

# Glossary for *All About Nubble Light: Cape Neddick Light Station, York, Maine*

The following list of words with brief definitions are terms used within the text of *All About Nubble Light* with which the reader might not be familiar. It is hoped that this quick reference will make reading easy to understand and more enjoyable.

**Agamenticus:** Name native people gave the southern Maine coast around the York River and kept today in the named Mount Agamenticus Park.

**Aid to navigation:** Refers to lighthouses, buoys, channel markers, lightships, fog signals, radio beacons—any device on land or water to guide vessels safely to their destinations. Term is often seen abbreviated as ATON.

**Appropriation:** Money (funding) set aside for a project. In 1837, Congress appropriated \$5,000 for a light by near York, signaling it intended to place a light in the area. Later, \$15,000 was appropriated and construction on the Nubble Light began four years later.

**Army Corps of Engineers:** At West Point Academy, the country's first trained engineers and topographers served as leaders during wartime, explorers to expand the country west, and as construction supervisors during peacetime. They built some of America's greatest lighthouses during mid- to late-nineteenth century.

**Automated/automation:** The operation of a light without a keeper on site. Today, American lighthouses are operated remotely by light sensor, timer, and fog detector.

**Bark/barque/barkentine:** A large sailing ship typically rigged with three masts.

**Beacon:** A lighted or unlighted aid to navigation.

**Boathouse:** Most light stations had a building to protect the boat used to reach shore to get mail, food, and operating supplies. A ramp from the water ascending to a height out of reach of storm waves was used to move the station's boat to safety.

**Bull's-eye panels:** Convex panels of a Fresnel lens to refract and focus an intense beam of light.

**Chamois:** A soft cloth used to clean a Fresnel lens to prevent scratching the valuable prisms. Any damage to prisms lowers the brightness of emitted light.

**Characteristic:** Flash pattern of a light or pattern of a fog signal's sound to identify name and location of an aid to navigation to a mariner. The Nubble Light's characteristic is a red flash every six seconds.

**Cistern:** A 4,000-gallon holding tank for fresh water was filled by rain runoff from the keeper's house. Often, a cistern was the only fresh water source available to keepers on remote islands.

**Civilian keepers:** Until 1939, all lighthouse keepers were government employees but not affiliated with any military group. After 1939, the U.S. Coast Guard took over light stations with some civilian keepers working until they retired.

**Coasting trade:** Local boat traffic for fishing or recreational cruising through the harbor that were safely guided by the Nubble Light.

**Fog bell:** In areas prone to fog, a fog bell was placed facing the direction a warning sound was needed. For years, keepers had to strike the bell manually with a hammer; later, a fog bell was struck by a hammer run by gears. Today, the Nubble's foghorn is an electric foghorn that can be remotely operated by a passing mariner via VHF radio.

**Fresnel lens:** A revolutionary optic that originated in France and came to America during the mid-nineteenth century. Prisms that compose its beehive shape bend and reflect light from a central source to increase the light's brilliance for sailors to see miles away. The Nubble Light's fourth-order Fresnel originally used two lamps with red globes to produce its red warning light; today, the lens is encased in red plastic to create the same effect.

**Flying Santa:** A New England program that began in 1929 to honor lighthouse keepers; today, the tradition is kept by the Friends of Flying Santa that carry Christmas gifts by helicopter to honor U.S. Coast Guardsmen and their families.

**Foundry:** Cast-iron segments of the Nubble tower were manufactured in a Portland foundry where melted iron was poured into molds to shape them into plates to build the lighthouse. Popular in the 1840s, these plates traditionally sheathed conical (round) towers and were stronger yet lighter than stone.

**Ghost Ship:** There are legendary tales of ships lost to storms at sea that reappear now and then; but, when approached, they vanish as if phantoms. The *Isadore* is one of the most famous ghost ships in the Cape Neddick area.

**Gingerbread trim:** Style popular during the mid-nineteenth century with fancifully cut wooden trim on house gables and is associated with **Italianate** architecture that gave added ornamentation to simple structures including keepers' houses like the one at the Nubble.

**Incandescent oil vapor (IOV) light/lamp:** Specially designed lamp that pressurized oil, usually kerosene, which turned it into a vapor and burned slowly and intensely within a cloth mantle (a wide variety of wick).

**Keeper:** The principal keeper was in charge of all tasks needed to keep a light station clean and running smoothly. Assistant keepers took orders from the principal keeper.

**Lampist:** A person who specializes in the operation and maintenance of Fresnel lenses and the lamps used at the center of the lens. There is only a handful of lampists in the U.S today.

