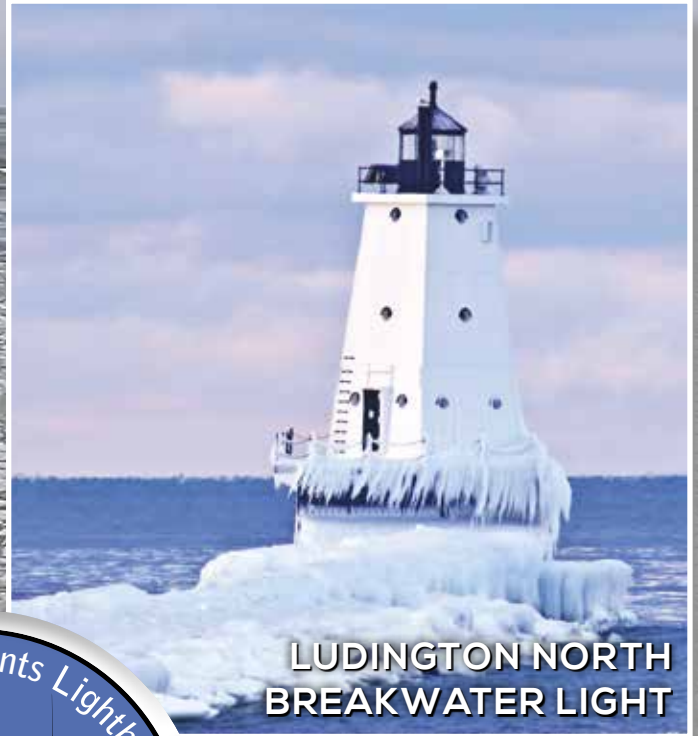


Sable Points BEACON

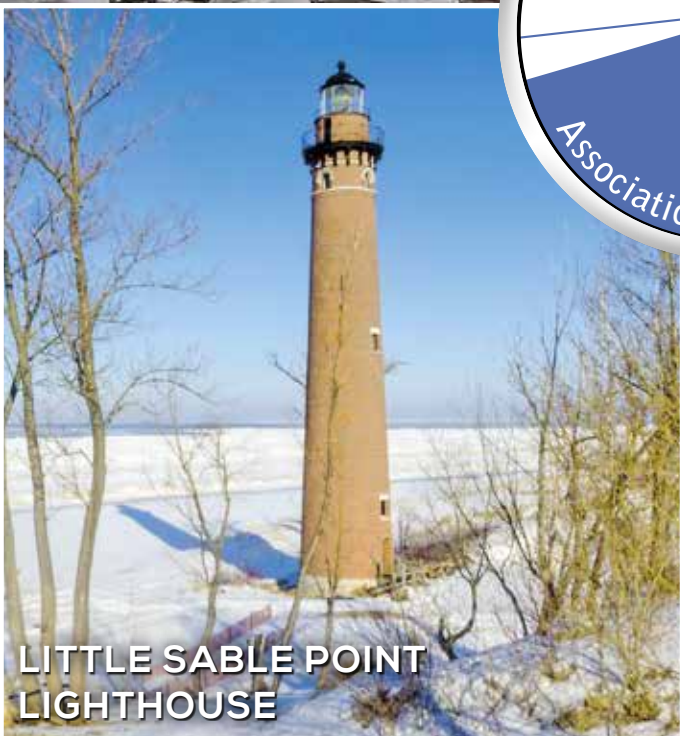
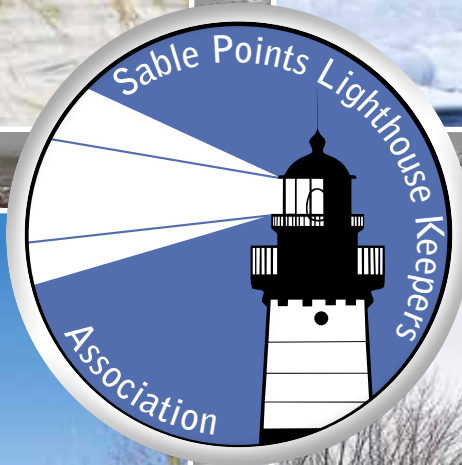
NEWSLETTER • JANUARY 2021



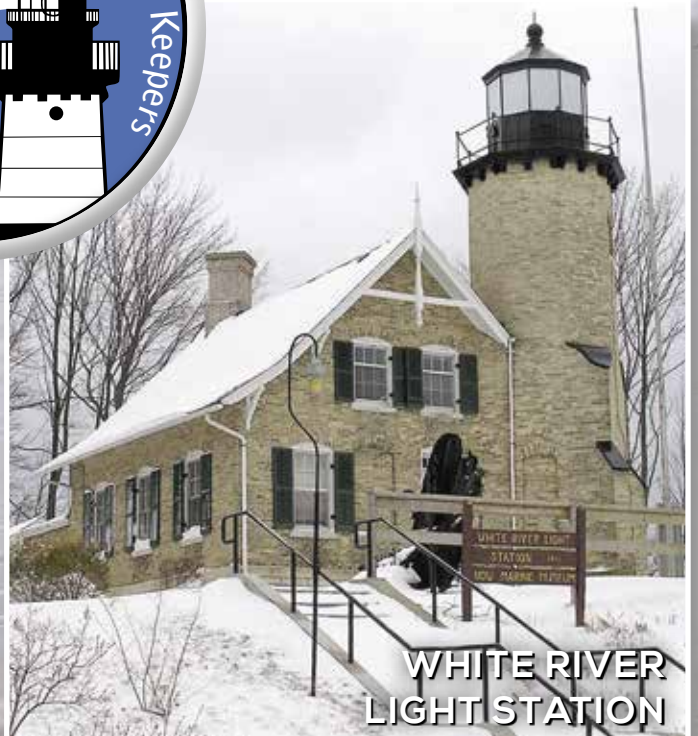
**BIG SABLE POINT
LIGHTHOUSE**



**LUDINGTON NORTH
BREAKWATER LIGHT**



**LITTLE SABLE POINT
LIGHTHOUSE**



**WHITE RIVER
LIGHT STATION**

LEAVE A PRINT IN THE SAND 🤔

"LOVE YA TO THE MOON AND BACK, CHRISTY GRAVES-GAVAGAN"
"JULIA'S JOURNEY ON THE ROAD TO A NEW LIFE 5-2-14"
"WE MADE IT DAD! CJ, JOE, BETH, TONY & KIDS"
"LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE, MARY AND DONNA HELDER"

These are some of the inscriptions on the new walkway around the Big Sable Point Lighthouse. The Leave a Print in the Sand campaign helps SPLKA raise funds for capital preservation projects identified by the SPLKA Board of Directors at all four of our lighthouses. Since SPLKA started offering customized walkway boards in July, 2014, at the Big Sable Lighthouse, we have raised over \$40,000 which has been added to the SPLKA Capital Campaign Fund on deposit at the Mason County Community Foundation. Since then we have also made boards available at the Little Sable Lighthouse and the White River Light Station. A total of 603 boards at Big Sable, 69 at Little Sable and 21 at the White River Light Station have been donated and installed around the lights.

Purchasing a personalized walkway board is a fun way to contribute to the preservation of our lighthouses. These boards are becoming the new walkway around Big Sable, a connecting walkway to the gift trailer at Little Sable, and part of the wheel chair ramp to the keeper's workshop at the White River Light Station. The cost of an engraved board is \$100. Each board can be engraved with up to 25 characters on a line, including commas and spaces, with a two-line maximum.

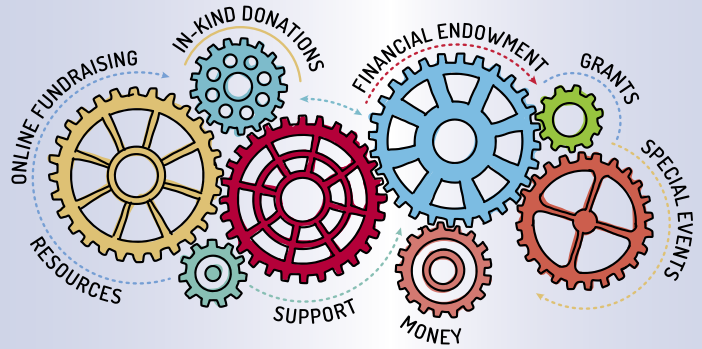
Whether you are documenting your travels, "2011-LIFE'S AN ADVENTURE, CLIMBED ALL 130 STEPS C&G", "SURVIVED THE DEATH MARCH"; remembering time spent at one of the lights, "HERE OUR SPIRITS SOAR AS EAGLES, THOM AND NANCY JONES"; memorializing a beloved pet, "GRETCHEN-THE BEST CAT EVER"; or honoring a loved one, "A SON'S FIRST HERO, A DAUGHTER'S FIRST LOVE, OUR DAD FOREVER", your personalized walkway board will be one more plank in the path across the sand. Strolling the path and reading the inscriptions is an enjoyable pastime to pursue on your next visit to a SPLKA site.

Brochures are available for downloading and printing on our web site at www.splka.org or by calling the SPLKA office at 231-845-7417. Your addition of another board on one of our walkways supports the mission of SPLKA to preserve our magnificent lighthouses for generations to come.

Link to
downloadable
brochure for
"Leave a Print
in the Sand"



Help us preserve all of SPLKA's Lighthouses and Towers by purchasing a Trex® board. These boards are available to be placed at Big Sable, Little Sable or the White River Lighthouses.



Capital Campaign Update Year-End 2020:

In the mist of the Covid-19 pandemic, the planning for the preservation of our castles that line the lakeshore continues. We are still in the midst of raising funds for Phase 1 of our Capital Campaign.

Phase 1 includes repairing the 139 holes that are in the steel cladding on the Big Sable Lighthouse tower. After the cladding is repaired, the tower will need to be painted.

Phase 1 also includes funding a Historic Structures Report for the Big Sable Point Lighthouse. A historic structure report provides documentary, graphic, and physical information about a property's history and existing condition. Broadly recognized as an effective part of preservation planning, a historic structure report also addresses management or owner goals for the use or re-use of the property. It provides a thoughtfully considered argument for selecting the most appropriate approach to treatment, prior to the commencement of work, and outlines a scope of recommended work. The report serves as an important guide for all changes made to a historic property during a project (repair, rehabilitation, or restoration) and can also provide information for maintenance procedures. Finally, it records the findings of research and investigation, as well as the processes of physical work, for future researchers.

