

## NLMS: 2008-2016

### GS/ST: THE END OF AN ERA.

**“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times....”**

- **March, 2008. ST hired.**
- **March – November, 2008 Intra-mural turmoil.**
- **November, 2008. GS (former Board Secretary, 2000-2001) invited and elected President. “Lead, Follow, or Get Out Of The Way”.**
- **First few months: Friction with prior leadership. Down to work.**
- **2009: Receipt of Ownership of New London Harbor Lighthouse; original application 2002 under leadership of President Ben Martin, after GS had proposed that initiative in 2001, based on New London Lighthouse Preservation Act of 2000.**
- **Discharge of NLMS responsibilities under the DEED: in Public Domain; open reasonably to the public; maintenance and rehabilitation; protection of ownership of entire property deeded. This required some modification of Martin’s application plans, which were felt to be too intrusive in the neighborhood.**
- **Decision to protect the other two main lighthouses in the public domain and out of private hands through auction. Attempted purchase with a national consortium of Little Gull Lighthouse, which was already in auction. We were out-bid by a private party over 300M to 175M.**
- **We made application for Race Rock, a massive undertaking. We received ownership of Race Rock in 9 months – instead of 7 years. The Federal Government evidently appreciated our stewardship of NLMS. We made application, again massive, for Ledge Lighthouse, since Ledge Light Foundation, the logical applicant, was not then a Sec. 501C3 non-profit organization. We collaborated on the application with Todd and Marcia Gipstein and LLF. We drafted a Lease and Management Agreement to enable us to hold LL as Landlords, with LLF as long-term tenants, retaining for NLMS the right to conduct NLMS tours of LL from New London, always**

in coordination with LLF. We received ownership of LL within another 9 months.

- Meanwhile, ST was greatly expanding our museum holdings, our exhibits, our public events, and including an initiative with public school children.
- We worked to improve the physical plant of the Custom House: furnace work and related alarm system; improvements to the Courtyard and access to it, and including a more modern tent; a working kitchen; the Archibald Chester Reading Room; the Montesi Model Ship Gallery in the Lower Level; an internal and external alarm system; improvements to the Museum Shop and to the Custom Office – the oldest continually functioning Custom Office in the Nation; continuing work on the roof. In addition, thanks to Jennifer Hillhouse and her sons, we added two handsome buoys to the front of the building. Responsibility for building maintenance fell to the careful attention of Vice President Rob Pittaway and Board Member Kenneth Holloway.
- Tours, regular and scheduled, were in the most capable hands of head docent Bill La Rue and his ever-expanding Volunteer Corps. Bill also agreed with our request to develop a Syllabus of his tours, which on request could provide up to 10 hours of interaction, highly informative and made more so by his lively style.
- During the same period, we were honored with the arrival of Brian Rogers, long-time former Librarian of Connecticut College, as our Librarian for the Frank McGuire Marine Research Library. Great work going on there.
- In 2014, NLMS BOT decided that NLHL needed serious rehabilitation. We undertook a several month cleaning and repainting of the Light, a massive undertaking in which we received the invaluable VOLUNTEER assistance of the Connecticut Painters Union and through them of the associated Scaffolding Company – a value of over \$250,000. To that, we had to find another \$175,000. to complete the project. During that period, the lighthouse property was an active construction site, a burden to the immediate neighbors the Waesches, and particularly to the Rings. We

kept them, and the City, regularly apprised and mitigated the damage as much as possible.

- Then there was also the brick wall separating the East end of the NLHL property from the ledge and the water. It had been severely damaged by the Sandy storm. In compliance with FEMA requirements, we had the wall rebuilt in granite.
- Meanwhile, Susan had developed over at least two years a fine series of water tours of the lighthouses, one source of vital donations. That is, until our initiatives were noticed and overtaken by “the 800 lb. gorilla in the room”. No Thanks for that.
- At some point during or somewhat before the above work, we had the NLHL property surveyed. We found that the Waesche family or the prior owner had built on our property along the Northern border. We apprised them of that fact; and we offered the family a License, personal to them and not “running with the land” to address the problem during their personal tenure of that property. The details of the subsequent actions are too numerous and are ongoing. They declined our offer and filed Suit in Federal Court, with NLMS and the USA as defendants. Despite our efforts at settlement, that suit is scheduled to go Court in another year. The Ring’s also tried to preclude our access to the Lighthouse, resulting in another suit. Then the City, in our opinion without legal grounds, issued a Cease and Desist Order. Again, too much detail here. All of these actions are continuing despite our efforts at reasonable resolution – and thanks to the unreasonable actions of our adversaries, including the City. “IT WAS THE WORST OF TIMES”. We do not now have proper access to our property.
- All of this has resulted in a major blow to the finances of NLMS, both through related expenses and through the disappearance of former reliable major and lesser donations from friends and “friends”. A real disappointment – and yet another object lesson in human nature. “NO GOOD DEED WILL GO UNPUNISHED”.

- Nevertheless, we at the Custom House Maritime Museum continue with our exhibits, our events, our weekly Public Access TV shows (Custom House Maritime Matters), completing our 6<sup>th</sup> year, our activities for the school children, our Jibboom Club monthly presentations with Russell DeMarco and Rob Pittaway...and also with our efforts to regain proper access to our NLMS property, to build an entrance through the Wall to allow safe access for the Coast Guard (which does not now exist, thanks to the above), and to re-build a Dock which served the Lighthouse in decades past.
- We have great and loyal friends and members. BUT WHAT WE LACK IS FUNDING, A SERIOUS PROBLEM. We work, all volunteers except one paid member (ST), for you THE PUBLIC. Please Help Us In Our Time Of Need.

GS – Annual Meeting, November 13, 2016

PS: "NEVER GIVE IN, NEVER, NEVER, NEVER, NEVER – IN NOTHING, GREAT OR SMALL, LARGE OR PETTY – NEVER GIVE IN EXCEPT IN CONVICTIONS OF HONOR AND GOOD SENSE."

Sir Winston Churchill, Address at Harrow School, October 29, 1941.

## A PHILOSOPHY FOR LIFE

***"THE THREE BEST DOCTORS ARE DOCTOR DIET, DOCTOR QUIET, AND DOCTOR MERRYMAN." JONATHAN SWIFT.***

***"AS LIFE IS ACTION AND PASSION, IT IS REQUIRED OF A MAN THAT HE SHOULD SHARE THE PASSION AND ACTION OF HIS TIMES AT PERIL OF BEING JUDGED NOT TO HAVE LIVED." OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES.***

***"FOR BETTER IT IS TO DARE MIGHTY THINGS, TO WIN GLORIOUS TRIUMPHS, EVEN THOUGH CHECKERED BY FAILURE, THAN TO TAKE RANK WITH THOSE POOR SPIRITS WHO NEITHER ENJOY MUCH NOR SUFFER MUCH, BECAUSE THEY LIVE IN THE TWILIGHT THAT KNOWS NOT VICTORY OR DEFEAT." Theodore Roosevelt.***

***"ADVERSITY IS THE PRICE TO BE PAID FOR PRINCIPLE".***

(UNKNOWN)

*Ch. G. Hart*