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ROBERT DAVID LION GARDINER FOUNDATION
AWARDS GRANT TO MONTAUK POINT LIGHTHOUSE

Montauk, NY— The Montauk Historical Society (MHS) has announced receipt of a grant of \$390,700 from the Robert David Lion Gardiner Foundation for the restoration of the iconic 225-year-old sandstone and brick Montauk Point Lighthouse.

The lighthouse, commissioned in 1792 by President George Washington, was built in 1796 and has served as an aid to navigation ever since. Citing high maintenance costs, the U. S. Coast Guard considered abandoning the historic structure and replacing it with a skeletal tower and light. Instead, they agreed to sell it to the Montauk Historical Society, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. The Coast Guard still maintains the beacon, visible over 19 nautical miles, but care of the grounds, and maintenance and repair of the buildings, are the sole responsibility of MHS.

“We are able to fund the everyday interior and exterior upkeep of the lighthouse through entry fees, gift-shop sales, and private donations,” said Dick White, MHS Treasurer and Chair of the Lighthouse Committee. “But when substantial restoration work needs to be done, we have to seek other ways to fund it. We are immensely grateful to the Gardiner Foundation for stepping up to help us save this National Historic Landmark.”

Construction professionals on the MHS Board had been monitoring worsening water damage on the exterior and interior of the lighthouse tower, and in 2016 and 2017, they commissioned feasibility and engineering studies to determine the causes and extent of the damage.

“For centuries, the lighthouse has been exposed to the most extreme weather conditions,” said Nick Racanelli, construction expert and MHS Board member. “We found that the lantern and its metal work had begun to deteriorate, allowing water to pour into the cavity between the inner and outer walls of the tower, where it froze and thawed. This led to cracking, bulging and spalling of the historic sandstone, which was aggravated by previous repairs that used hard cement, further weakening the stone.”

The MHS Board made the decision to proceed immediately with a full restoration, before the integrity of the 18th-century tower was compromised. They completed the first phase of work in 2020, repairing the metal work to minimize further water infiltration.

The second phase of work calls for stripping the structure of its many layers of existing coatings, repointing all the joints with lime-putty mortar, and repairing the damaged stone and brickwork.

“Phase Two is the most extensive and expensive phase of the restoration, and this is where the Gardiner Foundation will make a huge difference,” said Racanelli. “Getting a large grant like this allows us to complete these vital repairs, while continuing to keep our museum open and offer our visitors interesting and exciting programming. It makes all the difference.”

“The history of the Montauk Lighthouse as an original welcoming beacon to New York coupled with its striking presence makes an iconic symbol not only of Long Island but of hope and safe harbor to millions,” said Kathryn Curran, Executive Director of the Robert David Lion Gardiner Foundation. “The Robert David Lion Gardiner Foundation's mission is to promote the advancement of our regional history. We are delighted to be working with the Montauk Historical Society on the restoration of this important historic structure.”

Established in 1987, the Robert David Lion Gardiner Foundation primarily supports the study of Long Island history. Robert David Lion Gardiner was, until his death in August 2005, the 16th Lord of the Manor of Gardiner's Island, NY. The Gardiner family and their descendants have owned Gardiner's Island since 1639, obtained as part of a royal grant from King Charles I of England. The Foundation is inspired by Robert David Lion Gardiner's personal passion for New York history. For more information, please visit rdlgardinerfoundation.org.