In the January 1, 2020, newsletter, it was reported that the fund balance for the Capital Campaign Fund on deposit at the Mason County Community Foundation was \$138,420. Today the fund stands at \$155,622. This puts us at 69% of our goal of \$225,000 to fund Phase 1. **The SPLKA board and staff want to thank everyone who is continuing to step up and help us meet our goal.** Our mission continues to be the preservation of our iconic lighthouses. We also want to encourage you to keep giving so that Phase 1 can be completed as soon as possible. Funds can be donated to Phase 1 by going to our web site @ www.splka.org or can be sent to SPLKA, P.O. Box 673, Ludington, MI 49431.

Letter from the President

Dear Friends, Fall is a great time to get outdoors and take in as much as we can before the weather gets really cold. As our facilities close up for the season (what little there was!), there is a beauty about the lakeshore and our lights in the fall. Maybe your family likes to visit an orchard or pumpkin patch – why not combine that with a trip to Little Sable? Or White River, or Big Sable or the Breakwater? It's a great way to spend a day or weekend!

Our current plan is to be ready to open (fully!) come spring. Of course, that will depend on guidance from the DNR and the State of Michigan, but, God willing, we're going to open! While that sounds pretty easy, it actually isn't. There is much work to do.

Your staff has their work cut out for them, preparing our properties along with acquiring inventory and scheduling volunteers. Collectively and individually, they did a great job handling this unusual season, so I know they're up to the task. We need to support them in every way possible, and I encourage you to reach out and offer your time or talent along with your thanks!

Your board has its work cut out, too. Working closely with Peter, we need to find a way to have about \$125,000 on hand for January 1. As you can tell from treasurer Ted Robinson's latest report in the annual meeting package, we will be considerably short of that position. We're looking at a number of options, and I am cautiously optimistic. Nevertheless, contributions will help us considerably.

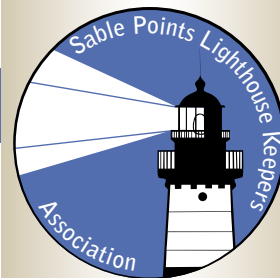
Perhaps you heard that the DNR was waiting for an engineering report about how to deal with the high lake levels at both Big Sable and Little Sable. Clearly, everyone who has visited these lights can see the issue. We, along with the DNR, have been waiting for a number of months to see the results of the study. Those results were delivered to us just recently. In it, the engineering firm selected by the state (GEI Consultants) recommended remediation projects at both lights that involved grading, geotextile fabric, and "heavy riprap" (large boulders). All in all, we agree with the reports and support the DNR's efforts to get these projects completed. Here's where you come in: the State of Michigan will be funding these two projects and must allocate the money to the DNR. Perhaps you could write or email your local legislator and state senator (assuming you live in Michigan) asking them to fund these projects. Wondering what to say? Here's my suggestion, which you are welcome to use as-is or as a basis for your own words:

Dear (insert name of elected official here), As a member of the Sable Points Lighthouse Keepers Association, I support the DNR's efforts to remediate shoreline erosion at Little Sable Point in Mears and at Big Sable Point in Ludington as identified in reports from GEI Consultants to the State of Michigan. I ask that you support this initiative to ensure that funding is available to the DNR to complete these projects in a timely manner. Sincerely, (insert your name here)

As we close out this year, we welcome two new board members, Susan Land and Sara Anne Hook. I know they will be fine additions and look forward to working with them. I believe our board will be able to make progress on several fronts next year.

In closing, Nancy and I look forward to a non-eventful winter season and hope that you and your families all have a wonderful Thanksgiving and a joyous holiday season, while staying warm and healthy!

Sincerely, ***Al Cocconi***
President, SPLKA



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VICE PRESIDENT

Ted Robinson
TREASURER

Roger Pashby
SECRETARY

Sara Anne Hook
DIRECTOR

Susan Land
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STAFF

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WRLS CURATOR

Rachel Bendele
OPERATIONS/ GIFT SHOP MANAGER

Jim Hardie
RESTORATION AND MAINTENANCE SUPERVISOR

Carol Cooper
BOOKKEEPER

Letter from *Vice President*



by **Mark Hallenbeck**



Our Mission is to preserve, promote and educate the public and make our lighthouses accessible to all.

SUPPORTING SPLKA FROM A DISTANCE

As we all know, almost overnight the COVID-19 pandemic changed seemingly everything about everyday life. For SPLKA, this meant virtually no chance this past season to show off three of our four lighthouses or to share ghost stories with our fellow volunteers. Nevertheless, SPLKA has launched several initiatives to continue capturing the imaginations of both new and seasoned lighthouse lovers and to help keep our volunteer keepers connected.

It takes over 400 volunteer keepers to run the four SPLKA lighthouses from May to October. Volunteers have hailed from 23 states in addition to Michigan, as well as from Canada, Japan, and China. In a typical summer season, our volunteer keepers conduct approximately 5,000 tower tours at White River Light Station, 18,000 tours at Big Sable Point Lighthouse, 9,000 tours at Ludington North Breakwater Lighthouse, and 25,000 tours at Little Sable Point Lighthouse. Without these traditional avenues for connecting the public to our lighthouses, the SPLKA education

committee has developed several initiatives to help fill the void.

The seven committee members – Lenore Janman, Pamela Cameron, Kathy Bloomfield, Janis Belair, Tim Heaton, Larry Stulz, and Mark Hallenbeck - live far afield: only one near SPLKA headquarters and the lighthouses, three in outstate Michigan, two in Ohio, and one in South Dakota. So, like just about everybody else, they've been required to communicate primarily via email, Zoom meetings, and phone calls. Nevertheless, they are mobilizing energy and ideas from diverse professional experiences, up to 15 years of SPLKA volunteering, and infectious enthusiasm for lighthouses.

All seven committee members are educators by trade. Their careers average 31 years and encompass a wide range of education-related fields: elementary, middle school, and high school classroom teaching; special education; military and civilian safety instruction; school and school district administration; library/school media specialization; educating the gifted and talented; and university teaching. One thing they share is a love of history and the desire to pass along that love to others, especially young people.

"I am particularly interested in passing on the history of our lights to young people," said Lenore Janman. "I would like young people to have an appreciation of the importance of lighthouses in our state's history and the role they played in our maritime history." Larry Stulz agrees. "I love

to teach others the forgotten importance of our history, such as lighthouses," he said. "History can be a sour pill for many to swallow, but when presented properly and with a real live lighthouse to show, it is easy to convey the energy and power of a lighthouse. When I see that sparkle in someone's eye of interest



or fascination with the subject matter, then I feel like I made a very lasting and personal touch in their life." Similarly, Jan Belair welcomes the chance to implement interactive school programs that focus on the historic significance of the SPLKA lighthouses. "I hope students of all ages will take ownership of the stories," she said, "and become involved in the preservation of our beautiful lights."

Like all SPLKA keepers, the committee members appreciate the unique opportunity to share a bit in the experience of the lighthouse keepers of old while helping to bring wide-eyed visitors into the story. "There is a magical bond with history and the countless people that came before us in manning and preserving the lighthouse traditions and their stories," said Larry Stulz. Kathy Bloomfield agrees: "For me, my tour of duty is the highlight of my year. I will miss it dearly this year! I feel oneness with the keepers and their families when I am here. I feel responsible for the safety of our guests and for passing on the importance of the role that lighthouses have had in maritime history."

Although they're unable to conduct the tours that animate their SPLKA membership this summer, the education committee members have initiated several virtual projects to help connect the public with their beloved lighthouses. For example, in collaboration with Executive Director Peter Manting and fellow keeper David Dietrich, they have drawn on their experiences at Big Sable Point Lighthouse to create a virtual tour of the lighthouse that is posted on the



Letter from Vice President Mark Hallenbeck cont.

SPLKA website and Facebook page. The virtual tour incorporates contemporary video footage with historic photos and journal reflections from actual lighthouse keepers in order to link the present with the past.

Realizing that SPLKA volunteer lighthouse keepers are dearly missing their annual tours this summer, Larry Stulz has developed a private Facebook page titled “SPLKA Members and Volunteers” on which volunteer keepers can stay connected and share memories, photos, and video clips of their lighthouse experiences. Among the experiences SPLKA volunteer lighthouse keepers relish – and have missed this year – is sharing ghost stories with one another and with visitors. “On every tour, I am always asked by guests, ‘Is this place haunted?’ I must be a haunting magnet, as I have had my share of minor experiences that I am all too happy to share with others,” recalls Larry Stulz. “No ‘face-to-face’ encounters, but many bumps in the night, visual uncertainties, moving doors, and unusual scents in the air.” Kathy Bloomfield concurs: “I have had some experiences that are unexplainable over the years, and it is fun sharing these stories with fellow keepers, as well as with the public.”

Last year committee member Pamela Cameron published a children’s book titled *Sport, Ship Dog of the Great Lakes*, which highlights the true story of an abandoned puppy that was adopted by the crew of the lighthouse tender ship *Hyacinth* and lived on board from 1914-1926. *Sport* became a beloved member of the crew, and lighthouse keeper families all along the Lake Michigan coast – including those at all four SPLKA lighthouses – looked forward to his visits when the *Hyacinth* made its regular stops with supplies. This summer Pam recorded a reading of the book at Big Sable Point Lighthouse, which is posted on the SPLKA website under the “Educational” tab. Committee members also have been culling through archival photographs of the SPLKA lighthouses to be posted

online in a monthly rotation with accompanying descriptions from October to May in order to further illuminate the importance of these amazing structures to the maritime history and economy of the Great Lakes.

A surprise bonus this summer was the chance to host two university students interested in creating a lighthouse-centered, computer-based community service project. Leila Owens, a student at Princeton University, and Ashvin Kumar, a University of Michigan student, worked at Big Sable from



Ashvin Kumar and Leila Owens

August 14-28 to create two imaginative videos using Google Street View-type photography: a virtual tour of Big Sable Point Lighthouse and a virtual escape room of Big Sable. Leila and Ashvin unveiled the videos on August 28 at the SPLKA office to Peter and several education committee members who were culling through the SPLKA archives at the time. It was a pleasure indeed to spend a little face-to-face (er, mask-to-mask) time with them just before they headed back to school, after previously only meeting them on Zoom. Needless to say, everyone was thrilled with their videos, which are posted under the “Educational” tab on the SPLKA website. The students offered to produce further videos for SPLKA if the details can be worked out.

