

# Beacon to shine after century of darkness

By Chris Janis  
Staff Reporter

There hasn't been a light in the old lighthouse for more than 100 years.

The brick walls are carved with lovers' messages and peace symbols from the decades during which it was left to grow dank and crumbled.

Each of its 74 spiraling stairs was encrusted with 18 inches of pigeon droppings. The lantern room is one huge bird nest.

But in recent weeks, the cracks have been filled and the droppings shoveled away. Steam has blasted clean the granite steps. There soon will be a new light.

The work is part of a \$70,000 project to restore one of New Haven's most well-known historic landmarks — the Lighthouse Point lighthouse.

It is also part of the city's long-range plan to fix up the whole park, including its carousel, ranger station, bathrooms and bath houses. A fishing pier is also in the works.

"We want to make it like it used to be," said Bernie Somers, Lighthouse Park manager. "It was (Mayor Biagio DiLieto's) idea." DiLieto lives around the corner from the park on nearby Townsend Avenue.

The lighthouse was built in 1840 to guide ships into New Haven Harbor. Made from sandstone from East Haven and brick from North Haven, it replaced an earlier wooden lighthouse that had been built too far north on the shore to be seen by ships coming from the East.

The granite staircase winds up

to a small, littered landing where an 8-foot metal ladder leads through a small hatch to the lantern loft. The keeper's duty was to make sure the light, which probably burned whale oil, burned throughout the night.

In 1877, a new lighthouse was built on the breakwater in the harbor and the original was boarded up. The lighthouse on the breakwater will remain the working beacon.

Much of the \$70,000 will be used to scrape the outside and repaint it white, install new windows in the observation tower and replace the railings surrounding it.

A new roof will be added and outdoor lights will be wired at the base of the lighthouse so that it can be seen for miles. It will remain closed to the public.



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Staff photos by Thom McGuire

An 8-foot metal ladder, left, rises to the lighthouse's lantern, dark for 100 years. The 74 spiraling stairs leading to the ladder were encrusted with 18 inches of pigeon droppings before workmen started restoring the landmark. Joe Capassa, above, stood on a scaffold to replace mortar high on the lighthouse walls.

