As the public’s independent voice, the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation (LPBF) is dedicated to restoring and preserving the water quality, coast, and habitats of the entire Lake Pontchartrain Basin. Through coordination of restoration activities, education, advocacy, monitoring of the regulatory process, applied scientific research, and citizen action, LPBF works in partnership with all segments of the community to reclaim the Basin for this and future generations.
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The New Canal Lighthouse

is a welcoming beacon to visitors from far and wide. Locals who have loved the lighthouse and are happy to see its return, will be glad to know they can visit and explore the site. They will finally be able to stand on the lighthouse porch and overlook the lake they have helped to restore. Tourists who come to this historic city will
be enchanted by the lighthouse and the lakefront’s past and will be able to hear about the great work that has been done for the lake and still needs to be done for the coast.

The Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation was established in 1989 in response to environmental concerns voiced throughout the Pontchartrain Basin. To answer these concerns, LPBF launched the iconic SAVE OUR LAKE campaign. LPBF scientists worked in the field and created enduring partnerships to achieve lasting results. The foundation’s outreach and education departments brought information to the public on issues that were critical to the health of the Pontchartrain Basin. They taught area citizens how to be better stewards of the basin they love. With the New Canal Lighthouse in operation, people will be able to come hear the stories of how the lake was brought back to good health.

LPBF has been very successful in reaching the local audience. The lake is swimmable again and the community has an unparalleled recreational resource. There are marinas all around Lake Pontchartrain and fishermen can choose to fish on any of the eleven artificial reefs situated around the lake.

There are beaches available to the public and a beautiful lakefront on both the north and south shores.

Now, the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation reaches beyond the lake to restore the coast with the SAVE OUR COAST campaign. Launched after Hurricane Katrina, the campaign strives to generate support for the Multiple Lines of Defense Strategy which will make our region endure for the future. This strategy was developed by LPBF and is embodied in Louisiana’s State Master Plan. The state’s plan envisions using $50 billion dollars over the next 50 years to build coastal restoration and hurricane protection projects. These dollars are necessary to protect the infrastructure of the coast that supplies so much to the rest of the nation in terms of oil, gas, fisheries and navigation. No longer is speaking to local audiences enough. LPBF needs to reach out to the nation. The New Canal Lighthouse will allow the education and outreach departments to draw people from all over the country. It will offer a perfect venue to tell the stories that need to be told to garner support to restore a coast that will serve the people here as well as the rest of the country.

Fishing at Bayou Castine

The beach at Fontainebleau State Park on the north shore includes a fishing pier, a hiking trail along the beach and water features for both children and adults.

Right- The relighting celebration was held, September 26, 2012.
In the early 1800’s Canal Street in downtown New Orleans served as a boundary line between the Creoles who were the original French and Spanish citizens, and the newly arrived Americans. The street was laid out with plans for a canal to link the Mississippi River to Lake Pontchartrain, but it never materialized. The wide median on the street became known as the “neutral ground” since it divided the two groups. The American acquisition of the Louisiana territory meant very little then, without better access to the Mississippi River. However, the Creoles controlled the Bayou St. John-Carondelet Canal waterway that reached from the lake to the back of the city. This was the city’s original connection to the river. The New Orleans Canal, later known as the New Basin Canal, was commissioned by Congress in 1832. It was a part of the American’s plan to be self-sufficient from the New Orleans Creoles. The Times-Picayune was not published until 1837, so everyday accounts of the actual construction of the canal are not available. What is widely known and accepted, however, is that the canal construction conditions were brutal, and what began as a story between the Americans and New Orleans Creoles would end as a testament to the perseverance of Irish immigrants. Thousands of Irishmen digging the canal succumbed to tropical diseases, such as cholera and malaria, only to be left and buried in the muddy walls of the canal.

Despite these tragic beginnings, the New Basin Canal would enrich the city as ships loaded with cotton, cypress, and pine logs, produce and other products made their way to the heart of New Orleans. The New Orleans Canal lighthouse, later known as the New Canal lighthouse (and sometimes known as the West End Lighthouse), was commissioned
by Congress in 1837 to guide the new maritime commercial route. The architect, Francis D. Gott, was awarded the contract to build the lighthouse, and in 1839, Thomas Beatie was nominated as the first keeper at a salary of $600 per year. The duties of keeping a lighthouse were numerous, beginning with the main responsibility of tending the giant oil lamps to trimming the

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1855 - The 1-story New Canal Lighthouse that replaced the original 1839 cypress tower structure.
wicks every four hours to ensure a constant and steady light. Keepers had to continually clean the lamps, lanterns, and reflectors as well as maintain a daily record of oil use, keep a daily-expenditure book, and maintain a neat and orderly house. Pay rates were relatively low, a reason why many lighthouse families attempted to have the wife appointed as assistant keeper to provide extra rations and income. The first lighthouse keeper, Thomas Beatie, passed away several years later, and his widow, Elizabeth Beattie was nominated to replace him. She would be the first of several women light keepers nominated to replace their departed husbands.