As educators at heart, committee members recognize the potential to introduce Michigan’s school children to lighthouse history, construction, and lore. As such, they are studying the Michigan K-12 academic content standards for opportunities to link selected standards with key lighthouse content. Once those linkages are identified, the committee is adapting and developing curriculum materials

that will assist Michigan’s teachers in addressing the content standards while also reinforcing the fascinating history of the state’s shoreline sentinels. “Education communities are seeking online and virtual experiences that match their curricula,” said Pam Cameron. “SPLKA is focused on providing well-written and well-planned activities for both children and adults.” Several early efforts to provide materials for Michigan teachers have been posted under the “Educational” tab on the SPLKA website.

SPLKA education committee members hope their various initiatives will help develop a robust online presence for the organization and – most importantly – will nurture a cross-generational interest in both experiencing and preserving the heritage of Michigan’s lighthouses. “If children are experiencing historical sites via their schooling,” said Pam Cameron, “it will give the adults in their lives ideas for family outings. Adults will see a connection between family activities and the curriculum their children are experiencing. SPLKA is an example of an organization that is working to maintain four historical sites in Michigan. It is exciting to see how volunteers and contributors who see the value of such sites commit their time and donations to that mission. During this time of less travel, SPLKA is finding ways to keep those sites relevant.”

Kathy Bloomfield mirrors the sentiments of her fellow education committee members on the committee’s continuing efforts: “Working on this committee has been a learning experience, as well as a welcome challenge. It has allowed me to stay connected to the lights and to be working as part of a team again. I appreciate both. I have learned lots about Big Sable from examining the old photos. Being there for the “premiere” of the kids’ virtual escape room was so thrilling. Meeting and working with new people, even from a distance, has been so enjoyable.”

Notes FROM YOUR DIRECTOR, Peter Manting



by Peter Manting
SPLKA Executive Director



Our Mission is to preserve, promote and educate the public and make our lighthouses accessible to all.

As I write this, fall is in the air as the summer temperatures now dip to the fifty-degree mark. It is the first day in almost five months that I had to dig my long pants out of the closet and put my shorts away. Fall is here. The leaves are changing color, and, by the time you read this, winter will be upon us.

In 2020 I have definitely missed my contact with volunteers, friends of the lights and donors. I have missed music at Little Sable on Wednesday evenings. Riding the bus out to Big Sable on bus day with lighthouse enthusiasts. Evening concerts at White River and just walking out into Lake Michigan on the breakwater on a summer day to visit the keepers.

I have a few take-aways after attending and hosting more Zoom meetings this year than I care to count.

The first take-away is how proud I am to be able to work with our current staff as director of this association. As the year looked bleak, we all rolled up our sleeves and came up with solutions to our problems. Jim was able to complete maintenance projects that he was forced to leave in late March and couldn't return to until after June 8th. With the closure of the lighthouses, Jim has had an opportunity to work on freshening up the inside of the tower at Little Sable Point Lighthouse. Our visitors will be excited to see some fresh paint on the walls and staircases.

Rachel was able to find outlets to sell the merchandise that we had ordered and had to be paid for this summer.

Having the gift shop open at Big Sable and scheduling volunteers to staff it, along with marketing items in a downtown store and improving the gift shop on our website,

are all things she has accomplished this summer. Matt made sure that the White River Light Station was open and safe for all who visited. White River was one of only a few Michigan lighthouses open to the public this summer. Carol kept the staff spending to a minimum, working with staff, board and vendors to ensure that our bills got paid. Cherie increased the weekly e-blasts to make sure that all of you were kept up to date on what was going on each week with SPLKA. She did this on top of her many other duties, and the office has received many positive comments and thanks regarding e-blasts during this time.

My next take-away is a virtual celebration of our steadfast members and volunteers. After just my second year at the helm, I proclaimed at our annual meeting that year that the SPLKA volunteers and members were the best of any organization with which I had been associated.

This holds true today.

Our members have financially stepped up to the plate to insure that SPLKA continues to stay the course. Our Capital Campaign Fund is over \$155,000. That means we raised over \$63,000 since our last annual meeting in September 2019 to help fund the tower repair and the Historic



Structures Report. We are well on our way to reaching the \$225,000 goal necessary to complete Phase I of our projects.

When COVID-19 hit, several of you took it upon yourselves to start sending in donations to our general fund before we even approached the membership for funding. You then met the challenge to match a \$15,000 gift that added \$30,000 to our operating fund. You then dug deep again, as we raised over \$8,000 in the Mason County Community Foundations Match Day for non-profits which, when added to the community foundation's match, added another \$12,500. WOW. I want to express my gratitude to everyone for your support.

Another take-away is an acknowledgement of the dedication of SPLKA's board members. Those serving on the board have my admiration and thanks for enduring the Zoom meetings and making the tough decisions this year. Thank you for your encouragement and for the direction you provided as we continue to move SPLKA forward to fulfill our mission.

Thank you to Bob Baltzer and Bill Mc Beth who are retiring from the board at the end of this year. Bob had come back on the board after taking a year or two off after already serving two terms. We will miss Bob's experience and wisdom. Bill had stepped in to fill an unexpired term and then stayed on giving us three more years of his leadership skills and experience. I speak for the staff, the membership and the board. We have all appreciated your commitment SPLKA.

We still have challenges to face in the coming months. Getting us back on track for next year will be our biggest challenge.

Our plans are to open fully staffed with volunteers and ready to accept visitors in May of 2021. Our bus days to Big Sable will be June 26, July 8 and 22, August 5 and 19 and September 11.

Notes

FROM YOUR DIRECTOR, cont.

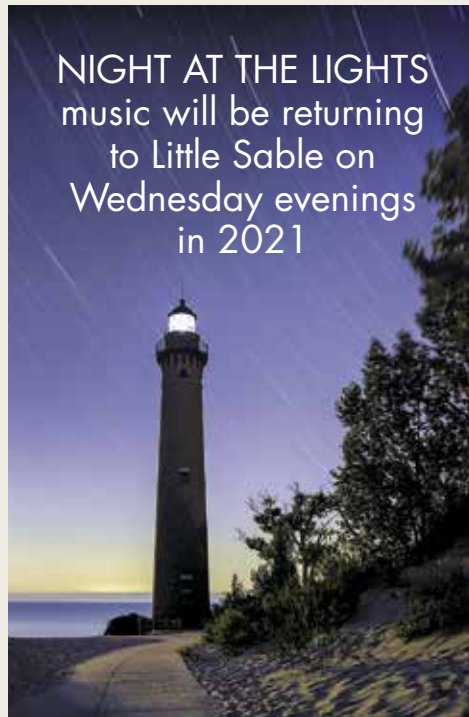
Night at the Lights music will be returning to Little Sable on Wednesday evenings July 7, 14, 21, 28 and August 4. Friday evenings there will be music at the White River Light Station on July 9, 16 and 30. Special events include the Western Michigan Dulcimers on Saturday, July 24, and our beer tent fund raiser on Friday evening, August 13. More details will be coming.

SPLKA will also be represented at the Michigan Lighthouse Festival on the weekend of August 6-8, 2021. The festival will be held on the grounds of Old Mission Point Lighthouse in Traverse City. We look forward to seeing many of you there in 2021.

We are still facing financial challenges. I have been successful in obtaining several grants which have helped to maintain our general operations this season. I and the board will continue to pursue grants and funding opportunities to help SPLKA weather the storm.

Grants this year from the Great Lakes Energy Peoples Fund and the Oceana Community Foundation helped finance the interior preservation efforts at the Little Point Sable Lighthouse.

Opportunities to support our cause have been plentiful this year. We have encouraged everyone to renew their memberships for 2021 and run promotions for buying a customized walkway board or two or three. We promoted the National Day of Giving which was on December 1, and now



we invite you to consider making a year-end gift to SPLKA for general operations. Gifts can be sent in by check or given through our website located on the donation tab.

I hope you are enjoying the articles about the history of SPLKA. In this past June's issue, we had the first of many articles that will continue chronicling the early days of the Sable Points Lighthouse Keepers Association and the saving of the Big Sable Point Lighthouse. Thank you Jacquelyn McShulskis for researching and writing the history from 1968 to 1991. We received many compliments on that article which chronicled the efforts to save Big Sable from being overtaken by the elements. In this

issue, Jacquelyn is partnering with SPLKA's first executive director, Mary James, to continue to bring us the history of Big Sable from 1991 to 2000. I hope that you are finding this history as fascinating as I have. The time, effort and vision of all those involved needs to be celebrated by all of us. What a sturdy foundation they laid for our entire organization.

To all of our members and volunteers, both seasoned and new, you continue to amaze me and the many thousands of guests who have visited our lights and who will return next year to visit them again. Your support, knowledge and love for our four lighthouses is unparalleled. You graciously welcome and help transport our visitors back to a time when our lights were homes to the lighthouse keepers and their families. Thank you for all of the hours that you have put into building SPLKA and furthering our mission.

2020 changed all of our lives this year. SPLKA has adapted to the changes and will make sure that in 2021 our guests and volunteers will have a welcoming and safe place to visit. On September 12, 2020, I finished seven years at the helm of this unique organization. I am so proud to be a part of SPLKA and to continue my role in keeping the Great Lakes maritime history alive by preserving and promoting these historical landmarks.

*~ Keeping the Lights Shining,
Peter Manting/ SPLKA Executive Director*



SUPPORT SPLKA USING THE AMAZON SMILE PROGRAM

Amazon Smile is a simple way for you to support the Sable Points Lighthouse Keepers Association every time you shop at no cost to you. When you shop at smile.amazon.com you'll find the exact low prices, vast selection and the same convenient shopping experience as *Amazon.com* with the added bonus that Amazon will donate a portion of the purchase price to SPLKA. Already have an Amazon account? Use the same account on *Amazon.com* and AmazonSmile.com, your shopping cart, wish list wedding or baby registry and other account settings are also the same. Amazon donates 0.5% of the purchase price from your eligible AmazonSmile purchases. Sign up today at AmazonSmile and specify your charitable giving be given to Sable Points Lighthouse Keepers Association. We thank you for this!



