

HARBOR PEQUOT LIGHTHOUSE

Established: 1760 Current tower: 1801

41° 19' 0" N, 72° 5' 23.1" W

Visit inside Harbor Lighthouse
New London Maritime Society offers tours
for up-to five people to visit inside the
lighthouse, year-round.

Climb 116 steps to the lantern room, all
the while learning the history of Harbor
Light, the fourth oldest lighthouse in the
country and the tallest on Long Island
Sound. The views at the top are spectacular.



Register for a 40-minute,
weekend tour. Children must
be age 8 or older. Please make
your reservation at least one
day in advance of the trip.
Sign up online today:

harborlighthouse tour.
bpt.me

For custom tours call:
860-447-2501.

The history of Harbor Light

1646 - New London is founded on Pequot and Mohegan territory. The settlement has the best natural deep harbor between Boston and New York.

1730s - New London's first 'beacon' is established on the west bank of the 'Harbour's Mouth' -- a bonfire occasionally lit to warn against an approach by the French fleet.

1754 - a damaged Spanish vessel, laden with treasure and coming to New London for emergency repairs, ran aground at Bartlett's Reef. Its heavy cargo was removed to free the ship from the rocks. But when the treasure was returned, a significant amount of the gold, silver and indigo was missing! People recognized the urgent need for a lighthouse to keep ships safe.

1759 - under King George II, land is purchased to establish a true lighthouse. Lottery tickets raise funds to build the new station.

1761 - Harbor Lighthouse is constructed at a cost of £715, (roughly \$285,000). It is the first lighthouse built on Long Island Sound. The 64-foot-tall stone tower with a wooden lantern was first lit on November 7, 1761. Lighthouses, like forts, were considered part of the coastal defense system.

1789 - after the revolution, Harbor Light becomes the fourth of the original 12 colonial lights that the young US government manages under its newly established Lighthouse Board. Local administration of lighthouses is handled by U.S. Customs agents.

1790 - Harbor lighthouse is ceded to the United States.

1791 - George Washington signs a contract authorizing the expenditure of \$360 quarterly to supply New London Harbor Light's six lamps with spermaceti whale oil, with the Act for the Establishment and Support of Lighthouse, Beacons, Buoys, and Public Piers.

1800 - as the lighthouse had developed a 10-foot crack beneath the lantern, and the lamp's low focal point left it indistinguishable from lights in nearby farmhouses, Congress appropriates \$15,700 'for rebuilding, altering, and improving the lighthouse.'

1801 - Abisha Woodward of New London completes construction of the new (current) lighthouse. Originally left unpainted, the tower is whitewashed some time in the mid-19th century.

Harbor Light is one of the earliest American lights with a flashing light; a revolving eclipser made the beam flash - 3 seconds on, three seconds off - so it couldn't be confused with the steady lights of nearby farms.

A total of 257 ships embarked on over 1100 separate whaling voyages out of New London between 1718 and 1908.

1812 - during the War of 1812, New Londoners put out the lighthouse lamp to prevent British ships navigating the harbor.

1833 - Harbor lighthouse receives extensive repair: a stone deck, lantern, copper dome and vane, flight of wood stairs, and outer door and lock added.

1857 - a fourth-order Fresnel lens is installed and remains in use to this day. A 'red sector' warns boats of rocks near shore. About this time, the foghorn is invented.

1863 - the tower's cast-iron circular stair and lantern are added and new dwelling (the current house) built.

1868 - a road (Pequot Avenue) is opened by the city of New London across the lighthouse grounds.

1874 - Celadon Daboll, of New London, experiments with fog horn designs in the 'engine house' at the site. A 2nd-class fog signal with two 18-inch engines and a Daboll trumpet is installed. It was in operation 553 hours during 1875.

1881 - U.S. Lighthouse Service instructions to keepers state: Keepers must be courteous and polite to all visitors...and show them everything of interest about the station.

Fresnel lenses were considered an ultimate expression of art, science, and technology. Tourists visit lighthouses world-wide to see the lenses and partake in the lantern views. 'Basket Picnics' are offered at Harbor Light for steamboat day-trippers.

1904 - a journalist described a visit: The keeper [Charles B. Field], a Swede, was a very intelligent man... When we were in the tower talking of fog, he told me how one night, when he was operating the horn, and 'the fog was so thick yer could have cut it with a knife and it fairly stuck in yer throat.'

1910 - the U.S. Lighthouse Service is created.

1911 - as a result of complaints by summer residents, and despite protests by local watermen, the fog signal is moved off-shore to then-new New London Ledge Light (est. 1909). (In *A Long Day's Journey into Night*, by New London-born playwright Eugene O'Neill and set in a home on Pequot Avenue at about this time, the mother complains about the mournful sound of the fog horn.)

1912 - the Light station is automated when the light is changed to acetylene. It is soon switched to electricity. A lighthouse keeper is no longer necessary.

1929 - the lighthouse grounds are divided and the keeper's house sold to a private party.

1939 - the U.S. Lighthouse Service merges with the U.S. Coast Guard. The USCG oversees Harbor Light.

1990 - Harbor Light is listed on the National Register.

2009 - through the National Historic Lighthouse Preservation Act of 2000, New London Maritime Society becomes owners of New London Harbor Light. The conveyance ceremony takes place in October, 2010.

2013 - Harbor Light represents Connecticut on the US Postal Service's *Lighthouses of New England* stamp series.

NLMS announces a campaign *I'm Part of Something BIG* to restore/repaint the lighthouse. Within 24 hours, the local carpenters and painters unions and Brand Scaffolding donate \$500k in in-kind labor and materials. The community donates another \$125,000.

2014 - Harbor Light undergoes exterior restoration.

2019 - New London Harbor Light receives state 'Good to Great' grant for landscaping.

2024 - Lighthouse landscaping completed.

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Photo: image from glass negative, ca. 1910, NLMS collection.

According to the USCG, from the top of New London Harbor Light, one can see more lighthouses than from any other place on earth.

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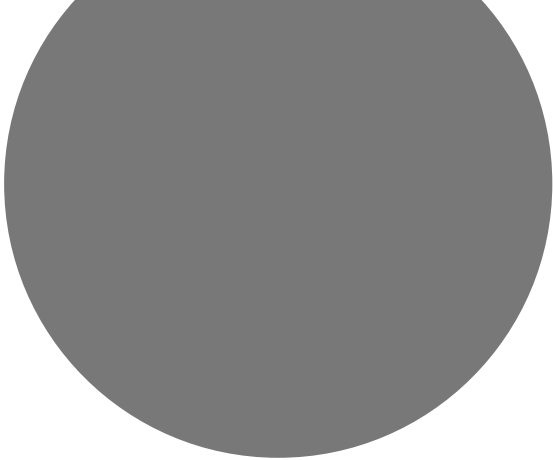
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