Just twenty years after their construction, several Lighthouses built along the lake were being described as “wholly worthless.” The New Basin Canal Light-house’s foundation piles had rotted causing the structure to tilt. This prompted Congress to authorize its rebuilding in 1854 for a total of $6,000. In 1862, during the Civil War the light was temporarily dark when Union forces captured the City of New Orleans, but was relit that same year under Union control. In 1890, the U.S. government sold the lighthouse to Major Manuel C. Royes, superintendent of the canal, for a mere $11. A new square, two-story white frame structure with a slate roof now stood in its place, with a focal point towering 49 feet above the lake. A Times-Picayune article describes that the planned lighthouse would “be built with stronger foundations and heavier timbers, and being a feature of beauty will be of greater service to the schooners and other water crafts that go through Pontchartrain, as its lights will be higher than the cupola of the Southern Yacht Club.” In 1915, the Government commend-ed lighthouse keeper Caroline Riddle for sticking to “her post the night of that great hurricane which passed over New Orleans. She alone maintained the light by securing the lens and hanging a lantern in the tower, although the storm did great damage around the station.”

In 1926 an excursion boat caught fire in Lake Pontchartrain and keeper Margaret “Madge” Norvell rescued 200 victims treating them until they could be evacuated. Norvell demonstrated her heroism again when she re-ceived word a naval airplane had gone down in the lake. She did not hesitate in battling a mercy-less squall for two hours on Lake Pontchartrain as she rowed to the survivor of the crash, rescued him and then rowed the naval aviator back to shore. She was quoted in a newspaper article saying, “There isn’t anything unusual about a woman keeping a light in her window to guide men folks home. I just happen to keep a bigger light than most women because I have got to see that so many men get safely home.” The lighthouse was damaged by hurricanes in 1926 and again in 1927, prompting the installation of new concrete piers.

In 1936, the breakwater around the station was filled in, placing the light on dry land for the first time in its history and adding to what today is known as the lakefront. During World War II, the Pontchartrain lakefront was heavily utilized for the war ef-fort and eventually the lighthouse was taken over by the U.S. Coast Guard for a Search and Rescue Station. The Coast Guard moved in 2002 to larger headquarters, but maintained the property until 2005, when Hurricane Katrina’s storm surge inundated the structure leading to its collapse.

The duties of keeping a lighthouse were numerous, beginning with the main responsibility of tending the giant oil lamps to trimming the wicks every four hours to ensure a constant and steady light.

Lighthouse keeper Madge Norvell was famous for her rescue of survivors from a burning excursion boat in Lake Pontchartrain.
Right - New Basin Canal at West End, in the 1930s. Popular excursion boats carried New Orleanians across Lake Pontchartrain. Aboard were first-rate jazz bands, beer and German pretzels. The open decks provided a breezy relief from the hot summer. Once ashore on the far side, passengers picnicked or treated themselves to a meal at Bechac’s on the lakefront in Mandeville. To the left is the Southern Yacht Club; to the right is the Coast Guard station (New Canal Lighthouse.) The last excursion boat ran in 1936. Photograph courtesy of J. Gilbert Scheib, Southern Yacht Club. Collection of Frank Gordon & Son New Orleans

Right - The New Canal Lighthouse stands as a sentinel in the early 1900’s leading boats into the New Basin Canal.
As the public’s independent voice, LPBF is dedicated to restoring and preserving the water quality, coast and habitat of the basin for this and future generations.

### About

**March 3, 1837** – New Canal Lighthouse is born:
Status update: Congress authorizes funds for a lighthouse to be established at the entrance of the harbor recently constructed on Lake Pontchartrain for the newly dug New Orleans Canal.

**1855** – New Canal Lighthouse has changed its profile picture. A one story New Canal Lighthouse replaces the original 1839 cypress tower structure.

**1890** – New Canal Lighthouse changes its profile picture. The buildup from a one story to the well known two story wedding cake style building took place when the newly built Southern Yacht Club across the canal blocked the light to the western approach.

**1839** – A cypress tower was built lighting the way to the New Orleans Canal.

**August 3, 1854** – Status update: Foundation piles are rotted and causing the lighthouse to tilt! Someone called it “wholly worthless.” An act of Congress appropriates $6,000 for a new lighthouse to replace the existing structure at the New Basin Canal. Years of expenditure: 1855-1857.

**1862** – New Canal Lighthouse is now offline. Union forces, under direction of General Butler, capture New Orleans and the lighthouse is temporarily dark.
1920 - New Canal Lighthouse likes Jazz. The West End was a hotspot for cabarets, moonshine and early jazz.

1960's - New Canal Lighthouse is now friends with the U.S. Coast Guard. U.S.C.G. Search and Rescue unit takes over the lighthouse for operations.