Keeper's Notes



by **Matt Varnum**
CURATOR
White River
Light Station & Museum



Our Mission is to preserve, promote and educate the public and make our lighthouses accessible to all.

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

2020 has definitely been an interesting and challenging year for all, and the White River Light Station & Museum is no exception. We were able to open up completely for the 2020 season on Monday, June 15, with the implementation of many precautions in order for us to be able to open safely. Not only were visitors to the museum very respectful and understanding of it all, they were really happy we were open, considering not many other

THE WHITE RIVER CURATOR REPORT/WINTER 2021

places were.

Not only were visitors very understanding of everything, but so were those who volunteered at White River. With that said, I want to take this opportunity to thank all of you that helped out here at the museum in 2020,



whether you were returning keepers from last year or new volunteers to White River. You have no idea how much your help means to not only SPLKA but to me as well. Without your help, the light station would not have run as smoothly as it did this season. Along with the great volunteers who helped out during the 2020 season, I would also like to thank the two interns we had, Stan Houck and Sharon Edgar, who were also of great assistance and helped make sure that our volunteers were comfortable in handling the new guidelines we had in place.

During the upcoming off season, I will again schedule three presentations

within the White Lake community to discuss a topic related to the White River Light Station and to highlight the need for volunteers. Depending on how things are going in Michigan, I will either be giving the presentations in person or electronically by doing a voice-over presentation and getting it out into the world as much as possible through the internet as was done this year. Also during the off season, we will be installing and hopefully unveiling the new hands-on activity for the 2021 season. It was supposed to debut this year, but, because of COVID-19, the project was delayed due to our inability to sanitize it.

During the 2021 season we will again be hosting concerts and yoga sessions on the grounds. Our beer & wine fundraising event will be taking place on August 13, and I will work with local libraries to offer story times for children.

The White River Light Station & Museum, just like our other lighthouses, will need volunteers for 2021. If you are interested in volunteering at the light station or have questions, please contact me at 231-894-8265 or whiteriverlight@gmail.com.

I hope to see you all here during the 2021 season!
~ Respectfully, Matt

Just in time for the season SPLKA is announcing the "All Access Pass". These passes provide the user with a discounted rate to climb all four towers. You may purchase these by contacting the SPLKA office by phone at **231-845-7417**, email at **splkaofficemanager@gmail.com** or at any of our four SPLKA lights. The price for these passes is \$15.00 for students (17 and under) and \$25.00 for Adults (18 and over). These passes provide a \$5.00 savings for Students and a \$7.00 savings for Adults over buying individual tower climbs. Passes will be good for the 2021 season.

SPLKA invites you and your family to come climb a lighthouse and create priceless memories!



Sable Points Lighthouse Keepers Association invites you to

go climb a
Lighthouse!

Purchase an ALL ACCESS PASS for 2021

Rachel's Corner



by Rachel Bendele
SPLKA Operations
Gift Shop Manager



Our Mission is to preserve, promote and educate the public and make our lighthouses accessible to all.

Who doesn't love a good challenge? Normally, I do! But when I say I am ready for things to get back to our typical daily challenges, I would bet many of you are feeling the same way. Those pesky little challenges that we always knew would pop up, yet we hoped they wouldn't? Yes those- let's get back to those challenges!

I've been thinking about our volunteers during this time, and I hope you all have found ways to keep yourselves active. Maybe you have even found your way back to some old hobbies you had lost time or a passion for. In my house, with three active kids in sports, the sudden stop to everyday life came with lots of mixed feelings. Early on, our highlight was evening trail rides through the forest. We painted canvas pictures, did lots of baking and puzzles and prepared meals to deliver. As the days continued to add up and the stay-at-home order continued to be extended, the unknown became more frustrating. Everyone was getting bored and ready to be with friends, family and people. Another project the kids worked on was journaling every day about what was going on in the world, how they felt, what they enjoyed, what they missed, etc. In one discussion, we talked about life as a lighthouse keeper and imagined how isolated they were

and that they lived years isolated from the rest of the world.

It was that conversation that got me thinking- I bet our volunteers are thinking about the lighthouse and imagining serving at the lighthouse and being isolated (or quarantined there). In my last column, I proposed that you write your version of the story and submit the "The Quarantined Keepers." Unsure whether or not we would get a response, I was thrilled when one came in. You can read Kathy Bloomfield's story in this issue in the Volunteer Spotlight.

Once the order was lifted and we were able to leave the virtual world and get back into the office, we put our virtual planning into action. The gift shop at Big Sable was set up to accommodate the social distancing guidelines and staged for minimum keepers to be on site.



Everything was set for a one-way flow for our visitors. They entered through the main gift shop entrance and were greeted by a keeper. They were able to shop two rooms, with the old kitchen area being off limits and used for back-up merchandise and checkout. Visitors were then directed down the hallway, toward the tower, observing the pictures and displays, and exiting out the Coast Guard door. We found many people didn't want to hang out long for history and questions due to the masks. When we had an extra volunteer, they were able to catch them outside and share Big Sable's history and answer questions. Many visitors expressed excitement that we were open while others shared their disappointment that they couldn't



climb the tower.

Big Sable was successfully staffed on weekends to keep the gift shop open, and I was able to help Matt with some volunteers for White River Light also. Volunteers at WRLS enabled Matt to have days off while that light was able to remain open daily.

As for the merchandise, fortunately, once the decisions were made for the season and once local businesses reopened, I was able to cancel or reduce many of the merchandise orders that had been placed. I was also able to set up a pop-up booth in Ludington at Avenue's End Mini Mall next to House of Flavors and sell some of our merchandise there.



It has been so nice to hear from many of you and know you are doing well and looking forward to returning to the lights. Many of you have expressed disappointment in not being able to come this summer. We also felt that! For me- I missed hearing voices echo through the tower, the greetings along the pier, the stories of proposals or other happenings at the lights, the laughter, and just catching up with your latest adventures.



I want to thank everyone who has reached out and said hello, sent pictures, made us masks, congratulated my daughter on her graduation, helped in our fundraising efforts, volunteered time and for always supporting SPLKA.

You are the lights that keeps our boat from crashing!
~ Rachel

Lighthouse Maintenance News

FALL 2020/WINTER 2021



by Jim Hardie
Restoration and
Maintenance Supervisor



*Our Mission is to preserve, promote
and educate the public and make
our lighthouses accessible to all.*

It's October in Western Michigan. There is a chill in the air, and you can smell the wood stoves in the neighborhood firing up to warm the houses. Amidst all of the sensory cues that fall is here, one of the neighbors is getting in one last barbeque before putting the grill away for the season. What a wonderful time of year. 2020 has been a unique year for everyone, and the lighthouses are no exception. We started the season shut down and shut out. The state had a stay-at-home order in place which prevented us from doing any work on our lighthouses and from welcoming any keepers or guests. It wasn't until the second week of June that I was allowed to get back into the lighthouses and finish what I had started a few months earlier. SPLKA's opening plans were modified several times, and the final decision on what and how we would open for 2020 was that the Breakwater and Little Sable would stay shut down for the year. White River would open mid-June with minor restrictions, and Big Sable would only open the gift shop on weekends. There would be no tower climbs there this year.

Big Sable would start its modified season on July 10 and close for 2020

on September 27. A short season for sure. White River is scheduled for closing on October 25. The temporary shuttering of our lights didn't stop work from commencing on our structures after the stay-at-home order was lifted. At Big Sable, the plaster was repaired and a fresh coat of paint applied in the two west bedrooms. That work was sorely overdue. The sump pump has been running pretty much nonstop since installation last fall. With a few exceptions, it has been able to keep up with the influx of water into the basement. Lake Michigan has been at record high levels for 2020, although it seems to have finally stabilized. Hopefully it will drop a little over the next few months. SPLKA received the engineers' report from the State of Michigan DNR on a permanent solution for protecting the sea wall at Big Sable. The DNR has applied for funding to proceed with this action, and, once funding is received, will work with SPLKA to implement the plan.

Last fall and again this spring we backfilled the sea wall with sand that has been building up from road maintenance. This was done with the concurrence of the Michigan Department of Environment and Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE). Erosion has been manageable during this summer. The piping from the sump pump is unsightly, but it is working.

The shutdown prevented the walkway boards from being placed as early in the year as usual, but, when restrictions were lifted and the sand was finally moved, I was able to place the walkway boards. I came up with a different layout to keep the boards out of the inland lake that forms each time the wind blows. The new layout seems to have been successful, but now it is time to roll them up for another winter.

The Breakwater residence underwent quite a transformation this year. The board of directors had approved a renovation of the living space last fall which was badly needed. While removing the suspended ceiling tile to replace it, I noticed some wood peeking out from behind some insulation that

was in the ceiling. Further investigation revealed that there was a hand-hewn ceiling with beautiful wood beams hidden behind the drop ceiling. What a find! Plans changed slightly for the design. SPLKA had purchased most of the materials and furniture for the renovation in January and February, but work had been stopped due to the stay-at-home order. I took some materials home to my shop and proceeded to mill and stain boards to the extent possible.



This helped keep work progressing and enabled a quicker finish to the project once the state allowed me back into the residence. In June, I could start finishing what had been started. The space has now been completed and is ready for occupancy next year by our keepers. New carpeting was installed in all the bedrooms and the stairwell.



A new hardwood floor was laid in the living room and dining room. The walls received a coat of paint. An accent wall of stone was installed, and new furniture was delivered to complete the project. The residence looks great and should be very comfortable for our keepers next season.

Maintenance News, CONT.

Little Sable was closed for the year. This presented a maintenance opportunity. With no guests climbing the tower, it was time for a much-needed facelift of the interior.



When I could finally get out to the lighthouse, I began scraping paint and loose plaster off the interior walls. A fresh coat of paint was put on the intact plaster, and the spiral staircase has gotten a fresh coat of paint as well. I have been able to get half way up the tower this year, and the new paint has

brightened up the interior significantly. Hopefully there will be an early spring in 2021 with weather conducive to painting so more renovation of the interior can take place before our guests arrive for a busy season.

