



Raspberry Island Light



Rehabilitation Preserves Lighthouse and its Stories

Years of exposure to the harsh Lake Superior environment have taken a toll on the Raspberry Island Lighthouse. The “showplace of the Apostles” needs substantial restoration work to ensure sustainability. A major rehabilitation project will close this popular site to the public through spring of 2007. According to National Park Service guidelines, rehabilitation returns a property to a state of utility through alteration or repair, while preserving its historical, architectural and cultural significance. When the lighthouse reopens, its south half will be an interpretive museum furnished like it was in the early 1920s when Lee Benton was the keeper. The north half will serve as living quarters for National Park Service personnel.

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. This created a need for additional staff. In 1906 the original lighthouse was rebuilt into a duplex to house the head lighthouse keeper and his two assistants at a cost of \$7500! The duplex structure is the building we see at Raspberry Island today.



The original Raspberry Island Lighthouse.

Keeping the Lighthouse

It is important to note that when lighthouse keepers were living at the lighthouse, constant upkeep of the buildings and grounds was taking place. One has only to read excerpts from the logbooks to see that almost every day there was some activity to keep these buildings in excellent condition. Note these entries from 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.*

Soon after the National Park Service acquired the island in 1975, \$19,000 was spent just to work on the foundation of the lighthouse. The structures received basic repairs and maintenance through the years, but nothing to the extent of the present rehabilitation. 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.



Keepers cutting wood near Raspberry Island Light.



Shoreline Stabilization work in 2002

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



Lighthouse Restoration

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." The six light stations, the most found in any unit of the National Park System, are all listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Raspberry Island Light is usually the national lakeshore's most popular lighthouse with as many as 10,000 visitors touring the site 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 the case of Raspberry Light, all the materials and construction equipment have to be transported to the island and hauled up the 30-foot bluff to the

light station grounds. Access to the island can be difficult as lake conditions direct how, when and if travel can occur. This \$1.3 million restoration project, scheduled from August 2005 through Spring 2007, involves 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.
- 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.



Restoring the tower, repainting interior and exterior walls, and repairing a cracked foundation are just a few of the tasks included in this rehabilitation of the Raspberry Lighthouse.



Recycling the Past

How can we keep alive the stories the lighthouse tells of those that lived here, the lives it saved, and the storms it weathered? Saving a lighthouse is recycling the past. It connects us to the past and helps form a bridge to the future. It's a continuum of human society that should not be broken, for if we do not know what came before, how can we understand what the present and future may bring?

Anthropologist Mary Catherine Bateson wrote:

"The past empowers the present..." Recycling our past is reviving it to the present...bringing history back to life! This is what rehabilitation of Raspberry Island Lighthouse will accomplish - an ultimate recycling project.

The restoration plan for Raspberry Island Lighthouse calls for refurbishing the lighthouse

keeper's quarters as it may have been in the early 1920s. This may help visitors better understand what life was like for the keepers and their families. The National Park Service is accepting donations of specific items and/or collecting monetary donations to purchase some of the desired furnishings. Contact Myra Foster at (715)779-3397 ext. 301 for more information.

The National Park Service regrets any inconvenience that the closing of the Raspberry Island Lighthouse may cause. We ask your patience and support as we work during the next couple of years to rehabilitate this unique historic structure. If you care to contribute to this effort, please contact **Friends of the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore, P.O. Box 1574, Bayfield, WI 54814** (Ph: 715-779-3397, ext. 444). Thank you for your interest.



The keeper's quarters at Raspberry Light will be furnished as it may have appeared in the 1920s.

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