

Sanibel Lighthouse Patent Transfer Ceremony

By Stan Farnham, April 24, 2010

Sanibel Island near the 1884 lighthouse crackled with excitement as a ceremony a decade in the making took place on a beautiful Wednesday morning, April 21, 2010.

The Department of Interior Bureau of Land Management turned over nearly 45 acres, the lighthouse keeper's quarters and assistant lighthouse keeper's quarters to the City of Sanibel. Imagine what the value of this large prime beach property is worth!

Officials, invited guests and the public gathered at a spot in view of the lighthouse for the ceremony at 1 Periwinkle Way. Lighthouse lovers attending the ceremony celebrated *Florida Lighthouse Day* a few days early as the city gained ownership of the "symbol of the city."

Mayor Kevin Ruane, who had been elected the day before, chaired the half-hour event. Seated with him were Vice Mayor Mick Denham, Councilmen Marty Harity and Jim Jennings.



The Mayor (left below) who called the lighthouse the "jewel of the city," introduced Sanibel legend Sam Bailey, 86, (center and right below with Stan Farnham) as the speaker. He serves as Historical Preservation Committee Chairman. He has long been an advocate of preserving the lighthouse.



Bailey shared stories of the early days as a boy eight decades ago. Born and raised on Sanibel Island, Sam Bailey's family history dates back to the late 1800s. His book, *A Sanibel Son*

Looks Back, came out last year. He said he grew up playing and fishing at the lighthouse, a time of a one-room school house and few people before Sanibel became the vacation playground of today.

“The Sanibel Lighthouse buildings are the oldest buildings remaining on Sanibel,” Bailey said. “When the lighthouse was first lit August 20, 1884, the 17 square-mile island had few residents.”

Bailey declared: “I’m delighted the city is taking over this historical landmark.”

Several in the audience asked questions, which included when and what color will the lighthouse be painted and about a museum open to the public on the grounds. Bailey noted the answers would be determined in follow up meetings, but preservation was the priority.



Mayor Ruane introduced Bruce Dawson, BLM Field Manager who, after brief comments, introduced Marcilynn Burke, BLM Deputy Director, Washington D. C. for the presentation.

Burke said: “This is the kind of partnership we want to foster so there is a continued stewardship.” She noted it would be hard to place a value on the historical property.

In the photo, Bruce Dawson is seated at left as Marcilynn Burke speaks.

A tour of the grounds followed the ceremony. After the tour, the BLM officials and the City met.



In the photo, Mayor Ruane accepts the patent from Deputy Director Marcilynn Burke as Councilman Jim Jennings (middle) and Councilman Marty Harrity (right) look on. Vice Mayor Mick Denham is behind Harrity, They are also former Mayors.

Invited guests seated for the ceremony included a half dozen U.S. Coast Guard officers, including Senior Chief Robert Wooten, who has had the responsibility for the lighthouse as leader of U.S. Coast Guard ANT (Aids to Navigation Team); Florida Lighthouse

Association officers President Stan Farnham and Treasurer John Kennedy; Jody Brown, Historical Preservation member; Alex Werner President of Sanibel History Museum and Village (Werner is also Florida Lighthouse Association delegate); local dignitaries, former Mayors,

including Mayor Carla Johnston, who was involved during the original application; Lee County officials and others.

City officials included Judie Zimomra, City Manager; Pamela Smith, City Clerk; and others. Bert Gomez, Public Works employee helped with the setup.

FLA'ers present included Don and Julie Schwartz who live on Sanibel.



In the photo at left, photographers stand behind part of the crowd. In the photo at right: Mrs Jennings, left, FLA'er Mary Farnham seated next to her, City Manager Judie Zimomra standing behind Julie, FLA Treasurer John Kennedy seated second row and next to him Jody Brown, Sanibel Historical Society. FLA'ers Don and Julie Schwartz are standing in the background.

A local reporter interviewed participants and guests. A short story appeared in the Fort Myers News Press the following day. NBC-2 television had film and interviews of the event on the evening news.



In the photos above are three Bureau of Land Management employees from Virginia to meet with City officials after the ceremony, Senior Chief Robert Wooten (center) and long-time Sanibel Councilman Jim Jennings (right).

Sanibel the smallest city in Lee County has 6,000 residents. The first Mayor of the city was Porter Goss (1975-1977), former congressman and CIA director.

Sanibel Island Light, the most photographed structure in Lee County, was the first lighthouse erected on Florida's west coast north of Key West. It was first lit in 1885 and was automated in 1949. The lighthouse was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974.

Although the Coast Guard in 1995 issued a grant to the City of Sanibel, for using the property and responsibility for maintaining the grounds, the City did not own the property, nor have access to the lighthouse. The Coast Guard also continued to maintain the lighthouse itself and the optic.

The Coast Guard determined the land to be excess to its needs in October 2000. It relinquished it to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). City officials talked with the Bureau of Land Management then about applying to take ownership. The BLM accepted an application from the City of Sanibel in 2004 to take custody of the Sanibel Island Light property, subject to the right of the Coast Guard to maintain the optic. Before the transfer could take place an environmental clean-up was required and processing and reviews of the application which stretched out six years.

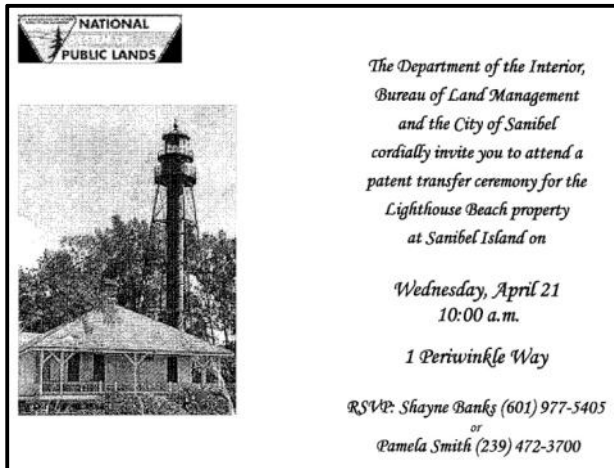
The Coast Guard Aids to Navigation Team (ANT) in St. Petersburg, Fla., continues to maintain the light's optic, as it is still a functioning, high-priority aid to navigation in the area.

The turnover precedes a gathering of statewide preservations May 13 for the Florida Trust for Historic Preservation annual meeting at Sanibel Harbor Resort. Their agenda includes a Sanibel Lighthouse tour.

Charles LeBuff, an FLA member, and who lived in the Sanibel lighthouse for 22 years, wrote the book, *The Sanibel Island Lighthouse...A History*, which provides interesting insights, from a person who was a Sanibel resident before the causeway was built (1963). Betty Lowe Phelps, an FLA member, is the granddaughter of assistant Sanibel lighthouse keeper Howard Lowe (served 1939-1943). Former Coastie and FLA'er Leo Haskins spent time at Fowey Rocks and at Sanibel Lighthouses.



Stan Farnham, Sam Bailey, John Kennedy



Invitation to the Ceremony