

Fact Sheet:
Stepping Stones Lighthouse
Long Island Sound, New York

Howard Kroplick
Town Historian
Town of North Hempstead
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Description

- A square, red brick keeper's dwelling is topped with a mansard roof and attached to a square tower. The building is sitting on a granite ashlar round platform resting on a riprap foundation. The style is considered Second Empire Victorian.
- Guards the approach to New York City's East River.
- Light marks a major hazard in western Long Island Sound and used as a primary navigational aid. Warns ships and boats of an extensive shoal and series of rocks which at times break the surface of the water and extend northward from Kings Point. It takes its name from these rocks.
- The lighthouse sits on the northernmost reef.

How the Lighthouse Was Named

- Native American Legend

- A Native American legend recalls a battle for Connecticut with Habboamoko, the Evil Spirit, and the Siwanoy Indians of New Rochelle.
- Fortified with potions and wizardry, the Siwanoy pushed the Evil Spirit back up against the north shore of the Long Island Sound toward City Island.
- The future of the Evil Spirit was bleak until he looked back towards Long Island at low tide. Noticing a series of rocks between Long Island and Throgs Neck, he promptly “stepped” across these “stones” and fled to Long Island.
- Angry at the Siwanoy, the Evil Spirit began to heave boulders across the Sound. Not known for his aim, the boulders reached all the way to Maine and littered New England with rock formations.

- Long Island Sound

- In the 1770s, Long Island Sound was known as “Devil’s Belt” due to the sudden storms and nor’easters and the strong belief in the Devil by residents in nearby communities.
- Early maps noted the Sound as “Devil’s Belt” and the reefs as the “Devil’s Stepping Stones” from the Siwanoy legend.
- The name “Devil’s Stepping Stones” continued until 1877. With the opening of the lighthouse, the name was shortened to “Stepping Stones”.

History of the Lighthouse

- In the 1860s, the expanding shipping commerce on the Long Island Sound commerce resulted in the need for a lighthouse to define a clear channel.
- \$6,000 was first allocated in June 1866 calling for a day beacon on the Stepping Stones reef and a lighthouse near Hart Island about 1 ¼ miles north. When the property on Hart Island became difficult to obtain, the Lighthouse Board decided to change the lighthouse location to Stepping Stones.
- Construction was begun by A.D. Cook in late 1875 with Irish bargemen and stonemasons from Throgs Neck.
- The foundation of the tower was built directly over a large rock which just broke the surface at low tide. A total of 900 tons of boulders was barged to the site between 1875 and 1878 to the riprap which was encased in rough-hewn blocks. The center of the riprap was leveled for the foundation.
- The dwelling was completed in January 1877 although the year 1876 is carved on the granite panel of the tower.
- The light was first turned on for the night of March 1, 1877 with Findlay Fraser as the first keeper. The original optic was a Fifth Order Fresnel lens showing a fixed red light.
- In 1932, the light was changed to a Fourth Order lens with a fixed green light.

History of the Lighthouse

- The lighthouse was updated and modernized in 1944
- A modern optic producing a flashing fixed green light was placed in the lantern room when the lighthouse was automated in October 1966.
- Overwhelmed by high maintenance costs, the US Government enacted the National Historic Lighthouse Preservation Act of 2000, which gives away dozens of the lighthouses every year to groups willing to preserve them and turn them into public attractions like museums.
- The lighthouse was added to National Register of Historic Places on September 15, 2005
- Stepping Stones Lighthouse was deemed as surplus in 2006 by the Coast Guard, and offered at no cost to eligible entities, including federal, state, and local agencies, non-profit corporations, and educational organizations.
- Eventually all suitors except the Town of North Hempstead withdrew their applications, deciding it was too big an undertaking.
- In 2008, the lighthouse was transferred to the Town of North Hempstead. The U.S. Coast Guard still maintains the functioning beacon.
- In 2012, with the assistance of the Town of North Hempstead, the Stepping Stones Lighthouse Preservation Society was established.

