



WEST DENNIS LIGHT

(Previously **BASS RIVER LIGHT** renamed in 1989)

Light List No. 13273

41°39'04"N, 70°10'10"W

Ht. above water: 44 feet

Fresnel lens, modern optic (1989)

Built 1855

Range: 12 miles, 10.43 nautical miles

Flashing white every six seconds

Red Tower on large white house

Disestablished 1880-1881, 1914

Sold at auction 1915

Re-established; privately operated

May 1 to October 1, 1989



A Brief History of Lighthouse Inn

In 1850, the federal government appropriated \$4000 to build a lighthouse near the breakwater at the mouth of the Bass River. Although an officer of the Marine Revenue reported that a light was unnecessary, the plans were carried through because the captains of the ships had been putting in 25 cents per month of their own money to buy kerosene for a lantern that was placed on Wrinkle Point in West Dennis. In 1854, construction began on the light and the keepers home. Oxen were used to drag the materials over the salt marshes and dunes. The light was lit on May 1, 1855, and continued in service until 1880, when the Lighthouse Service decided the Bass River Light was no longer necessary since a new light had been built at Stage Harbor in Chatham. One year later, the government changed its mind and decided to relight the Bass River Light. The light continued to serve seafarers until 1914, when it was decommissioned after the Cape Cod Canal opened. After being sold at auction in 1917, the Lighthouse property was purchased by Harry Noyes of the Noyes Buick Company in Boston. Noyes enlarged the Main House, built several buildings, and landscaped the grounds. After his death in 1933, the property was on the market for five years until Everett Stone - - at the urging of his wife Gladys - - purchased the Lighthouse property. Their son Robert helped by putting in \$1000 inherited from his grandparents. Everett was a developer from Auburn, Massachusetts. He planned to develop the land and sell it. But the papers on the

Lighthouse were passed too late in July to begin any construction, so Gladys Stone decided to take in overnight guests to help pay the mortgage. So many of the 1938 guests asked to return, the Stones changed their mind about developing the land and thus began Lighthouse Inn. Since there were very few restaurants nearby, in 1939, Gladys and Everett decided their son Bob would run the dining room for the Lighthouse. Bob hired three waitresses from Wheaton College, including Mary Packard. Bob and Mary were married in 1942, starting the tradition of family operation of the Inn. After the death of Everett Stone in 1947, Bob, Mary and Gladys continued to run the Lighthouse over the next three decades. After Gladys retired, Bob and Mary continued to run the Inn while raising five children at the Lighthouse - Betty Anne, Deborah, Barbara, Jonathan and Gregory, all of whom have worked at the Inn at one time or another in various capacities. After being dark for 75 years, the light was relit on August 7, 1989, in conjunction with the 200th anniversary of the U.S. Lighthouse Service which is now the U.S. Coast Guard. The light, which is a one-second flash every six seconds is now recognized by the Coast Guard as the West Dennis Light and also as the only privately owned, privately maintained working lighthouse in the country. 2004 saw the passing of Robert Stone at age 86 and Mary joined him in 2016 at the age of 96. By 2003, Bob and Mary had both retired and the reins to the Inn had passed to Greg and his wife, Patricia, who started at the Inn in the late '70's as the Children's Director. Together they now manage the day-to-day operations of the Inn as the third generation of the Stone Family continuing the tradition of the family run business.



HISTORY OF BASS RIVER LIGHT

1836 - In an attempt to improve the harbor at Bass River, Congress made an appropriation of \$10,000 to make a study of the shoals and to take steps to remedy it. The recommendation was to dredge the channel and build a stone breakwater in a position off shore so that it would provide protection from the prevailing winds and waves. This would hopefully retard the building up of the shoal (Dogfish Bar). There was also a plan to build a lighthouse on the breakwater. The island of stone was to be located ½ mile from the shore. Construction was a major challenge because the town had no steam or gas powered machinery. The energy was supplied by manpower and oxen. The rocks were taken from upriver, particularly Dinah's Pond in Yarmouth. Using levers and pulleys, the rocks were loaded onto barges, and the barges were poled downstream as well as pulled by oxen. At the mouth of the river, a structure was erected to which pulleys were attached, and 4½ inch hawsers were passed through the pulleys. A similar structure was built where the breakwater was to be constructed. The barges loaded with stone were pulled out with these ropes. However, it was soon determined that the plan was not going to work as the sand drifted toward the inside of the stone breakwater, and the plan was abandoned. (Dennis, Cape Cod, Nancy Thacher Reid, 1996, pg. 306-307) Later reports site that the island was used for docking sailing vessels during storms because it was unsafe to sail around Monomoy Point and the shores of Cape Cod to Boston. While ships were tied up, men came ashore to their homes on the Cape. Legend has it, during storms some ships carrying lumber docked there and some of their cargo was lost which later was used for material for captain's homes. (Lighthouse Beacon, 1959, newsletter from Lighthouse Inn)