As always, there have been several volunteers who have helped me along the way. Your help is

deeply appreciated. A few people have really gone above and beyond in this extremely difficult year. Kate Dennis helped to get the Breakwater residence painted and ready for occupancy. Chuck Jamison is always there to help me and to provide moral support when needed. My wife Debbie Hardie has provided infinite help with the design and furniture selection for our yearly renovation projects. The Breakwater residence went from our dreariest place to stay to a temporary residence where you will truly enjoy the accommodations.

I am ready to put 2020 behind us and all the turmoil, discontent, loneliness, fear and anger with it. Here's to 2021. May it be filled with hope and kindness. As they said in my Navy days, I wish you fair winds and following seas. It will be good to hear all the diverse voices enjoying our precious lighthouses again next year.



~ Jim Hardie



SARA ANNE HOOK



Sara has been a member of SPLKA for over ten years. Sara Anne brings a wealth of experience to the SPLKA Board. She has been an archivist, a librarian, a professor and lawyer in her career. She has served as board member, committee members, committee chair and project leader for the Rotary Club of Indianapolis, board member and officer for the

Philharmonic Orchestra of Indianapolis, and also held positions on several committees on the Indiana State Bar Association. Ludington has a special place in her heart as she remembers coming here on summer vacations while spending time at her grandparent's cottage in Baldwin. Recently her trips to Ludington have included visiting the lighthouses, eating Ice Cream at House of Flavors and attending SPLKA's annual meetings. She feels this is a great opportunity for her to use her gifts as she is transitioning from her position as professor into retirement. Sara Anne resides in Indianapolis, IN.

SUSAN LAND



Susan is a lifelong lover of lighthouses. She welcomes the opportunity to work with others who share that love and desire to preserve the lights and the historical importance to both Michigan and the Great Lakes region. Susan has been a member of SPLKA for three years and has served as a volunteer in our keeper program at the Little Sable Point Lighthouse.

She is a retired teacher/ school administrator, living in the Lansing, MI area, who brings her skills acquired while working with a wide, diverse group of students, teachers, staff and administrators to this position. She will be bringing her experience in curriculum development, leadership and supervisory experience to the board. Susan has been active in her home church in Holt, MI and with the American Cancer Society.

SAVING BIG SABLE: THE SAGA CONTINUES

by Mary James and Jacquelyn V. McShulskis

~ TRANSITION INTO SECURITY

Lake Michigan pushed past a failing seawall to within six feet of the Big Sable Point Lighthouse tower in the late 1980s. It took sandbags, machinery, money, dedicated workers, and negotiations with government agencies, from the mid-1970s to the early 1990s, to save both the keepers' house and the tower from becoming rubble. That was the first era of BSP restoration*, characterized by about twenty years of gritty determination on the part of critical volunteers, and gritty surfaces and crumbling structures restored to integrity.

*Read this story, *The Saving of Big Sable Lighthouse*, in the June 2020 edition of the *Sable Points Beacon Newsletter*



THE SAVING OF BIG SABLE: THE SAGA CONTINUES

TRANSITION INTO SECURITY CONT. . .

What happened next? How was this original small group of people going to protect the Big Sable tower and house from vandals, natural elements, and governmental choices that might not favor its survival? Much restoration and many basic repairs remained to fulfill the dream of preserving these historic structures. Where would the resources come from for that, and for protection and maintenance long into the future? Ideally, too, there would be a way that the public could enjoy and learn from the place. There were high hopes and endless years of work ahead. The small core



group had a lot of will, but they couldn't do everything on their own indefinitely.

This is the beginning of the restoration chapter that led to so many of us having the opportunity to join Big Sable's story. Let's start with Mary James' account of a chance meeting of kindred spirits in Ontario, Canada, that brought three key figures together into the restoration process. Mary will explain how she and Robert Sperling entered the Big Sable saga and how they helped build a successful future for both the lighthouse and the organization that supported it.

MARY'S STORY - BUILDING THE VOLUNTEER PROGRAM AND FINANCIAL FOUNDATION FOR BIG SABLE

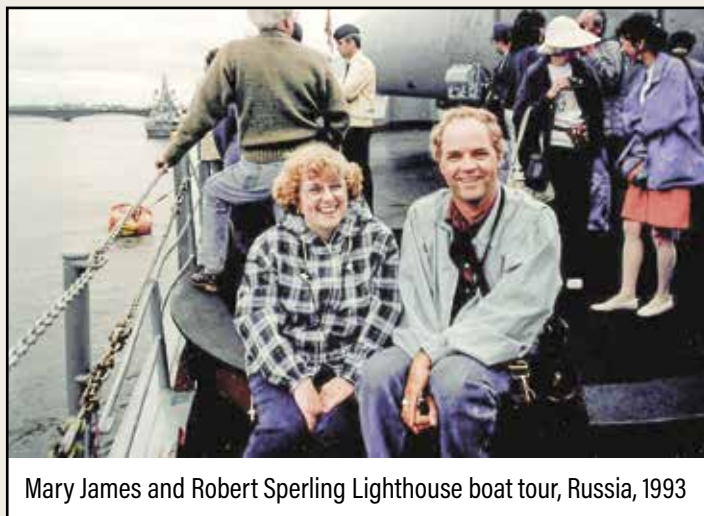
In retrospect, it seems inevitable that I would become a "keeper" of sorts at Big Sable Point Lighthouse. In the 1950s and 1960s, I grew up in Standale, a rural area west of Grand Rapids, across the road from Robert Sperling, who would one day become a fixture at SPLKA for many years. We weren't close friends back then, but we played baseball with all the other kids in the neighborhood on the nearby vacant lot, walked 1.5 miles each way to our four-room country school, and graduated from that same school after 8th grade. Robert, two years ahead of me, finished high

school again, and my brother's advice to Robert was, "Call my sister." Robert made that phone call, which led to ten years of travel and good times. Robert, a sailor, was interested in all things nautical. We traveled to England, Russia, and throughout the US and Canada to visit lighthouses and historic nautical sites.

One such trip was to Goderich Lighthouse in Port Albert, Ontario, Canada, in June of 1992 (<https://www.lighthousefriends.com/light.asp?ID=1043>). We stayed at the Port Albert General Store (<https://www.portalbertgeneralstoreandpub.com/>), which was being run as a bed and breakfast at that time. The only other guest there was Dick Smith, from Ludington, Michigan, with whom we enjoyed breakfast on that June morning. This auspicious encounter was the beginning of our long-time affiliation with SPLKA and years of friendship between Robert and Dick.

Those kindred spirits, Robert Sperling and Dick Smith, were both mildly introverted, hands-on guys who could fix anything. Dick lost no time telling us the story of Big Sable Point and easily hooked us into volunteering to work at the next bus day, which was on June 25 of that year. And hooked we were. Robert eagerly took on one repair or maintenance task after another, while I, with my completely different skill set, became a board member, secretary, president, and eventually the first director of the Big Sable Point Lighthouse Keepers Association.

In 1992 the bus days and tower tours were held three times each year, usually on or near the weekends of Memorial Day, the Fourth of July, and Labor Day. There was a small gift shop in the kitchen of the first assistant keeper's quarters on the ground floor of the east side of the building.



Mary James and Robert Sperling Lighthouse boat tour, Russia, 1993

school, married, and got a good job at GM, while I finished school, attended college, married, became a teacher, and, later on, a school library media specialist and school administrator.

Twenty years later, Robert and my older brother were working at the same GM plant. Robert and I were both



THE SAVING OF BIG SABLE: THE SAGA CONTINUES

MARY'S STORY CONT. . .

The gift shop was stocked with T-shirts, sweatshirts, hats, and scarves, all neatly laid out on folding tables. Round-trip bus rides from the state park were available for \$1, and a \$2 donation was requested from those wishing to climb the tower.

Two or three times on each bus day we offered a slide show in the living room of those quarters, with volunteers providing the narration from a typewritten script. We could seat about 15 or 20 people in there on folding chairs. I developed a firm grasp of the history of Big Sable Point Lighthouse from presenting that slide show over and over and over, and I never grew tired of it.

In the 1993 April edition of the BSPLKA newsletter, it was noted that the association had a balance of \$386 in its bank account and that funds were needed to pay for fuel oil, propane, and an insurance bill in the amount of \$1,045. Sometime in 1993 or 1994 I became a member of the BSPLKA board of directors, and by June of 1994 I was the secretary of the organization. The first newsletter for which I was responsible appeared in June of 1994, wherein I was happy to report that during the May 28 bus day 400 visitors rode the bus and climbed the tower. Gross income from the event was \$2,625, and subsequent bus days that year were similarly successful.

In the summer of 1995 we welcomed the first resident volunteer keepers to Big Sable Point. BSPLKA members and Detroit residents Pat and Jerry Biggs had recently retired and volunteered to move into the upstairs keepers' quarters. The lighthouse was open Tuesdays through Sundays from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., May through October.

That summer, we moved the gift shop from the kitchen of the first assistant keeper's quarters to the living room on the ground floor of the head keeper's quarters. This move enabled the new resident keepers to manage both the gift shop and the tower tours. On bus days, there were always enough volunteers on hand to staff the gift shop, the tower entrance, and the top of the tower. But with just two people on site, it was critical that they be able to oversee both locations simultaneously. Working with nothing but a cash box, Pat ran the gift shop and collected tower tolls while Jerry conducted the tours. We kept the exterior entrance to the tower closed and admitted visitors to the tower only from the front hall, as we do today.

By the summer of 1996, Pat and Jerry had moved on to work at Point Iroquois for two years, just like real lighthouse keepers. However, the Upper Peninsula snow did them in, and they stayed there only one year.

Lacking volunteers who could spend an entire summer

at BSP, I began to look for some who might be able to stay for one month at a time in June, July, and August. The crew that summer included long-time volunteer and BSPLKA member Susan Van Dyke and various members of her family. Also on the roster were Joe and Mary Ann Novetske, both teachers from Charlotte. We welcomed their three kids as junior volunteers with the condition that they spend one or two hours each day helping their parents with the sweeping of floors, the folding of shirts, and other assorted tasks.



Jennifer Ziembra,
volunteer keeper
at BSP, 1996.
Jennifer, where
are you now?

