved a wide variety of tasks including:

- Replace roof and repair foundation.
- Repair and repaint interior and exterior walls.
- Restore windows; refinish doors.
- Install well, new septic and utility system for staff housing.
- Restore tower to include repairing glazing, rebuilding railings, repairing structure floor, and painting lantern room.
- Install drainage system and regrade grounds to direct water away from the lighthouse.
- Improve existing mechanical, electrical, plumbing and fire protection systems.



How can we keep alive the stories of the keepers and explain their connections to the broader community that they served? Once the lighthouse was rehabilitated, the National Park Service refurbished

the lighthouse keeper’s quarters as it may have been in the early 1920s. This helps park rangers tell the keepers’ stories so visitors can better understand what life was like for the keepers and their families.

Preserving the Station



Local 4-H volunteers plant gardens each spring.

Ongoing station rehabilitation efforts include the grounds and the other buildings. New roofs, floors and paint for the barn, cabin, wood shed and privies help return the light station to its former glory. Dedicated volunteers help plant and maintain the flower and vegetable gardens that, historically, were such an important part of the light station’s landscape.

The Friends of the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore are working to help rehabilitate the boat house at Raspberry Island. Please contact them at P.O. Box 1574, Bayfield, WI, 54814 Ph: 715-779-3397 ext. 444 if you wish to contribute to this effort.

Saving a lighthouse is recycling the past. It connects us to the past and helps form a bridge to the future. Anthropologist Mary Catherine Bateson wrote: “The past empowers the present...” Recycling our past is reviving it to the present...bringing history back to life! Rehabilitation of Raspberry Island Light Station is an ultimate recycling project.