Notable Keepers

[From the United States Coast Guard Website](#)

- A couple of notable keepers served at the Stepping Stones Lighthouse over the years. Ernest Bloom, who started his service at the station on April 20, 1910, was awarded the Lighthouse Service's efficiency pennant for the meticulous manner in which he maintained the lighthouse. The pennant was flown next to the Stars and Stripes at the lighthouse to honor Bloom. Keeper Stephen Holm served at Stepping Stones in the early 1920s and during his time rescued several unfortunate mariners. One example of his lifesaving skills occurred on July 18, 1923 when two men ran the sailboat *Mistral* onto the rocks just east of the lighthouse. Holm hurried to rescue the two men, and later towed their damaged boat to Long Island.
- Devil's Belt has a tricky way of stirring up unexpected storms. On the morning of February 9, 1934, the mercury at Stepping Stones Lighthouse hit 14 degrees below zero. With the sound frozen, Keeper Charles A. Rogers, could not row ashore for supplies. The weather only got worse. On February 20, the wind blew in a blizzard, which dumped 17 inches of snow overnight, the worst storm since 1888. Trapped and with only two days worth of food for his small family, Rogers hung the flag upside down, on March 1 hoping someone would notice the distress signal. Captain Sioss of the tug *Muxpet* spotted the signal and gradually broke the *Muxpet* through the ice to the lighthouse. The captain offered Rogers food, but Rogers refused stating that it was the Lighthouse Service's responsibility, and asked that the depot at St. George, Staten Island be notified of the situation. Shortly after being apprised of the situation, the depot dispatched the lighthouse tender *Hickory* to the station with supplies.

Significance

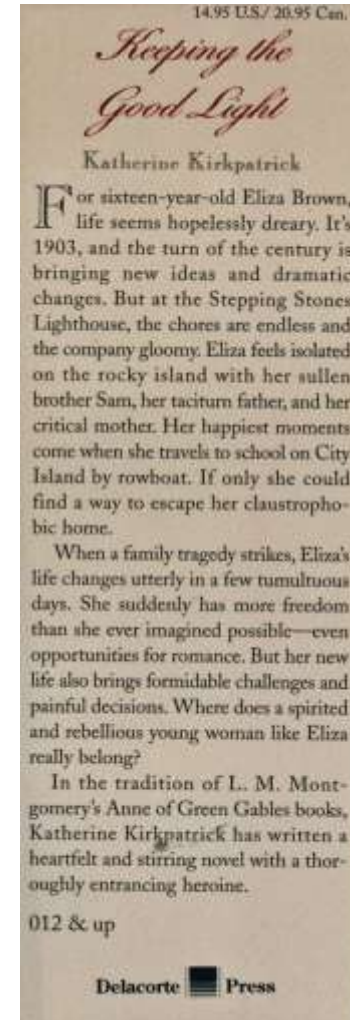
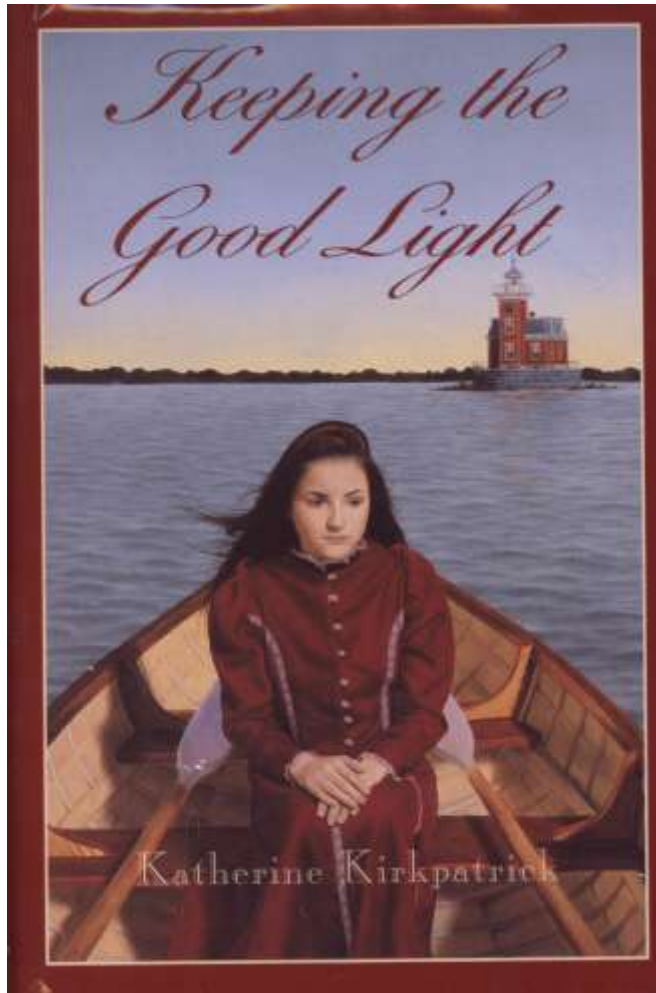
- Stepping Stones Lighthouse represents the last period of the 1800's brick-and-masonry Second Empire lighthouse, a Victorian-style supplanted in the 1880s by the use of prefabricated cast-iron plate construction and conical iron towers. The Second Empire design promoted architectural content beyond its function as an navigational aid.
- The lighthouse continues to serve as an important navigational aid for approaches to New York City from the Long Island Sound. When completed in 1877, Stepping Stones Lighthouse worked with Great Captain Island (1829, Greenwich, Connecticut) and Execution Rocks (1850, Sands Point, New York). A clear channel was defined for New York City's shipping commerce by keeping South of Captain Island and Execution Rocks Lighthouses and north of Stepping Stones Lighthouse.
- The impact was immediate in the 1870s as the value of New York City imports increased 63% from \$281 million (1870) to \$459 Million (1880).