Jennifer Ziembra was head keeper for the final tour of duty that summer. Just 24 years old, she was so excited about living in the lighthouse that she actually quit her job to become a volunteer keeper. However, the agreement with Jennifer stipulated that she could not, under any circumstances, ever be there alone and that it was her responsibility to recruit assistant keepers. As I recall, her mother and her brother, and maybe a friend or two all spent time there with her that summer.

By the fall of 1996, I had become president of the association. The board of

directors and I explored a number of options for staffing the lighthouse from May through October the following year. Many visitors in 1996 had inquired about how they could get to live at BSP and be volunteer keepers. So that fall the newsletter included an entire page describing the role of BSP volunteer lighthouse keepers.

A rigorous application process was developed. Applicants were required to complete an application form, submit a resume' and two letters of recommendation, and schedule an in-person interview. Robert and I conducted these interviews during the winter in my school library on weekends. We made it abundantly clear that being a volunteer keeper would not be a vacation on the beach. We emphasized the number of hours per day the applicants were required to work. The responsibilities included sweeping out the sand, learning the history of BSP, operating the gift shop, balancing the cash register, and making bank deposits.



None of the applicants were deterred by our requirements. Nor were any of them available for month-long assignments. Thus the 1997 roster included 13 sets of two keepers, each of whom stayed for two weeks and had Mondays and Tuesdays off. Two adults were required to be on site at all times. Most of the keepers were married couples, and a few brought school-age kids along. Some were brother-sister teams or pairs of friends who worked together. One crew of two moved out on Monday; the incoming keepers moved in on Tuesday. Robert and I drove the 100 miles from Grand Rapids to Ludington every two weeks to oversee the transition and provide on-the-job training for the new arrivals, often taking two separate vehicles. Robert's van would be loaded with boards and paint and tools, and, after I stopped at Sam's Club in Muskegon, my SUV was filled floor to ceiling with laundry detergent, paper towels, and other housekeeping supplies for the volunteers, as well as candy and snacks to sell in the gift shop. My school-year schedule allowed me to spend a lot of time at BSP, and I think Robert used his vacation days. It was so much fun!

We would stay in the first assistant keeper's quarters for two, three, or four days to provide moral support, encouragement, and supervision of the volunteers. We used the pantry off the kitchen as an office where I answered the mail, managed the membership database, and fulfilled the role of BSPLKA's president. Ruth Smith, and later Marcia Walsworth, ordered and processed merchandise for the ever-growing inventory in the gift shop, mostly working from their homes. The bank account balance improved. With nerves of steel, we began ordering higher-end clothing such as Gear jackets that sold for \$100 each, and we were ecstatic when they sold out by the end of the season.

And so it began. Between 1998 and 2001, the schedule expanded from the three summer months to seven months, from April through November. The first two crews in April were charged with cleaning the keepers' quarters and organizing the gift shop. The last crew in November took inventory and helped Robert close the lighthouse for the winter.

Each season was busier and more successful than the last. We decided to open the lighthouse seven days a week, and the visitors kept coming. The volunteer keepers needed more help.

In 1999, we recruited enough volunteers to expand the roster to four adults on site at all times and made the difficult decision to exclude families with children. In 2000, we expanded the roster again, scheduling six volunteers for each tour of duty. The volunteers shared

the upstairs quarters (four bedrooms, two bathrooms and one kitchen). The keepers sometimes arrived as complete strangers, but they often left as fast friends. Some returned to work together year after year, like the Van Wingers from Rockford, Michigan, who teamed up with the Reeveses from Mishawaka, Indiana. Volunteers came from Ohio, Illinois, Colorado, California and New York. From the downstairs apartment in the evening I could hear shrieks of laughter as the keepers prepared meals and played cards on the kitchen table. The keepers often invited me upstairs for dinner, and in return I fed them homemade hot fudge sundaes in the downstairs kitchen. It was so much fun.

Articles about the restoration of Big Sable and our volunteer program appeared in newspapers around the country and in the publications of other lighthouse organizations. I fielded many inquiries about how we made our program work and shared copies of our membership forms, application forms, and the keepers' handbook. Our successful program was replicated in lighthouses in Michigan, Florida, on the east coast, and on the west coast.

By then we were hosting thousands of visitors each season. The gift shop expanded into all three rooms of the first floor of the head keeper's quarters. We improved the inventory system and added bar codes and scanners. We sold bottled water with our custom BSP label on it. Harbour Lights offered a BSP model, and we sold hundreds of them. We continued the bus days, adding a second bus along with more volunteers to manage the crowds. Gift shop sales increased dramatically when we added credit card service.

A significant factor in the growth and success of the volunteer program was our focus on ensuring that the volunteer keeper experience was as positive and beneficial to the keepers as we could possibly make it. While I was immersed in application forms, recruitment, training, and supervision of the volunteers, Robert and I worked on upgrading the upstairs living quarters to be welcoming, comfortable, and well equipped. We purchased furniture, pots and pans, appliances, dishes, new mattresses, and patchwork quilts and shams for all the beds. We added comfortable chairs to each bedroom so that the keepers all had quiet, private spaces to which they could retreat for reading and contemplation. Those were only the visible, icing-on-the cake improvements. Read on as Jacquelyn describes the ongoing restoration and maintenance projects that were completed as we built the volunteer program and grew the bank account far beyond the \$386 balance we had in 1993.

... CONTINUED ON PAGE 19



THE SAVING OF BIG SABLE: THE SAGA CONTINUES

EXCERPTS FROM AN INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT SPERLING, 2014

The first time Bob Sperling ever walked along the beach to visit Big Sable Lighthouse, the fog was so dense that he was just about to give up and turn around when he spotted part of the seawall, though still saw no lighthouse.

“I decided to see what it was, walked on, and the lighthouse kind of arose from the fog,” he said. *“It looked like it did in a lot of the old photos. Black roof. Kind of beat up. A lot of junk on the porch. Sandbags, pipe, bricks, wood.”*

After his chance meeting with Dick Smith in Canada when he offered to help out, Bob started his volunteer work by minding the green gate on a couple of bus days to make sure no one drove through onto the lighthouse road. Next Dick Smith wanted to get a work crew together to fix one of the porches. *“I have pictures of him and me using his truck to jack the porch back up,”* he said.

As BSPLKA was able to shift from the focus of saving the lighthouse from destruction to preparing it both inside and out for more extensive use, there were endless tasks to be done. The first one Bob took on by himself as a new volunteer was cleaning the basement.

“Nobody really complains when you clean a basement,” he told me. *“Back then there was an old oil furnace that gave us all kinds of trouble. When Dick and Hutch took over the*



Photo taken in January of 1986, Ten months before restoration began.

lighthouse, the boiler from 1943 had frozen and broken. Dick had a 1940 or ‘41 boiler with an oil attachment that he put in there. One day the burner had burned the tube out and was blowing dust and fumes into the basement. Luckily, he caught it and repaired it. That made the whole basement sooty. I spent a lot of time cleaning that up with brooms and mops. So that’s how I started.”

He said that during his first visits to Big Sable you couldn’t walk from the lighthouse to the seawall without going through water that went up over your ankles.

“Outside was bad. Plumbing was bad. Electricity was bad,” he said. *“Mary James became secretary, and that’s when we really got started with ideas for making money. We thought it would be interesting to have someone stay there and open the lighthouse to*

people.”

At some point early on, Bob began to go to Big Sable to work for whole weekends and longer. *“Back then I would be out there for days and no one would show up.”*

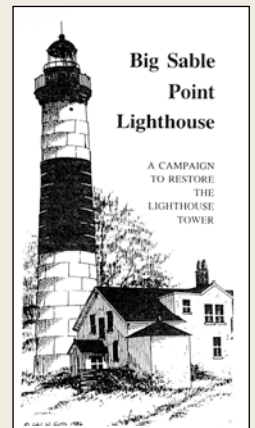
I started to ask if maybe that was hard in a way that might have been like the early keepers’ isolation. *“And was that kind of - . . . “Fun,”* he interrupted me to say. . . . *“Really kind of fun, Jacquelyn.”*



Bob Sperling doing maintenance in the basement at BSP, 1996



Most of the original bannister was removed to be burned on the beach before being restored!



Cover of membership brochure, 1989



CHRONOLOGY OF REPAIRS AND RESTORATION

During the next ten years, significant repair and restoration projects were undertaken and completed. Bob Sperling was the guy in charge, often in collaboration with Dick Smith. For the major undertakings, like roofing and tower painting, he sought and hired professional contractors; but he was always on site to oversee the progress. Most everything else, Bob did himself. He was seldom seen without a tool or a paintbrush in one hand.

The following details were pulled from an early Big Sable Point Lighthouse brochure, from BSPLKA newsletters saved in the SPLKA archives, and from the memories of Mary James and Bob Sperling.

1993 – The sea wall was extended 75 feet to the north, thanks largely to Al Hardman.

1993 – A sink was installed in the downstairs kitchen and the dilapidated south entrance was repaired.

1995 – An anonymous \$3,700 donation made possible the purchase of red shingles like the ones the Coast Guard put on in the 1950s, and the deteriorating black roof was entirely replaced. A portion of the labor was donated by Mr. Paul Irvine of Clingan, Irving Associates.



“I don’t know how many years later we got a letter from the State Historic Preservation Officer saying we were in violation of historic guidelines because we had changed the roof from black to red,” Bob Sperling said in 2014. “They had taken an aerial photo. So we had to clue them in to why we were doing things the way we were.” (When a decision about which historical period to replicate was necessary, the choice had been made to return the lighthouse to the way it was when the Coast Guard left it in the 1970s, using samples of paint from that era, red shingles, etc.)

1996 – The Coast Guard contracted for asbestos pipe covering removal throughout the BSP house (a legal requirement for the Coast Guard’s “disposal” of the dwelling).

1996 – The D9 tower in the dunes that was intended to replace the original lighthouse was lifted out of the dunes by helicopter and removed for good. This was a very exciting day for everyone involved, as the D9 was an eyesore that interfered with the view of Big Sable from the south.