1943 - New Canal Lighthouse likes Uncle Sam. Southern Yacht Club and lakefront become host to the U.S. military during WW II.

2012 - New Canal Lighthouse is back online. LPBF relights the lighthouse September 26, 2012.

2005 - New Canal Lighthouse signed offline. Hurricane Kartina brings down the lighthouse.
From its inception in the 1960’s, the U.S. Coast Guard station on Lake Pontchartrain has had enormous responsibility and a high level of activity. The station was always on duty and prepared to respond to water related accidents across Lake Pontchartrain and other inland water bodies from Baton Rouge to the Chandeleur Islands. By the late 1990’s, the requirements of the station had simply outgrown the capacity of the New Canal Lighthouse. A new larger and more modern structure was built just three-fourths of a mile away along Lake Pontchartrain at the historic community of Bucktown.

Although it is officially the “U.S. Coast Guard Search and Rescue Station New Orleans”, it is actually located in adjacent Jefferson Parish, and not within the city limits of New Orleans. The station is much larger and is billeted for 53 active duty and 24 reserve Coast Guard personnel. The station also hosts 8 Coast Guard Auxiliary Flotillas comprised of over 250 Auxiliarists. It was opened in 2002 and is still very active. The station has an area of responsibility (AOR) which covers 7,500 square miles. This area extends from West Pearl River to Des Allemands and includes the Mississippi River from South Baton Rouge to Pointe à la Hache. Other bodies of water covered in the AOR are Lakes Borgne, St. Catherine, Ponchartrain, Maurepas, Salvador, Des Allemands, and the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet.
It was the U.S. Coast Guard’s move to Bucktown in 2002 which precipitated the recent chain of events leading to LPBF operating the New Canal Lighthouse. LPBF’s Deputy Director, Anne Rheams, who was already a lighthouse enthusiast, saw the old lighthouse as a natural venue for LPBF’s mission. Discussions began with the U.S. Coast Guard to transfer the lighthouse to LPBF. Since the lighthouse was listed on the National Register of Historic Places, it could be donated to LPBF. Although there was no formal agreement, it was expected that soon after the Bucktown move, the lighthouse would be donated to LPBF. These discussions were ongoing when Hurricane Katrina struck in 2005. Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and then a winter storm damaged the lighthouse beyond repair. Undeterred, in 2006 LPBF was given a 5-year lease by the Coast Guard for the damaged lighthouse which would allow for its restoration by LPBF.

LPBF’s first action was to deconstruct the old lighthouse in 2007 and safely store all the materials. LPBF also launched a lighthouse fundraising campaign and used its initial funds to repair the damage to the communications building on the site. Shell Oil Company donated funds to repair this structure, which is now the education center for LPBF. This rather demure building survived Hurricane Katrina, and is actually a remarkably well-built concrete fortress not unlike a military bunker. Restoration of the education center building began LPBF’s

The New Canal Lighthouse being deconstructed.

The former communications building for the U.S. Coast Guard now serves as LPBF’s education center.
lease expired and raised more questions about the fate of the lighthouse property.

Fortunately, the original donation of the lighthouse property included reversionary language so that if the federal government stopped using the lighthouse, the property would revert to the

State of Louisiana. In 2011, the Non-Flood Protection Asset Management Authority exercised its reversionary interests, and in December of 2011, the U.S. Coast Guard acknowledged it no longer had any remaining interest in the lighthouse property. In 2012, LPBF signed a five-year lease (renewable up to 60 years) for the lighthouse site with the Non-Flood Protection Asset Management Authority. Within a month, construction was initiated on the New Canal Lighthouse, which was completed later that year. The 10-year campaign by LPBF to operate the lighthouse property succeeded. In 2012, it came to be as a result of enormous support from the local community and tremendous help from the state’s federally elected officials, in particular US Senators Mary Landrieu and David Vitter.
Pre-Katrina lighthouse

Post-Katrina lighthouse

Decommissioning the U.S.C.G. station

Deconstructed lighthouse material ready for storage

Newly constructed New Canal Lighthouse in 2013, in holiday garland
CELEBRATION & REBIRTH 2013

RECONSTRUCTION

Left - Drilling 45 ft. pilings

Above - Forms for concrete footings

Framing

Weather sealing

Porch construction

Final prep for the cupola

Left - Cupola on site

Adjusting the base for the light. Pictured from left: Prom Dagoglou, Kid Falcone, Glenn Higgins and Marco Burgos
New Canal Lighthouse
RECONSTRUCTION
April-September 2012

Right - Test Lighting, pre-Hurricane Isaac.

