

# CUP AND **away**

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## The **Photographer's Lens** ISSUE



2024 World Athletics Relay  
**From Paradise  
To Paris**



# A BEACON OF HOPE

The last of its kind restored to its iconic red-and-white grandeur.

By Shavaughn Moss

Photographs Courtesy Of Heather Forde-Prosa, Julie Westmore, Kent LeBoutillier and Annie Potts

It is the last manual, kerosene-fueled, intact, and complete light station on the planet, whose burner has not been electrified, and it is to be found in Hope Town, Elbow Cay, Abaco. This iconic red-and-white striped Elbow Reef Lighthouse, one of the island's most visited attractions, is being restored to its grandeur.

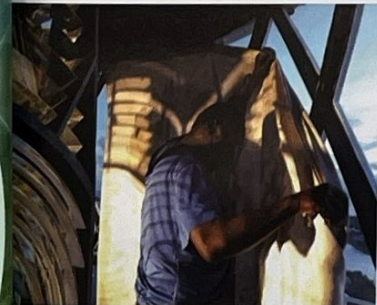
Constructed in 1863, the historic hand-operated, kerosene-burning lighthouse has aided navigation for 160 years.

A lighthouse keeper must climb the red-and-white candy-striped tower that is eighty feet high with 101 steps to the lantern room floor at the top of the tower to light the kerosene-fueled burner by hand. He then has to hand-crank a weight

compounded by the devastating force of Hurricane Dorian in 2019, took a toll on this cultural treasure.

The Elbow Reef Lighthouse Society (ERLS), a Bahamian non-profit organization has been preserving historical elements of this light station, including its grounds, machinery, and parts.

Its goal is to keep the lighthouse hand-wound (manual) and kerosene-burning, preserving an important economic and cultural link to the past. The Society is responsible for ensuring this iconic landmark remains true to its historical past as a fully-functioning, non-automated aid to navigation, remaining true to the period in which it was constructed.



Elbow Cay Lighthouse Restoration  
Photographer Heather Forde-Prosa



Elbow Cay Lighthouse Lenses  
Photographer Heather Forde-Prosa



Elbow Cay Lighthouse Staircase  
Photographer Kent LeBoutillier



Lighting the Flame - Lighthouse  
Keeper Jeffrey Forbes Jr.

system that slowly drops to keep the lantern turning, much like an old grandfather clock.

Kerosene feeds the flame in the old burner, and a massive Fresnel (pronounced "freh-Nell") lens system projects a powerful beam of light visible up to seventeen nautical miles away, helping sea vessels avoid the shallow waters and the vibrant coral reef off Elbow Cay. The Fresnel lens rotates to generate a group of five white flashes every 15 seconds, 12-feet above sea level, to warn mariners away from the Elbow Reef. Kerosene feeds the flame in the burner that generates 325,000-candlepower light.

The light station was a crucial navigational aid, safeguarding crew, and cargo from shipwrecks in both the 1800s and 1900s.

A source of civic pride, the lighthouse connects the past and present. It is a shining example of The Bahamas' maritime history. Normal weathering and wear,

Originally, Elbow Reef Lighthouse was maintained by the Bahamas Lighthouse Preservation Society. This group, together with the Bahamian Government worked to prevent the automation of the Lighthouse and preserve its historical significance. In 2013, this Society was reorganized and renamed Elbow Reef Lighthouse Society.

The Society is the recognized custodian for the Elbow Reef Lighthouse's upkeep and preservation, overseeing all matters of restoration and reconstruction of the light tower, outbuildings, dock, and pier. The Society fosters relationships with artisans and suppliers to utilize best practices when replacing materials no longer in production and replicating manufacturing methods no longer in practice.

The Society worked on the outbuildings after Dorian, mobilizing shortly after the devastating storm, focusing on rebuilding the keepers' quarters, and the dock and reroofing all light station outbuildings.

## A BEACON OF HOPE

In early 2021, the United States Embassy, in Nassau, partnered with the Elbow Reef Lighthouse Society and the Elbow Reef Foundation to restore the landmark. The Elbow Reef Lighthouse Restoration project was made possible by a grant of \$472,000 from the U.S. Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation (AFCP).

Work on the restoration project began in August 2022 on the exterior, starting at the top with outside lantern and metal works restoration – scaffolding was set on the iconic tower, and assessment and repair to the weathervane, canopy, gutters, astragals, walking grates, lantern walls, and hand railings were done. Gutter pipes and water buckets were installed. On the inside, assessment and repairs were made to vents and vent grates, floor grates, staircase, windows, and door handles.

The second phase of the project entailed stripping the lighthouse tower to repair the masonry and painting it. The iconic lighthouse was “denuded” and stripped of its iconic stripes with a non-chemical sand/vapor abrasive blasting technique. Masonry faults were fixed, and the tower pressure washed, primed with paint, and pressure washed with fresh water before the final application of new paint.

The third phase of the project entailed the replacement of the slate floor. New slate floors were fabricated and replaced one section at a time, and rust removal was performed on steel beams to neutralize rust before painting.

The fourth phase of the project, which was anticipated to be completed at the end of 2023, involving the operational system restoration, including making repairs to the kerosene storage tanks and distribution system, aligning the gear weights



Elbow Cay Lighthouse in all its splendor - Photographer Heather Forde-Pros

inside the interior column, and cleaning the inside of the weight tube, assessing lens support system, and completion of the soot and ventilation stack cleaning.

Designed and fabricated by Trinity House – the official authority for lighthouses in England, Wales, the Channel Islands, and Gibraltar – Elbow Reef was one of 11 British Imperial Lighthouses commissioned between 1836 and 1887 to be built as remote outposts in the Bahamas Islands.

In 1973, oversight of the 11 Bahamian lighthouses passed from the British Imperial Lighthouse Service to The Bahamas Port Department. Two had already been decommissioned and between 1973 and 2012, the other lighthouses were automated – except at Elbow Reef and San Salvador. The Society members are the custodians entrusted with the ongoing preservation and restoration of the lighthouse and light station.

The lighthouse and nine outbuildings, including two keepers' quarters are historic buildings – built between 1862 and 1864.

The members of the Society work to ensure that Elbow Reef Light Station continues to be a gift to the world by staying true to its history and original beauty.

The lighthouse is open Monday through Saturday, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. **UA**