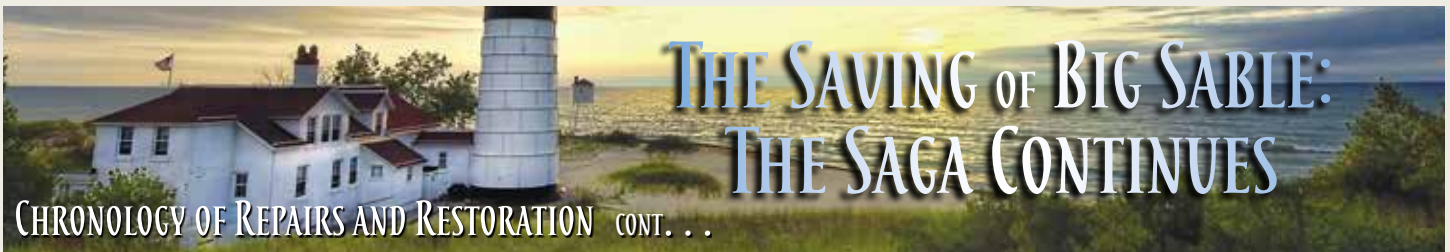
1998 – A \$5,000 anonymous donation helped pay for the cost of repair and painting of the BSP keepers’ quarters. Beginning in 1997, Rick’s Quality Painting replaced rotted and broken boards and deteriorated windowsills. Rick also repaired crumbling and broken bricks and prepared them for primer and paint. The job was completed in 1998.



Late fall 1992 - with D9 tower still in place



Helicopter picking up the D9 tower, 1996



THE SAVING OF BIG SABLE: THE SAGA CONTINUES

CHRONOLOGY OF REPAIRS AND RESTORATION CONT. . .



Mary James and "Willie" from Carr Creek Construction inspect the new sidewalk, 1998

1998 – Carr Creek Construction built new sidewalks around the entire building. The old sidewalks were completely unusable because they had caved in due to erosion.

"The new sidewalks have a pebbled texture and look as if they have always been there," the 1998 Spring/Summer newsletter states.

1998 – Ongoing improvements to the keepers' quarters included replacing bare bulbs hanging by wires with brass or glass light fixtures, heating system repairs, new doors and storm windows added where needed, and the acquisition of furniture for the kitchen and bedrooms.

1999 – The base of the tower was repaired and painted. The interior of the tower was scraped, repaired, and painted by several volunteers after tours were over and the gift shop closed for the day.

1999 – New electrical wiring was installed in phases over two or three years and completed in 1999. This was an extensive, costly project done by professional electricians. As old wiring was replaced, the entire electrical system was updated with lots of new electrical outlets and some additional ceiling lights. Electrical outlets were added in the kitchens, bathrooms, and in the bedrooms so that people could plug in hair dryers, curling irons, and cell phone chargers. Previously, there had been no outlets at all in some rooms.

2000 – The wood floors in the head keeper's quarters were refinished (where the current gift shop is).

"The beautiful wood floors look like new!" the 2000 Spring/Summer newsletter says.

2001 – A new boiler, hot water heater, and all new pipes supplying hot water to the antique radiators throughout the keepers' quarters were installed by Ludington Plumbing, Dick Smith's company. The system includes what looks like miles of copper tubing neatly routed throughout the basement.

2001 – The floors in the first assistant keeper's quarters were refinished. That kitchen floor was the last in the building still covered in linoleum. Bob spent an entire weekend spreading wet newspapers on the floor to soak the felt backing which stubbornly clung to the wood floor underneath. After soaking the felt for several hours, Bob repeatedly scooped up the wet newspapers, scraped up more felt, put down more wet paper, and scraped again until he had removed all of it.

"In the 1940s and 1950s, linoleum was in vogue," the 2001 Summer newsletter states, "and most of the wood floors at Big Sable were covered with it. In the 1990s, most of it was still here, in unimaginable condition. Over the years, the linoleum has been removed and the wood floors refinished. During the past winter, the wood floors in the first assistant keeper's quarters were refinished."

2001 – Victorian touches that were originally part of the house were restored. To match old photographs of Big Sable, replicas of the clay chimney pots, white ridge trim on the roof, and finials at the peaks were put in place.

2001 – The exterior of the tower was re-painted with funds from anonymous donations and tower tour and gift shop income.

2002 – The remaining second story wood floors were refinished. This completed the restoration of every floorboard in the entire building, making them easier to clean and maintain, in addition to vastly improving the ambiance of the rooms.

2002 – The banister and newel post stolen by vandals many years before were finally replaced.

"A beautiful replication of the spindles, banister, and newel post in the stairwell in the front entrance has been completed. It's worth a visit to the lighthouse just to see it." (From the 2002 Summer newsletter)



During the years of the development and refinement of the volunteer keepers program and the ongoing restoration projects overseen by Robert, I continued in my role as president of BSPLKA, still working out of that pantry off the kitchen. We discontinued the slide show and replaced it with our first video, which we produced in conjunction with students from Ferris State University. We promoted our group tours, and I scheduled visits for hundreds of school children, scouts, and church groups. I wrote a grant and obtained funding for the design and printing of a “Historical Scrapbook” brochure.

So many projects of all kinds called to us. We developed a program called “The Lighthouse in the Sand Dunes” in conjunction with Alan Wernette, the Ludington State Park interpreter. We worked with the Michigan Historical Commission for many months to finalize and install a Michigan historical marker. We designed and distributed membership brochures and rack cards, which we delivered to the chamber of commerce, area hotels and motels, restaurants, and other tourist attractions. In 1997, we worked with Thomas Tag to update and reprint his 74-page paperback Big Sable Point Light Station. My “hobby” had become a full-time job, even as I still held my “real” job.

In 1999, I introduced the concept of employing an executive director to take over what had become a complex nonprofit organization that could no longer be managed only by volunteers. The board of directors approved a job description for a part-time position, and I announced that I was ready to retire from the Grandville Public Schools and would like to apply for the job.

On New Year’s Eve, 1999, Ruth and Dick Smith, Ed and Donna Hallin, and Robert and I toasted the new millennium with sparkling white grape juice at the top of the tower and celebrated everything that had been accomplished at Big Sable Point since the last of the official keepers left in 1968. I looked forward to the new year and my new role with BSPLKA as its first executive director. The Biggses’ successful season in 1995 had planted the seed for the resident keepers’ program that grew and grew to become the extensive operation it is today, involving some 400 volunteers each season at four lighthouses. Now known as SPLKA – Sable Point Lighthouse Keepers Association – to acknowledge the association’s responsibility for the additional three lights, the organization currently employs a staff of six. Today the staff no longer works out of a pantry but is housed in its own small office building near downtown Ludington.

The Big Sable Point Lighthouse rescue was driven by love for the place. Whether as a crumbling old sentinel or a beautifully restored historical landmark full of friends

and travelers, Big Sable captures hearts. First it lured the original group of heavy lifters who propped it up and got it removed from the list of government properties slated for destruction. Next came the group that included Mary James and Robert Sperling, who worked for years to secure strong volunteer support and revenue. Since then hundreds more have come and gone, contributing their unique talents during their volunteer keeper tours. Indeed, the lonely lighthouse crumbling on the beach, that had once led floundering seafarers to safety, drew its own saviors and supporters in its time of need.

FOOTNOTE:

On an October evening in 2001, Mary climbed onto a two-foot tall radiator in the downstairs keeper’s quarters to reach a window shade, lost her balance, stepped off and suffered a tibial plateau fracture of her right leg. Her well-trained volunteers implemented for the first time the emergency plan so carefully outlined in the volunteer keepers’ handbook compiled by her. (It’s not an easy thing to get an ambulance through the front gates of the state park, through the campground and two locked gates, and down a dirt road to the lighthouse.)

After many months of convalescence and physical therapy, it was determined that the leg needed to be broken again and re-set, so the 2002 Summer issue of the BSPLKA newsletter included a posting for Mary’s replacement. Over the next three years she endured a total of six surgeries on her leg, eventually recovering and becoming a trainer for a software company. For the next ten years she traveled throughout the US and Canada to K-12 school districts training people to use library management and student information system software.

Robert served a term as president of BSPLKA and, under pressure, finally agreed to accept compensation for his hard work and became the organization’s first paid director of restoration and maintenance. Sadly, he died from cancer in July of 2016. Jacquelyn McShulskis met Robert at BSP as a volunteer keeper in 2008, and they became close friends for the rest of his life. Jacquelyn and Mary met at Robert’s memorial service and enjoyed sharing Big Sable memories. Their friendship has resulted in their collaboration on this article and the previous article, “The Saving of Big Sable Point Lighthouse” in the June 2020 issue of the *Sable Points Beacon*. Mary says she likes to think that she and Robert both left some footprints in the sand on Big Sable Point. She continues her involvement with SPLKA as the editor of the *Sable Points Beacon Newsletter*.

AT the time our June newsletter was published, we were all under the stay-at-home order. I thought maybe some of you could relate to the isolation of past keepers and have fun with submitting a story of what your time would be like as the "Quarantined Keepers." Here is a submission by Kathy Bloomfield.



Kathy liked the idea of this and says she was inspired because, over 14 years of volunteering, she has dealt with all kinds of crises: storms, power loss, missing items, accidents, people hiking out in terrible weather, missing persons, searches, etc. "So, it was easy to imagine that something like a quarantine situation could happen way out at the end of the road that connects you to the rest of the world. I thought of funny things as well as scary things that could happen. It was a lot of fun imagining it!"

Over the years she has worked at each light and seen many changes. When asked why she continues to volunteer, there were three words, "I LOVE IT! I actually love the feeling of continuing the work of Alonzo Hyde and Henry and everyone in between. I love clipping on the keys and feeling responsible for keeping it safe and sharing it with the guests that come out to see that beautiful tower. It is the highlight of my year!"

Kathy says staying on the shore of Lake Michigan is definitely worth the work you have to do. "It's one of the best adventures you can give yourself!" This year Kathy helped at Big Sable and spent lots of time working with the education committee.



THE QUARANTINED KEEPERS OF 2020

KEEPERS LOG

Day 2 of Tour #12

OH MY GOSH, this is unbelievable! We had finished our first day at Big Sable when a call came to the gift shop from Rachel saying that BSP is closed to the public and we may have been exposed to the coronavirus! We are all quarantined for the rest of our two-week stay. The crew went NUTS! THEY CAN'T DO THAT, was uttered. We just sat there in the gift shop, staring at each other.