Left - Installation of the cupola
The Relight Celebration
September 26, 2012

Celebrating the Light - view of Lakeshore Drive from the New Canal Lighthouse
On September 26th, 2012 LPBF celebrated the relighting of the New Canal Lighthouse! Seven years after being destroyed by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, this beautiful and historic Lakeshore Drive landmark was lit once again! As part of the festivities to celebrate this occasion, we held a 1/2 mile and 2 mile run/walk along the lake. The 610 Stompers helped kick things off and kept us dancing all evening long. Many local dignitaries attended and Mr. and Mrs. Tom Benson (major lighthouse sponsors) had the honor of flipping the switch! It was a fabulous night and a great time was had by all!
New Canal Lighthouse Museum
Becomes a Reality

By JoAnn Burke

The Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation (LPBF) worked tirelessly to rebuild the New Canal Lighthouse since its collapse as a result of the hurricanes of 2005 and now, finally, it is done! In spring of 2013, this classic structure opens to the public, and all will be able to share in its greatness.

The New Canal Lighthouse has had such a storied history since a light was placed on the Lake Pontchartrain landscape in 1839. Built to steer mariners safely from the lake through the New Basin Canal, the beacon has been rebuilt three times and is a reminder of when maritime commerce thrived along Lake Pontchartrain and its outlets.

In the mid-1900s, the Coast Guard acquired the property and took over operation of the lighthouse. They maintained the site until 2005 when Hurricanes Katrina and Rita toppled the structure.

In 2006, LPBF signed the lease for the property. LPBF deconstructed the old lighthouse and saved original building materials to reuse them to preserve some of the historic integrity of the building. From 2006, LPBF worked relentlessly in collaboration with
the Coast Guard, the Non-Flood Protection Asset Management Authority of the Orleans Levee District and the City of New Orleans to obtain the necessary approvals to rebuild and create a museum and education center.

The site is a destination for visitors from near and far. An entranceway will take one past a landscaped plaza made of personalized bricks that generous donors have purchased (To purchase a brick go to our website, www.saveourlake.org.) From the site entrance, visitors will take a boardwalk to the education center. There, tickets will be sold for entrance into the lighthouse museum, and reservations will be made for educational presentations and site rentals. The gift shop will be located there as well.

Leaving the education center, one will walk onto an expanded open deck. This multi-function area will serve as a gathering place for groups to congregate and will offer a view of the Point and the New Basin Canal.

The entrance to the New Canal Lighthouse Museum branches off the deck and up a flight of stairs. The lighthouse structure itself is built up nineteen feet for hurricane protection. Beneath it is an open air area to host outdoor functions. This area provides access to the lawn and the plaza. The inside of the museum is accessed either by staircase or handicap lift. There is also an additional staircase on the east side of the building rising

Continued on page 22
up from ground level.

As they climb the stairs to the museum, visitors enter onto a balcony that encircles the first floor with a view of the area from all sides. Inside, they can view displays, see videos and hear audios that cover four areas of interest. The first area offers a timeline and displays of the history of the region, the history of the lighthouse and the roles of the entities that administered the light’s operation. Audios provide details on the present New Canal Lighthouse and the lakefront’s history. A video plays with information on the New Orleans lakefront of the past.

The second area contains displays related to Lake Pontchartrain; they highlight how LPBF, in its SAVE OUR LAKE campaign, has successfully addressed water quality issues and continues to improve a great environmental resource. It includes interactive components showing the lake’s food web, the history of commercial fishing and the many opportunities for recreation the lake has to offer.

The third exhibit area shows the major coastal crisis we face in our region. It presents LPBF’s SAVE OUR COAST campaign, explaining the vulnerability of our basin as a result of hurricanes and sea level rise. Displays show the need for coastal restoration and offer the plan the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation authored to make the basin sustainable for the future. There is a video highlighting coastal issues of the region. Displays include information on Hurricane Katrina and, in an audio, pay tribute to the U.S. Coast Guard for their heroic contribution.
LPBF is offering a Lighthouse Docent Training Program to prepare willing volunteers to serve as docents, volunteer museum guides, in the New Canal Lighthouse Museum. Anyone interested in becoming a docent for the New Canal Lighthouse contact: joann@saveourlake.org

The New Canal Lighthouse is the only operating Louisiana lighthouse and museum open to the public.

BECOME A PART OF HISTORY

Buy a personalized brick for yourself or as a gift and become part of this historic landmark.

THANKS to everyone who helped contribute to the rebuilding the New Canal Lighthouse. We can’t wait to open this landmark as an Education Center and Museum!

More funds are still needed. Although we have some funding for Phase II, which includes the completion of the fountain plaza, front peninsula and the dock, we still need more help to complete this next phase. Please consider making a donation to help bring this Lakefront icon back to its full glory! Thank you again for your continued support!

Bricks are available at 3 price levels

4”x8” for $200 - 3 lines of text
8”x8” for $500 - 4 lines of text or 3 lines of text and Lighthouse logo
8”x8” for $1000 - 4 lines of text or 3 lines of text and a personal logo. (logo must be in vector format)

Mail Certificate To: (circle one) PURCHASER GIFT RECIPIENT

Message For Gift Letter:

Bricks in any size may contain a maximum of 18 characters per line. Spaces & punctuation count as characters. Please place your text in the boxes provided. For instructions and information about submitting a logo, please call (504) 836-2203.

