

Touring Stage Harbor Light

By Danielle Jeanloz

Have you ever wanted to see the iconic Stage Harbor Light up close? Maybe go inside? Now you have a chance to visit the three-acre property. The Hoyt-Ecker family has invited current members of the Chatham Historical Society for a tour and refreshments on Sunday, September 22. The road to the lighthouse is a 3/4 mile long from the eastern end of the Harding's Beach parking lot. You will also have an opportunity to learn more about marsh and dune plant communities during a nature walk to the old lighthouse. This event is not handicap accessible. For those who have mobility concerns, please call the museum at (508) 945-2493 ext. 10 for more information.

Stage Harbor Light was, in 1880, the last lighthouse built on Cape Cod to guide boats into Stage Harbor. It remained in operation for 53 years. The 48-foot structure is made of cast iron and has endured harsh weather conditions for almost 140 years. The keeper's house also remains in fine condition thanks to its caretakers. "Five generations have worked together to preserve the property as close as possible to how it was when the lighthouse was decommissioned." explain the property owners. The Hoyt-Ecker family purchased the property in 1937, four years after the lighthouse was decommissioned. The lens had been removed and sold.

Over time, as the family grew, the lighthouse has been actively used for family reunions, vacation gatherings, and work parties to maintain the property. The Hoyt-Eckers decided to keep the property exactly as it was in the 1930s with an outhouse and hand-pumped water. Each generation learns from their parents how to use, value, and preserve the property.

The cast iron lighthouse itself has been restored by family members during the summer. With a group of architects, engineers, and construction workers among the relatives, the restoration has truly been a family endeavor. The keeper's quarters are carefully maintained. There is no electricity or generator on the property. For refrigeration, the family used to bring in blocks of ice for their "icebox." Now the group uses propane for refrigeration and cooking. As new family memories are created, the younger generations learn from the older relatives about life in the '30s. One family member remarks, "There's nothing better than a smoky sou'wester, with the windows propped open with pieces of wood and the wind whistling outside."

This landmark is one of the most photographed and painted structures in Chatham, but it is usually experienced from afar. Now you will get a chance to not only see the exterior of the lighthouse up close but also visit the interior, which looks like a museum with its antique decor set in a casual and comfortable manner welcoming guests to experience the views on the inside.

For many years, the lighthouse keepers were instrumental in guiding boats and saving lives in the treacherous waters around Stage Harbor, one of the foggiest regions on the East Coast. To learn more about daring rescues, life 80 years ago, and other historical aspects of this property, join this members-only Historic Tour of Stage Harbor Light on September 22.

Advance reservations are required and tickets are available through www.chathamhistoricalsociety.org website. We hope that you will take the journey back in time with us.

Danielle Jeanloz is Executive Director at the Atwood Museum – Home of the Chatham Historical Society