Things were quiet. Some people took a walk, some a nap. Late afternoon, we called a happy hour to discuss a plan for who was going to fix dinner each night. We decided as a group to just have cereal for dinner. We did go out to star gaze together and then called it a night.

Geez! We sure didn't see that coming . . .

Keepers Log - Day 3

We started out with ideas about doing constructive things, like cleaning and organizing. We chose our tasks and split up. Around lunch time we heard a car pull up and a horn honk. We went to a window in the gift shop and there was Rachel. "Open the window," she hollered. She asked how we were doing and said she was there to post signs on the doors and windows.

Everyone quit working, and we went back to the kitchen to complain. Someone suggested a card game. So, we spent the rest of the day playing games. Then it was time for happy hour again, and Jackie said she would start some dinner. Some of the crew tried calling family members to see what was going on, but there was no phone reception. We gave up and went to bed early.

Keepers
under
Quarantine
Thank you
for your
patience.
~ SPLKA



Keepers Log - Day 4

Even with the signs posted all around, people were still knocking on the doors, asking to be let in. About mid-day we started to get stir crazy and wanted to go outside, but there were people milling around on the grounds. So, instead we climbed the tower! Just being outside in the fresh air was such a lift for our spirits. People down below hollered up to us and we waved back at them.

In the evening, we played a rousing game of charades, ate snacks, watched the lighthouse video, and decided to sneak out and stargaze.

No eggs.

Keepers Log - Day 5

This morning we were having coffee when someone asked where Rick was. We went to check his room. His door was slightly open, and there was a note on his bed that said: HIDE AND SEEK - I'LL HIDE FIRST!

We decided we better start looking and split up on different floors, with two people assigned to the basement, because no one wanted to go there by themselves. We were stumped and trying to decide if we should climb the tower when we heard a muffled sound in the hallway. We jumped and wondered if someone had managed to come in the outside door?! We slowly got up and went out into the hallway but didn't see anyone. Then HE MOVED! HENRY MOVED! Several of us screamed and bumped into each other trying to back away. Then, someone said "Hey! Turn that light on in the window." The light illuminated what should have been Henry, but was really Rick, dressed completely like Henry and smiling back at us! We all had a great laugh, helped Rick get out of the window display, grabbed some snacks and went upstairs and laughed.

Dinner was prepared while some sneaked outside and gathered some firewood for a fire. We went out at sunset to take pictures and made a nice fire. A bottle of wine was shared, and the night ended on a positive note.

No eggs. Actually, I think we forgot to look.

Keepers Log - Day 6

Today breakfast was quiet. We're bored and feeling trapped and just drifting. There's nothing we HAVE to do. We decided to sit down as a crew and discuss our concerns - food supplies and beverages are getting low, and we're almost out of coffee! We really have no idea what is going on in the rest of the world, especially regarding our COVID exposure.

This is not what we signed up for! The joy of working with a crew, the excitement of helping the public learn the history of Big Sable, the stories we would share during dinner about how the day went - gone- all gone. Things couldn't get much worse, right? Well, they did.

We noticed a stillness and looked outside and saw the BLACK clouds heading our way. It didn't take long for the wind to come and with it huge waves. Then the rain came and pelted the windows. Some of the crew climbed the tower to watch the storm from above. A call came down from the tower that there was a fishing boat straight out from the tower that looked like it was having trouble. We all went to windows to see what they were reporting. The boat was being blown about in the wind and waves and wasn't making any headway toward town. Gloria was able get a call through to the state park, and they said they would get help. Then we lost power! Our quiet, mopey day took a turn for the worse, but at least it gave us purpose.

A larger boat, maybe from the Coast Guard, came out to help the fishing boat. They hooked together, and the smaller boat was taken to the harbor.

We all assembled in the kitchen for lunch, discussing how this was something like what the keepers of the past may have experienced. Right then, the power came on. Now we could warm up soup and run water and turn on lights, etc. We had lunch and decided to break out the board games.

Dinner was very simple. Then we decided to climb the tower, opened the door at the top, and sang the national anthem! The sun came out of the clouds on the horizon, surprising us with a beautiful sunset. It was a great end to a stressful day.

No eggs. The hens didn't like the storm!



Keepers Log - Day 7

Well, we slept in again and had started to gather at the breakfast table when we heard a horn honk. Myra went to the window and saw Peter was down next to his car, holding a box. He hollered up that he was leaving doughnuts on the front porch and assured us that we would be first to hear the results of the COVID tests from our visitors. He thanked us for our patience and drove back down the road.

After breakfast, we all decided to go outside and clean up after the storm. It sure felt good to be outside and working together.

We grilled hot dogs on a campfire for dinner and enjoyed the sunset. We also climbed the tower to sing the national anthem at the top again before we called it a day.

Keepers Log - Day 8

Today we had a visitor again. Jim came out with supplies: beer and wine for us! Dinner was on the grill again, and we ate at the campfire. As the stars came out, we started telling ghost stories. The libations helped. We decided to sing the national anthem around the fire, as no one had the energy to climb the tower. It was a fun day.

No eggs. Can't find the chickens.

Keepers Log - Day 9

Today the tide turned! Rachel showed up early. She told us with a huge smile that the COVID tests on our guests came back and they all were negative! Once we settled back down, she told us our options: We could go home now, or we could stay and open, with some changes. Jeff responded, "If we can go out to get House of Flavors, pizza, and some more wine, WE'RE STAYING!" We all laughed!

It sure did feel GOOD to be able to see other people and go into town. We climbed the tower when we returned for sunset and sang the national anthem again at the top. We're going to sleep well tonight!

Hope the chickens show up tomorrow.

Keepers Log - Day 10 and 11

Rachel and Jim both brought out items for the gift shop and we worked until it was all shipshape.

No one felt like cooking either day, so we went back into town and got some carryout items to eat at the beach. A lot of restaurants are only doing carryout, because of COVID19.

The weather was so sunny and warm that we all took a swim together. That was such a treat! Water wasn't too bad, but we didn't stay in very long. We again had a campfire, and sang . . . the national anthem.

We're pretty sure we heard the chickens joining us for the singing, but still no sight of them.

Keepers Log - Day 12 and 13

Back to normal! We went down to open the gift shop, put out the sign, and we were ready to greet guests at 10 A.M. We spent lots of time outside talking with guests and answering questions about the tower, fog horn building, shore line erosion, etc. The days went quickly. We decided to cook dinner both nights at the lighthouse because we had to use up food and clean out the fridge. We had a nice long relaxing dinner both nights, enjoying each other's company and retelling stories from our quarantined adventure. We all agreed that it was one tour that we would never forget!

Still no chickens.

Keepers Log - Day 14

Last day was BITTERSWEET. We worked at the gift shop, bought our souvenir items, and managed to clean our rooms and pack during the day. Pictures were taken at the top of the tower and we sang the anthem together one last time with tears brimming. We helped each other pack our cars and honked our horns as we drove down the dune road. Wow! What an experience this was - **The Quarantined Keepers of 2020!**

Guess the next crew will have to worry about the chickens.

Tour #12 out - Gloria, Jeff, Jerry, Myra, Rick, Jacquelyn, Jan and Kathy



Renew Your 2021 SPLKA Membership Today!

Your support of the Sable Points Lighthouse Keepers Association means a great deal to S.P.L.K.A. and to the lakeshore communities. We would like to remind you that now is a great time to renew your membership for the 2021 season.

Your membership, along with hundreds of others, makes it possible for us to fulfill our important mission to preserve, promote, educate and make accessible Michigan's Maritime History to all through our lighthouses.

Advantages of being a member included being eligible to be a day keeper, (associate membership) or resident keepers, (all other membership level categories) at three of our lights, voting privileges at the annual membership dinner meeting, membership card, window decal, semiannual newsletters, unlimited free admission to all four lighthouses for one year and for memberships head keeper level and above merchandise discount at all

of SPLKA gift shops.

2021 membership rates are as follows: Associate member \$30.00, Individual member \$60.00, Couple/Family \$100.00, Head Keeper \$175.00, Business

Sponsor \$250.00, Individual Life Time membership \$750.00, Couple/ Family Life Time membership \$1,000.00. The levels and amounts are all the same as the last four seasons.

Your partnership is sincerely appreciated, and we couldn't do this without you. If you have already renewed your 2021 membership please consider giving the gift of membership to a friend or relative who would be interested in joining our cause to restoring, promoting and educating the public and making our castles along the lakeshore accessible to all.

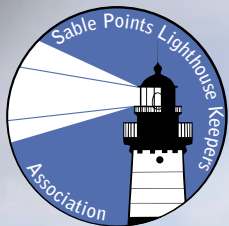
Sable Points Lighthouse Keepers Association



MEMBERSHIP DUES FOR 2021

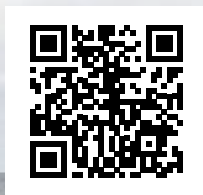
associate membership.	\$30
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Thank you for your continued commitment to our historic structures and our communities' Maritime History.



Sable Points Lighthouse Keepers Association Is on Facebook!

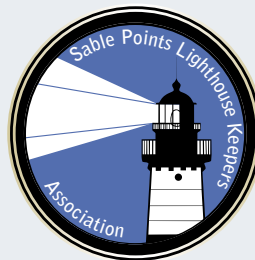
Search "Sable Points Lighthouse Keepers Association" and **LIKE US!** Or, scan the QR code with your smartphone!



<https://www.facebook.com/SPLKA.org/>

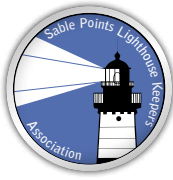
Need reminders of our Bus Days or other special events? Keep up to date with all the SPLKA happenings by visiting our Facebook page.

Help further our mission with the CHARITABLE IRA ROLLOVER



Congress has now extended the IRA charitable rollover, and made it permanent. This could be an easy way for you to support the Sable Points Lighthouse Keepers Association. The charitable IRA rollover, or qualified charitable distribution (QCD), is a special provision allowing taxpayers aged

70-½ or older to transfer up to \$100,000 annually from their IRA accounts directly to a non-profit organization, including the Sable Points Lighthouse Keepers Association, without having to recognize the distribution as income.



Sable Points Lighthouse Keepers Association

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