One
Two
Three
Four

$200 and $1000 levels only

Docents Wanted
LPBF is offering a Lighthouse Docent Training Program to prepare willing volunteers to serve as docents, volunteer museum guides, in the New Canal Lighthouse Museum. Anyone interested in becoming a docent for the New Canal Lighthouse contact: joann@saveourlake.org

CELEBRATION & REBIRTH 2013

in that time of need.

Finally, the fourth area is used for temporary exhibits. They can be changed and will present information and images that are immediately pertinent and timely to the visitor. Whether looking back at the past or focusing attention on a critical basin situation, they can show the visitor items of interest concerning Lake Pontchartrain and the Pontchartrain Basin.

Loyal and generous friends and donors have helped LPBF raise the funds necessary to rebuild the lighthouse. There is still need for more financial assistance in order to make the site complete. Rest assured that the community will rally around and continue to support LPBF to bring this historic landmark back to its former glory.

To become part of this exciting restoration project, please call 504-836-2215 or visit www.saveourlake.org
Some people have dreams, but others, like Ms. Anne Rheams, have vision.

It was not a whimsical notion for LPBF to pursue the New Canal Lighthouse. It was a tangible concept Anne conceived which would create a unique resource in LPBF’s pursuit of its mission to restore and protect the natural resources of the Pontchartrain Basin. LPBF has been a catalyst for protecting and restoring Lake Pontchartrain since 1989. It was Anne who saw this golden opportunity twelve years ago. Always interested in lighthouses, when she heard that the U.S. Coast Guard might vacate the iconic New Canal Lighthouse overlooking our precious lake, she saw these events not as simply a fortuitous circumstance but as an opportunity which she then made her determined mission.

Anne graduated from the University of New Orleans in 1990 with a Masters Degree in Urban and Regional Planning. After working for the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality, Anne started with LPBF in 1992, just after Carlton Dufrechou became Executive Director. It was after only a few years with LPBF that she first proposed that LPBF acquire the lighthouse. Carlton and long-time staffer Dr. Steve Gorin were tough realists who did not immediately buy into the farfetched idea that LPBF should acquire a lighthouse. After all, lighthouses are obsolete and expensive to maintain. For a small organization on a tight budget, this was an audacious concept. LPBF had never owned any real estate of consequence much less an operable lighthouse. But Anne was tenacious and worked tirelessly to champion the idea.

Ms. Anne Rheams

LIGHTHOUSE VISIONARY

By John Lopez Ph.D.

Anne did extensive research on the history of the New Canal Lighthouse and discovered the remarkable stories of heroic women light keepers. She pieced together the lineage of lighthouse structures and its later use as the Coast Guard rescue station. She nurtured a relationship with the U.S. Coast Guard’s 8th District in New Orleans as well as their real estate office in Miami, who would assume management of the property once the lighthouse was no longer in service as a rescue station. She was relentless in organizing a fund-raising campaign. She even convinced the LPBF board and staff that the lighthouse was not only worth pursuing but was the future of the organization.

And then Hurricane Katrina came, with such a crushing blow to the city, that pursuit of the lighthouse almost seemed frivolous. That is unless, you were Anne Rheams. She led an effort to try to stabilize the structure immediately after the storm so that it might be preserved entirely. She successfully pushed to lease the lighthouse property even when the site was in ruins. She oversaw the repairs to the education center and saw it open for the first time to be used for LPBF activities. She has been the extraordinary leader who persevered against great odds. The restoration of the New Canal Lighthouse is a testament to her undaunted struggle and is her legacy.
The New Canal Lighthouse was not the only lighthouse to light the way for mariners as they traveled Lake Pontchartrain. History tells of eight lighthouses that once ensured safe passage around Lake Pontchartrain. Today only three of these lighthouses remain.

Lighthouses of Lake Pontchartrain

By JoAnn Burke

BAYOU ST. JOHN LIGHTHOUSE

In 1811, the first lighthouse to be built outside the thirteen original English colonies was placed at the entrance to Bayou St. John. This bayou led directly into the city of New Orleans. Called the Bayou St. John Lighthouse, it was originally an octagonal wooden tower. It was replaced in 1838 with a new tower. In 1855, the Bayou St. John Lighthouse, as well as its sister lighthouses, the Port Pontchartrain Lighthouse and the New Canal Lighthouse, were all replaced. An 1865 hurricane damaged the Bayou St. John Lighthouse beyond repair. It was relit in 1869 with a sixth-order Fresnel lens, but its value declined due to better ports nearby. It does not survive today.