Statistics

- Official Name: Stepping Stones Light
- Location:
 - Latitude: 40° 49' 28.1" N
 - Longitude: 073° 46' 28.7"
 - 1,600 yards offshore from Elm Point, Kings Point
- US Coast Guard Light List #: 21505
- Base Diameter: 48 feet
- Height: 49 feet above sea level
- Current Light Characteristics: Flashing green every 4 seconds
- Color: Red
- Focal Plane: 46 Feet
- Range: 8 nautical miles
- First Lit: March 1, 1877
- Sister Lighthouse: Hudson-Athens Lighthouse on the Hudson River (1875)
- Current Use: Active aid to navigation
- Governing Body: United States Coast Guard



Novel About Stepping Stones Lighthouse



Novel by City Island Author Katherine Kirkpatrick

Then & Now: Images of Stepping Stones Lighthouse

Then: 1902



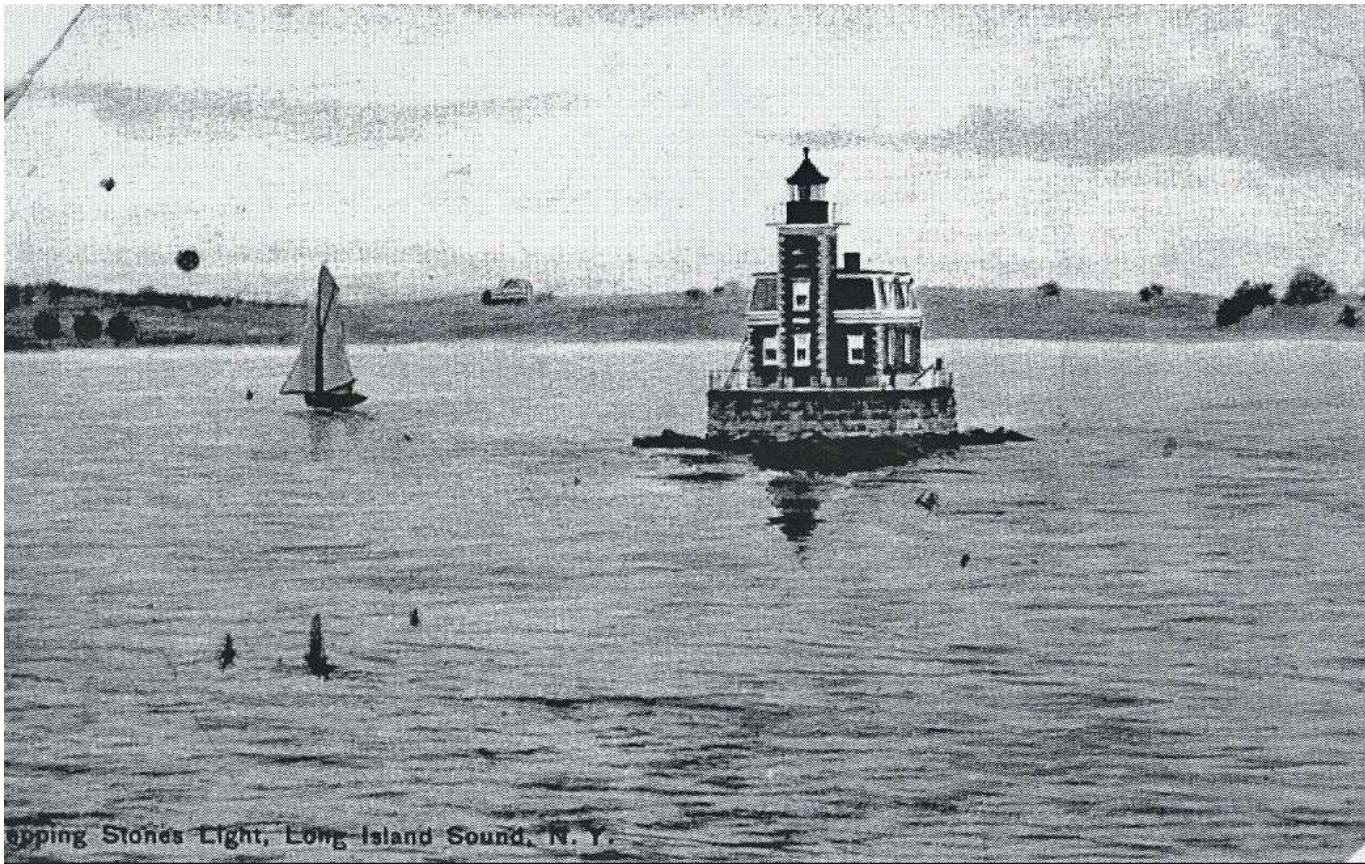
Painting by Horton

Then: 1912



Featured in the 1912 Hassan tobacco card series on lighthouses

Then: Circa 1910



Shipping Stones Light, Long Island Sound, N. Y.

Then: 1915



Then: Circa 1930s



Courtesy of the United States Coast Guard

Excursion to Stepping Stones Lighthouse July 1, 2012

- On July 1, 2012, staff from the Town of North Hempstead and members of the Stepping Stones Lighthouse Preservation Society took an excursion to evaluate the conditions outside and inside the lighthouse. Photos by Howard Kroplick.
- If you would like more information on the Society, contact Ron Brinn at 1-516-466-4063 or email him at Ron.Brinn@gmail.com

Now: 2012



The lighthouse is 1,600 yards offshore from Elm Point, Kings Point.

Now: 2012



The lighthouse can be seen from the Throgs Neck Bridge.

Now: 2012



The boulders below the lighthouse.

Now: 2012



Members of the group discover the lighthouse.

Now: 2012



Although 1876 was carved on the granite panel of the tower, the lighthouse was not completed until January 1877.

Now: 2012



Inside the lighthouse, the walls have been taken down.

Now: 2012



A modern optic producing a flashing fixed green light was placed in the lantern room when the lighthouse was automated in October 1966.