

Foundation Formed To Preserve Lighthouse



ANN MARTIN, wife of the town manager of Bald Head Village, displays the ancient brick press stored inside Old Baldy, that will one day be part of the proposed museum.

STAFF PHOTO BY MARJORIE MEGIVERN

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was equipped with a radio beacon and continued to be a prominent day marker for craft in the Cape Fear River.

Despite her limitations, the old girl guided many ships safely into the river's mouth and now represents the maritime heritage of the region.

With aging and inactivity, however, she has not been cared for. Windows were replaced with ill-fitting ones, allowing inclement weather inside, and missing chunks of plaster exposed the brick to the elements. Decay has set in.

At this point, people like Donna Ray have stepped forward to save Old Baldy. "I'm a landscape architect, and I saw what a beautiful structure it is," Ray said. "I love historical buildings and we need to preserve them."

Ray said the Old Baldy Foundation was formed in 1985 to preserve the lighthouse and the adjacent oil house. Brochures seeking funds for these purposes have been distributed.

An April 2 event will "Relight the Light," as the Coast Guard will throw a switch to reactivate Baldy's light. Next to the lighthouse a black tie dinner will be served to about 200 guests at \$250 per couple, with sounds of the North Carolina Symphony's brass quintet in the background.

This fund-raiser will kick off efforts to raise \$10-20,000 for matching

state and federal grants. "The money will fund study by a rehabilitation architect," Ray explained.

Ray, who is the foundation president, said a future goal is replication of the lighthouse keeper's cottage as a museum. "We already have some items for the museum," she said, "like the document signed by President Thomas Jefferson, authorizing the construction of Old Baldy."

Meanwhile the lighthouse is locked, as its ancient stairs are considered unsafe to climb. The little brick building beside it, where whale oil was once stored for use in the

lamps, is also closed to the public.

But, surrounded by the lush beauty of Bald Head Island, where development creeps at a careful snail's pace, these historic structures are about to have company.

Village manager, Wallace Martin, said a new town hall is to be erected beside them.

That will bring even more traffic to the island's historic attraction, and foundation members hope visitors will soon be climbing to the top once again.

Their aim is to show the grand old lady proper respect with a thorough face lift and a new lease on life.

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