PORT PONTCHARTRAIN LIGHTHOUSE/MILNEBURG LIGHTHOUSE

Milneburg was a fishing community on Lake Pontchartrain in the early 1800’s that became an active port on the south shore of the lake. The first steam railroad west of the Allegheny Mountains was built from New Orleans along present day Elysian Fields Ave and drew people out from the city to the small village. In 1832 a private lighthouse was built there, but in 1839 Congress constructed an octagonal wooden tower like that at Bayou St. John and the New Basin Canal. In 1855 a brick tower with a fifth order Fresnel lens replaced the wooden tower, and in 1880 the tower was raised by flaring out the brick top. When rail service declined, the port also declined. The lighthouse was placed on dry ground by a landfill project in the early 1900’s. It survives today although in great disrepair.
NEW CANAL LIGHTHOUSE

In 1839, Congress placed the New Canal Lighthouse at the entrance to the newly constructed New Basin Canal that carried water commerce into New Orleans. Built as a cypress tower it rotted and was replaced in 1855 with a square wooden dwelling holding a fixed fifth-order Fresnel lens. In 1890 it was again rebuilt, but this time as a two-story structure to allow the light to be visible over the new neighboring yacht club. The hurricanes of 2005 toppled the light and it was rebuilt by the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation in 2012. It stands today as LPBF’s New Canal Lighthouse Museum and Education Center.

TCHEFUNCTE RIVER LIGHTHOUSE

The Tchefuncte River Lighthouse was completed in 1838 as a 30-foot brick tower. In 1857, its light was replaced with a Fresnel lens. Badly damaged in the Civil War, it was later rebuilt in 1868 with many of the same bricks. The replacement lantern originated from the destroyed Cat Island station. Automated in 1939, it still operates today as a private aid to navigation under the jurisdiction of the town of Madisonville. It is currently closed to the public for restoration.
BAYOU BONFOUCA LIGHTHOUSE

On the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain, the Bayou Bonfouca settlement received a lighthouse in 1848. Patterned after the Pass Manchac light, it was just one story and intended only as a guide into the bayou. It was destroyed by fire in 1862 and, after the Civil War, became a secondary port with only a small beacon at the bayou.

POINT AUX HERBES LIGHTHOUSE

On Lake Pontchartrain’s south shore just inside the Rigolets, the Point Aux Herbes Lighthouse was built in 1875. It was a square dwelling topped with a fifth-order Fresnel lens. The station was discontinued after WWII and vandals burned the structure in the 1950’s.
PASS MANCHAC LIGHTHOUSE

The Pass Manchac Lighthouse was part of a system of five Lake Pontchartrain lights placed around the lake in the late 1830’s. The tower was made of brick just like the Tchefuncte River Lighthouse. The tower soon deteriorated and had to be rebuilt three more times before the Civil War damaged it severely. It was then rebuilt with a fifth order Fresnel lens. It was automated in 1941 and the dwelling was destroyed in 1952. Hurricane Katrina took down the tower that had remained and finally, in 2012, Hurricane Isaac washed away all remaining visible remnants.

WEST RIGOLETS LIGHTHOUSE

In an effort to create a true system of lighthouses, the West Rigolets Lighthouse was built in the 1850’s as a square dwelling with a lantern on the hipped roof. Before that, in the 1820’s, it had functioned as a light on a cypress log. In 1863, it was renovated and a fifth-order Fresnel lens put in place. It had some hurricane damage through the years, but was discontinued when an electric light was placed nearby in 1945. It did not survive the 2005 hurricane season.
The Bell of Pontchartrain

If asked to explain the primary tool and role of a lighthouse, the answer can easily be found in its name. With their bright beacons shining out into the sea, lighthouses have provided a point of reference for sailors since ancient times. But what does a light keeper do if a thick veil of fog obscures even the brightest of lights? Initially, they used cannons. In 1719, ships entering Boston harbor fired a cannon and the keeper would respond in kind, which would then give the captain a better idea of where the lighthouse was located. Unfortunately, this resulted in a great deal of wasted ammunition. In 1837, a bell rung by hand came into fashion. But this practice resulted in sore arms. Finally, Andrew Morse Jr. developed the “perpetual fog bell” in 1839. There have been variations and improvements throughout the decades, but by 1899 when a mechanical fog bell was installed in the New Canal Lighthouse, designs had become fairly standardized. An 1898 Times-Picayune announcement explained that the fog bell to be installed would be “struck by machinery during thick or foggy weather, a single blow every thirty seconds.” Sam Urate, the last proprietor of Brunings Restaurant, and former occupant of a home adjacent to the 17th Street Canal, recalled many mornings being awakened by the lighthouse bell.