June 3, 1841- Notice in Register: NOTICE TO MARINERS "The undersigned at the solicitation of those interested in navigation at Bass River and others, has erected a small light on the beach near the anchorage of said harbor for the convenience of those vessels passing through the Sound by the North Channel. He therefore takes this method of informing the public that a light will be kept until January next, bearings as follows: From Bishops and Clerks rocks, northeast 5 miles: from the south west corner of the Handkerchief, northwest by north 8 miles; from Kill Pond Bar, north west 2 ½ miles. Judah Baker 2nd, West Dennis, June 1, 1841" This was the earliest notice of any light near the mouth of Bass River. There was a tradition for a time that a light was kept

privately in the attic window of the home of Warren Crowell near the West Dennis Beach. Each master of vessels which used the harbor was said to have contributed \$.25 annually (other sources say monthly) towards the cost of oil for the light. (Dennis, Cape Cod, Nancy Thacher Reid, 1996, pg. 343) (Kerosene cost \$.30 a gallon, sperm whale oil was much more expensive) Over the next decade, the number of vessels that moored in Bass River and Deep Hole waiting for favorable winds increased to the point that there was serious consideration for erecting a more substantial light.

September 28, 1850 - Congress appropriated \$4000 to build Bass River Light, however, Captain G. Walden of the U. S. Revenue Service to the Secretary of the Treasury provided an adverse report, and the plan was abandoned. Owners of the two hundred vessels that were moored at Bass River raised a furious protest, and the matter was eventually approved. (Ibid)

1852- The newly formed Lighthouse Board reported: 'It is apparent, however, to this board, from information received from various resources – among which may be included that of the officer of the coast survey who was charged with examining this locality with reference to another object – that a small light is required at or near the Bass River breakwater.' Congress reappointed the \$4000 for the lighthouse on March 3, 1853, and a site near the breakwater was soon selected. (The Lighthouses of Massachusetts, Jeremy D'Entremont, 2007, pg.149)

February, 1854 - Land was bought by the United States of America from shoemaker George Richardson and his wife, Phebe (a large shoe factory was located on School St. at the time) for the lighthouse – Tom Follins Island on the West Dennis Beach in direct line with the old stone island offshore. (Reid, pg. 344) The cost was \$75.00 (from Registry of Deeds, Book 56, pg. 252).

May 1, 1854 - Bass River Light construction began with several teams of oxen hauling materials over the salt marsh and through the dunes. The lighthouse atop a white house was completed in the winter of 1855, and an outbuilding of brick was constructed as the Oil House – in which to store the oil. The light was a fixed white light – 270 degrees.

April 30, 1855- Bass River Light was lit for operation with Capt. James Chase as its first lighthouse keeper. Other sources have listed Warren Crowell as the first lighthouse keeper, but payroll records from the Lighthouse Board indicate Capt. Chase was paid \$350.00 a year beginning on June 20, 1854.

July 11, 1861-1869 - Capt. James Chase eventually turned the lighthouse keeping duties over to Zelotes Wixon who complained that Capt. Chase didn't provide him with any training, refusing him access to the light even though Mr. Wixon requested permission to look at the light and the proper discharge of his duties. Mr. Wixon also accused Capt. Chase of 'adulterating the oil used in the lighthouse.' (D'Entremont, pg. 150) According to payroll records, Mr. Wixon was paid \$500.00 a year as lighthouse keeper. According to Capt. Chase's obituary, he died in 1880, after an inflammation of the lungs, at the "ripe old age of 71." Capt. Chase "was the means of placing the lighthouse called the Bass River Light on the shores of West Dennis and for several years he was its keeper. He was a man well versed in the events of the day, a great reader and a strong politician; a strong Democrat until the last, of a social disposition and a general favorite in the community, and for many years a justice of the peace, also a contributor to several of our journals."

Oct. 22, 1869-1880 - Warren Crowell became lighthouse keeper after having served in the Union Army during the Civil War. (the same Warren Crowell who had kept a lamp in his window before the lighthouse was built) Mr. Crowell was wounded and captured by the Confederate Army and returned home in 1869. Mr. Crowell and his wife along with their children (eventually nine) moved into the lighthouse, and he remained as lighthouse keeper until August 1, 1880 when the light was decommissioned. (The Register, Dan Pierce 5/27/10, pg. 18) Mr. Crowell was paid \$511.00 per year as reported in payroll records. The light was deemed unnecessary after Stage Harbor Light was built in Chatham. It was sold at auction on September, 1, 1880, for \$400. to Hiram Loring of Dennis. (Registry of Deeds Book 144, pg. 576) However, this did not sit well with the sea faring community. (D'Entremont, pg. 151)