**Lantern:** The enclosure at the top of a lighthouse surrounded by glass panes where a lens and lamp(s) were kept.

**Light tower:** The part of the lighthouse that raises the lantern to a height needed to see a beam of light at sea and contained stairs to reach lantern room.

**Lighthouse:** A tower and lantern room together that serves as an aid to navigation.

**Lighting of the Nubble:** Early 1980s tradition became official in 1987 as a now-favorite Christmastime event when the light is dressed up in Christmas lights. A "Christmas in July" lighting has been added to share the joy of bright, colored lights on the Nubble with vacationers.

**Maintenance:** The ongoing process to keep a lighthouse standing and stable; it was one of a keeper's job priorities. Today, after restoration, maintenance is especially important to keep a light station shipshape.

**Modern-Day Keeper:** After the U.S. Coast Guard no longer had crews at light stations, others stepped up to take care of lighthouses, some are hired staff and others are much-needed volunteers.

**National Archives:** Several branches of this independent agency of the U.S. government are responsible to preserve historical records and make them available to the public. The main branch is in Washington, D.C., where Record Group 26 holds most U.S. Lighthouse Service records. Ongoing efforts are making records available online.

**Nautical:** Related to the sea such as a **nautical chart** used for guidance by ships, akin to a road map or GPS for travelers; or a **nautical mile**, which is distance traveled through water, (measured farther than on land). The Nubble's light from a fourth-order Fresnel lens can be seen 15 nautical miles at sea, equivalent to a little over 17 standard miles.

**Notice to Mariners:** Was published in local newspapers and posted for mariners to alert them to a new lighthouse location and its flash characteristic or to note any changes to existing aids to navigation.

**Nubble:** also "Knubble" in old documents, is a small knob (or nub) that described the island rising up out of the sea. Several terms associated with this lighthouse include Cape Neddick, Cape Neck, and "The Nubble," but in this book "Nubble" refers to the island and its lighthouse.

**Oil house:** During late-nineteenth century, kerosene became the chosen fuel oil for lamps in American lighthouses, and due to its volatility, it had to be stored in a separate building.

**Order:** Refers to the size of a Fresnel lens that determines the brightness of the light and distance the light can be seen by water. The Nubble's fourth-order Fresnel lens is a mid-sized lens of the orders used in America.

**Peninsula:** Cape Neddick is a peninsula off the coast of Maine, surrounded by water on three sides. Poised across a channel on a small rocky island sits the Nubble Light.

**Preservation:** The process of keeping a lighthouse free from damage or decay as a valued part of American history.

**Privy:** Until the 1930s, the only "bathroom" at the Nubble was a simple, unheated outdoor building (with no running water) that contained a bench with a hole in it for restroom use.

**Restoration:** the process of correcting decay at a lighthouse to return it to its former condition. Restoration is expensive and often occurs in "phases" as money and materials are available.

**Schooner:** During days of sail prior to motor-driven ships (early twentieth century), cargo and passengers were transported by this type of sailing vessel with two or more masts.

**Sohier Park** (pronounced /soy-er/): run by Sohier Parks and Recreation Dept, it is the best place to view the lighthouse in York, Maine, across a narrow channel in the Atlantic Ocean.

**Spiral stairway:** Conical (round) lighthouses had stairs that wound around the interior shape of the wall leading from ground level to the lantern. The spiral shape was an inclined plane for easier ascent.

**Tender:** A vessel used in servicing lighthouses and buoys that delivered food and other supplies (weather permitting) to lighthouses, usually semiannually.

**Town of York:** Named after York, England, it was incorporated in 1652 and divided into four villages: York Village, York Harbor, York Beach, and Cape Neddick.

**Trolley system:** To make it easier for keepers to get groceries and other items across the channel from the mainland to the lighthouse in the absence of a bridge, a simple box suspended on lines—similar to a zip line but *not* for people—was manually moved by a pulley system across the water, also known as a **tramway**. Today, it is a more sophisticated, remotely controlled basket.

**U.S. Lighthouse Board** (1852-1910): the second of three phases of the U.S. Lighthouse Service, called for a light on Cape Neddick in 1854 but it was not built until 1879. The Board was responsible for building the finest lighthouses in America by employing the Army Corps of Engineers and installing Fresnel lenses.

**Vessel:** Refers to any fishing or sailing ship or large boat.

**Voyager 2:** Space probe launched by NASA August 20, 1977, to study faraway planets and interstellar space beyond the sun and into the Milky Way. Photographs and sounds from earth were recorded on a gold record, including a photo of the Nubble Light, to be explored by alien lifeforms able to access its information.

**Watch room:** The level below the lantern room where a keeper prepared lamps for a night's work and often stayed during his "watch" duty to make sure the light operated efficiently.