Lights of the New Canal Lighthouse

The New Canal Lighthouse was originally built as a tower of cypress logs in 1839 and held a lamp 30 feet above the water. It contained 18 lights. New Canal was upgraded to a one story square building in 1855 and an iron lantern with a fixed Fifth Order Fresnel lens was placed in the lantern room. It shined out from 33 feet above the water. By 1859 practically all United States lighthouses were outfitted with Fresnel lenses according to U.S. Coast Guard history. In 1890 a two story wood building replaced the previous New Canal Lighthouse and again a Fifth Order Fresnel lens was used now 49 feet above the lake. Beginning in 1902 U.S. lighthouses began switching to acetylene gas to fuel the beacons and the light believed to have been in the New Canal Lighthouse during the early 1900’s used such a fuel. In 1926 following a hurricane the station was repaired and the lantern was raised to 52 feet and electrified. It is not clear if that light was a replacement but the last light believed to have been in New Canal Lighthouse is a 375 mm American Gas Accumulator (AGA) drum lens. This is a different classification of Fresnel lenses from those classified by orders. In 1939 all U.S. lighthouses were put under the jurisdiction of the U.S.C.G. Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation is working with the U.S.C.G. to borrow the AGA drum lens to put on display in the LPBF New Canal Lighthouse Museum.
New Orleanians unable to escape the oppressive summer heat, Lake Pontchartrain has provided relief and recreation for generations. At the gilded turn of the 20th Century the elegant and lavish West End Hotel and Restaurant, a grand pavilion and the Southern Yacht Club framed an impressive amusement area that provided diversions for all walks of life. Later during the 1920’s, the sultry cabarets of West End supported the illicit moonshine trade of Lake Pontchartrain and hosted those early Jazz performers made infamous by Storyville, including Louis Armstrong. The lake was and is not without its dangers, however, and a leisurely boat ride could turn dangerous if the weather changed suddenly.

We spoke to Sam Urrate, the final proprietor of the iconic Bruning’s Restaurant, about his great-grandfather Captain John C. Bruning, who along with his brother Theodore Bruning recorded saving over 125 people from the waters of Lake Pontchartrain. In 1893, Captain Bruning built a home for his family on the lakeshore, on the west side of the 17th Street Canal. In addition to running the family restaurant, Captain John and his brother operated a pair of boathouses, renting skiffs to lake visitors and tourists. Any time a boater or swimmer was in distress, the Bruning brothers were usually first to the scene, even braving stormy waters in their two-person skiff to help those in danger. So devoted to this task, John Bruning eventually added a belvedere on top of his lakefront house so he could better observe the lake for signs of trouble. Residents of West End were a tight knit community, and lightkeepers frequently visited the Bruning family restaurant and always let Captain John know if bad weather was on its way.

When Mr. Bruning was 64-years-old, the Times-Picayune profiled his selfless heroism, and he revealed that he had never accepted reward or compensation for any of his rescues, even turning down the prestigious Carnegie Medal. In 1913, Captain John and his son’s rescue of two local boys inspired both his nomination for the medal and a citywide effort to establish life saving stations for the lake. Despite years of local advocacy and
lobbying efforts out of Baton Rouge and in Washington D.C., the goal of a Lake Pontchartrain Coast Guard lifesaving station was not approved until 1937. The effort was put on hold when Lake Pontchartrain was heavily utilized for the World War II effort. From training newly enlisted sailors, to housing a Coast Guard barracks, to testing the New Orleans designed and built Higgins boat, the lakefront became an integral component of the United States war machine. The Southern Yacht Club was even a base of operations for the Coast Guard and Navy! In peacetime, the Coast Guard barracks would remain, assigning a Search and Rescue (SAR) team to the lighthouse, and the Bruning’s would from then on have considerable support.

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Theodore Bruning, along with his brother and business partner John Bruning was credited with saving 125 lives in Lake Pontchartrain.

Below - John Bruning eventually added a belvedere on top of his lakefront house so he could better observe the lake for signs of trouble. Located on the west side of the 17th Street Canal, the Bruning home was lost to Katrina.

Bruning Family to the rescue! Pictured are Cap’n John Bruning his granddaughter, Amelia Urrate and great-grandson Sam Urrate. Amelia also rescued several people in distress. Sam, at age 10, saved a friend from drowning while swimming to the “pipe” in Lake Pontchartrain. Also pictured is family dog “SeaBee.”

Below - John Bruning eventually added a belvedere on top of his lakefront house so he could bet- ter observe the lake for signs of trouble. Located on the west side of the 17th Street Canal, the Brun- ing home was lost to Katrina.

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We were able to speak with John Flores, an author and a former Coast Guard crewman who had been stationed at the U.S. Coast Guard New Canal Lighthouse from the late 1970’s to early 1980’s. A self-described “farm boy”, Mr. Flores was right out of boot camp when he was stationed at the New Canal Station. He wistfully recounted his early years, crediting his time at the New Canal Station as his most formative. Personnel operated on 4-hour firefighting shifts, 36 hours on, 36 hours off. On duty guardsmen slept on the second floor of the lighthouse, and when they weren’t on duty, the bottom floor had a TV room and a large galley. When they weren’t manning the emergency radio in the communications and engineering center, what is known today as the LPBF Education Center, Guard members could be gone for 24 hours on law enforcement patrols, searching the lake and the marshes of the Pontchartrain Basin. With just three boats (a 41-footer twin cummings diesel, a 40-footer from the Korean war era, and a 17-footer twin engine outboard), the New Basin Canal SAR team was one of the busiest search and rescue units in the entire Coast Guard – handling over 400 cases a year!