Early 1881- Capt. William Garfield of West Dennis began writing letters to his cousin, one James Garfield of Ohio who had just been elected President of the United States. 'I drop you a line or two again on account of a Light House we have here that has been standing for twenty-five years and last October was put out by the Lighthouse Board. We have sent in a large partition (sic) for them to relight it again. Our Harbor is one of the best there is in Vineyard Sound. All vessels come in here in bad weather and no light makes it bad for large vessels. When you git (sic) to Washington and git (sic) everything working, well then, we shall write you and see if you can do anything at this Lighthouse.' (Pierce, pg. 18) Apparently the letters were effective, and Pres. Garfield looked

into the matter and then invited his cousin and two young daughters to visit him in Washington at the White House. The Garfields traveled to Washington in June, and they met with Pres. Garfield on July 1, 1881. Pres. Garfield assured them he had 'convinced' the members of Congress to appropriate funds to purchase back and re-establish the light; and "at that very moment, the Bass River Light was being relit." On the following morning, before Capt. Garfield could leave Washington, Pres. Garfield was shot twice by an assassin. He lingered for two months, before passing away. Thus, his executive order to relight the Bass River Light was one of his last official acts while in office. (Pierce, pg. 18)

June 11, 1881- Hiram and Sarah Loring sold the Bass River Light and surrounding land back to the United States of America for \$400.00. (Original Deed from Barnstable County Registry of Deeds, dated August 22, 1917)

July 1, 1881 - Bass River Light was reinstated and lit. Capt. Samuel Adams Peak was appointed as the lighthouse keeper, and he remained keeper until his death in 1906. He was a third generation lighthouse keeper; his grandfather Samuel was the first keeper at Point Gammon. His father, John, served 62 years at Point Gammon, Bishop and Clerks, and South Hyannis. (Lighthouses of Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard, Nantucket; Admont G. Clark, pg. 117.)

1906 - Capt. Russell Eastman served as the last lighthouse keeper until 1914 when the Bass River Light was decommissioned. 'Capt. Eastman was taciturn and unceasingly busy keeping the Lighthouse and its out-buildings in spotless condition, but Mrs. Eastman always had a warm welcome awaiting us in the house. It came to be that no trip to the beach was complete without a trip to her immaculate kitchen. She was a wonderful cook as innumerable doughnuts and cookies testified, but especially was she skilled in doing the most beautiful embroidery I have ever seen.' All of the young girls wore her special dresses to graduation at school. (Cape Cod Remembrances, Marion Crowell Ryder, 1972, pg. 22.)

June 15, 1914 - Bass River Light was extinguished because of the opening of the Cape Cod Canal, and the last Fifth Order Fresnel lens was removed. Keeper Eastman was transferred to Ned's Point Lighthouse in Mattapoissett (D'Entremont, pg. 151).

June 8, 1915 - According to the original deed, since the property "cannot be profitably used in the work of the Lighthouse service; and whereas pursuant to

provisions of an Act of Congress approved, March 4, 1913, the Assistant Secretary of Commerce did, on January 8, 1915, order and direct the sale by sealed proposals, after due public notice, of said tract or parcel of land...the said tract or parcel of land was on June 8, 1915 sold to William H. Brown, of West Dennis...the highest bidder for the sum of one thousand five hundred dollars (\$1500.00)...” The deed was signed by the Asst. Secretary of Commerce, E.F. Sweet on June 28, 1915.

August 22, 1917 Harry K. Noyes of Boston area bought Bass River Light and surrounding land from William H. Brown and Harriet G. Brown for “\$1 and other valuable considerations.” (Registry of Deeds, Book ?, pg. 299) Mr. Noyes was the owner of New England Buick in Boston, and he had developed his automotive business from a small garage in Lowell to the largest Buick dealership in New England. Mr. William C. Durant, owner of Buick Company, had been to visit Mr. Noyes and granted him the rights to sell his cars in all of New England (Noyes’ franchise building is owned today by Boston University.) Mr. Noyes began to develop the land as a summer estate for his family by expanding the Main House and building the Lodge. He expanded the stables building that was next to the Main House by moving the entire building 180 degrees and turning it into the Guest House. He also built the garage by the Main House for his automobiles; a Carriage House on the far end of the property over a hill which is where the Carriage House guest rooms sit today; and a house for his Noyes Buick manager which is now Cottage 31.

July 15, 1938 - Harry Noyes’ son sold the property to Sen. Everett and Gladys Stone, and their son Robert. Thus began the history of Lighthouse Inn.

August 7, 1989 After Gregory Stone, grandson of Everett and Gladys Stone, petitioned the US Coast Guard, the Light was relit on the 200th anniversary of the Lighthouse Service as a private navigational tool for mariners as recognized by the US Coast Guard. It has a modern optic Fresnel lens (ML-300 high intensity lantern) The ML-300 lantern was changed in 2004 to a 100 watt halogen lamp changer. The lighthouse was renamed West Dennis Light. It is listed on the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Chart 13229 and as a Private ATON (Aid to Navigation). The Signal is 1 second white flash every 6 seconds, and the light is lit from May 1 to November 1st.

Barbara Stone Amidon

May 8, 2018