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Sheringham Point Lighthouse deemed heritage site, becoming park

Richard Watts / Times Colonist

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The lighthouse, near Shirley, is expected to continue to operate as an automated beacon to warn boaters. Photograph By Lighthouse Preservation Society

Sheringham Point Lighthouse, reportedly home to the ghostly presence of one of its last keepers, has been declared a heritage lighthouse and could soon be the centrepiece of a new park.

The Sheringham Point Lighthouse Preservation Society announced on Monday it had received word from federal Environment Minister Leona Aglukkaq that the lighthouse near Shirley had received the designation.

Terri Alcock, secretary treasurer of the society, said the designation as a heritage lighthouse is just the first step, albeit an important one, in turning the lighthouse into a park.

Ultimately, ownership of the 103-year-old lighthouse and about four to five surrounding acres will pass to the society. But first, notice of the ownership transfer must be posted for 90 days in the Canada Gazette.

After that, the society will take over upkeep of the park. It has raised more than \$300,000, mostly from donations, and is confident it can take on the task.

Right now, the site is fenced off, but the gate is left open so visitors can head down for a picnic or to take pictures.

Alcock said the lighthouse is an important touchstone for the community. Even the local fire department includes it in its logo.

It's expected it will continue to operate as an automated lighthouse for boaters. The foghorn, however, no longer sounds, something Alcock said "we all miss."

"The whole community feels very strongly about that lighthouse," said Alcock. "So we are just delighted to know it will be there for the foreseeable future."

Under the Heritage Lighthouse Protection Act, which came into effect in 2010, renovations to designated lighthouses must meet national and international conservation standards.

The structures can't be demolished unless "there is no reasonable alternative" and any sale or demolition would require public consultation.

Elanie Bruton, who grew up at Sheringham Point Lighthouse from 1968 to 1986 and still lives nearby in Sooke, said the building was said to be haunted by the ghost of Fred Mountain, the previous keeper.

While Bruton lived there, she said, objects were mysteriously moved. Footsteps were heard. And a figure was spotted walking the hallway, a man whose description and clothes matched neighbours' recollections of the real Fred Mountain.

"But everybody I spoke to said he was such a nice man, you wouldn't have anything to worry about," said Bruton, now a member of the preservation society. "There was never any problem."

Times Colonist archives showed Mountain was keeper at the Sheringham Point Lighthouse from 1959 until he died at the site in 1967 at the age of 60.

The following year, Bruton arrived there at the age of 12 with her brother, two sisters and their parents, Jim and Evelyn Bruton.

It was to be their home for the next 18 years, until the lighthouse was automated.



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