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Not all the New Basin Canal SAR unit’s work was dangerous or morose, Mr. Flores pointed out. They also gave guided tours of the station to people who dined next door at the former Bart’s Restaurant as well as to children on field trips with their local Boy or Girl Scout troops. The canal station also served as a community focal point, handling civilian medical emergencies just as a fire station would. Motorcycle accidents were frequent along Lakeshore Drive and the SAR team was often the first to arrive on the scene with all members having First Aid training. Sometimes people just stopped by the New Canal Station for company. John Flores recounted being just 20-years-old counseling recently divorced drunkards. One of Mr. Flores’ favorite stories involved a 70-year-old Bucktown fisherman. The man’s wife called the station when he hadn’t returned that evening and immediately the SAR team embarked on a search that lasted through the night. Finally in the morning just by a miracle, they found the fisherman hanging on the bottom of his boat. He had hypothermia but survived the ordeal. Since his time serving the United States and the New Orleans lakefront, Mr. Flores went to school and became a journalist. He has since written several books and has plans to write about his time living in a lighthouse.

By 1986, the New Canal Station was billeted for 21 persons with a Chief Boatswain’s Mate (BMC) as Officer-in-Charge. SAR cases were handled by a 41-foot large utility boat (UTB) and an 18-foot Boston Whaler. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Coast Guard crews rescued more than 24,000 people and assisted with the joint-agency evacuation of an additional 9,400 patients and medical personnel from hospitals in the Gulf coast region. More than 33,400 people were saved and evacuated during the hurricane response effort.
Above - Since 1937, the U.S. Coast Guard’s Search and Rescue has protected the waters of Lake Pontchartrain and inland water bodies from Baton Rouge to the Chandeleur Islands.

The 41-footer Coast Guard Vessel

Below - Lake Pontchartrain was heavily utilized for the World War II effort. From training newly enlisted sailors, to housing a Coast Guard barracks, to testing the New Orleans designed and built Higgins boat, the lakefront became an integral component of the United States war machine.

Map by Mary Lou Widmer
The New Canal Lighthouse Museum and Education Center has already been honored to be part of a pilot program under the Urban Waters Federal Partnership launched in June of 2011. Nationally, only seven urban areas have been selected for this program. The goal of the partnership is to improve our nation’s waters and promote the economic, environmental and social benefits of communities near them. The lighthouse is a perfect fit being on Lake Pontchartrain and located within New Orleans. Because of the rapid progress and significance of the lighthouse construction, the partnership considers the lighthouse as a cornerstone project for 2013.

The partnership is committed to the revitalization of America’s urban centers, which serve for innovation and the engines for economic growth and our overall national economic recovery. The partnership is a formidable union of thirteen federal agencies working together to improve federal coordination both on a national level and collaborating with local community-led revitalization efforts.

Although in its infancy, important contributions and progress have already been made by the partnership. The EPA met with the U.S. Coast Guard and explained the importance of the New Canal Lighthouse to the Urban Waters Federal Partnership. EPA supported an LPBF owned and operated lighthouse even when it was unclear how or when that might happen. In addition, the partnership has created an Urban Waters Federal Partnership Ambassador for the New Orleans area pilot projects. Danny Wiegand, who has worked for the New Orleans District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, has been recently named the first ambassador. There are seven projects established within the New Orleans pilot program.

The partnership is intended to align federal resources to benefit the pilot projects. This has an enormous potential to assist projects, which has become even more critical in these times of declining budgets. Two grant offerings have already been made. As the program is more fully developed, more resources are likely to emerge. LPBF is very proud to operate the New Canal Lighthouse pilot project as a participant in the Urban Waters Federal Partnership.

The Ten Participating Federal Partners for New Orleans Pilot Projects
1. EDA - Economic Development Administration
2. EPA - U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
3. FEMA - Federal Emergency Management Agency
4. FWS - Fish and Wildlife Service
5. HUD - Housing and Urban Development
6. NOAA - National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
7. NPS - National Park Service
8. NRCS - National Resources Conservation Service
9. USACE - U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
10. USGS - U.S. Geological Survey
The Seven Local New Orleans’ Pilot Projects included in the partnership

- New Canal Lighthouse Museum and Education Center for environmental education.
- Lafitte Corridor Greenway Revitalization for urban revitalization
- West End Marina, Pontchartrain Beach and East End areas along Lake Pontchartrain
- Bayou St. John and the Lakeshore for enhanced pedestrian access
- Pontchartrain Beach
- Shea Penland Coastal Education and Research Facility (CERF) located on Chef Pass for environmental field station
- Lake Pontchartrain East End

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Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation

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Photo by JoAnn Burke