

Good morning everyone, and welcome. My name is Amy Frank and I am the executive Director of the Door County Historical Society.

What an incredible day this is.

On behalf of the Door County Historical Society, thank you for joining us as we celebrate the completion of the Eagle Bluff Light Station Restoration and Reconstruction Project. I'd like to take a moment to recognize our local dignitary Joel Kitchens with the Wisconsin State Assembly who is in attendance today. Joel has always been a supporter of the lighthouse and the historical society. Thank you for being here.

Today, we gather at one of the most iconic and historic places in Door County. For more than 150 years, this lighthouse has stood watch over the waters of Green Bay, guiding ships safely through the Strawberry Channel and serving as a symbol of our county's rich maritime heritage.

But Eagle Bluff is more than a lighthouse.

It is a story.

It is the story of the men and women who dedicated their lives to keeping the light burning. It is the story of families who called this place home. It is the story of the mariners who relied on the light to navigate safely through Door County waters. And it is the story of a community that believes its history is worth preserving.

Today, we celebrate not only the completion of a construction project, but the preservation of that story for generations to come.

The story of Eagle Bluff's preservation actually began more than six decades ago. By 1960, the future of the lighthouse was uncertain. No longer needed as a staffed navigational aid, the buildings had deteriorated and there was no clear plan for their future. At the same time, the Door County Historical Society was searching for a meaningful preservation project that would inspire its members and serve the community.

With permission from the State of Wisconsin, the Society embarked on the ambitious task of restoring Eagle Bluff Lighthouse. Led by the remarkable Mrs. Ida Bay, along with a dedicated corps of volunteers, the restoration became a true labor of love.

Over nearly four years, volunteers painstakingly stripped away countless layers of paint, repaired crumbling plaster, researched original furnishings, and carefully assembled period furniture and artifacts to recreate the keeper's home as it would have appeared during its years of operation.

Their work transformed the abandoned lighthouse into one of the first lighthouse museums on the Great Lakes. The entire restoration was accomplished for an estimated \$3,600—an extraordinary achievement fueled almost entirely by volunteer labor, determination, and a shared belief that this piece of Door County's history deserved to be saved.

Since opening the museum in 1964, the Door County Historical Society has proudly managed, maintained, interpreted, and cared for Eagle Bluff Light Station, ensuring that each generation can experience its remarkable story.

Over the past six decades, the Society remained a dedicated steward of this site. Volunteers and staff have welcomed hundreds of thousands of visitors, shared the stories of the lighthouse keepers, maintained the historic buildings, and preserved countless artifacts. As preservation standards evolved and visitor expectations changed, it became increasingly clear that while the original 1960s restoration had saved Eagle Bluff, there was an opportunity to tell its story more completely.

Much of the historic lighthouse complex had disappeared over time, and the remaining buildings required significant preservation work to ensure they would endure for another generation. The challenge was no longer simply to save the lighthouse—**it was to restore the entire historic setting and create an experience that reflected the lives of the families who called Eagle Bluff home.**

That vision led to the next chapter in Eagle Bluff's story.

About 10 years ago, the Door County Historical Society, along with our partners at the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, began discussing how we could better preserve and interpret Eagle Bluff Light Station for future generations.

Together, we embraced an ambitious vision.

We wanted to restore the keeper's residence, tower, oil house, and privy. We wanted to reconstruct the historic barn and summer kitchen that had been lost over time. Most importantly, we wanted visitors to experience this site as it existed during the years when Captain William Duclon, his wife Julia, and their seven sons lived and worked here from 1883 to 1918.

We wanted people to understand that this was not simply a lighthouse.

It was a workplace.

It was a family home.

It was a small, self-contained community perched on the edge of Green Bay.

Today, that vision has become reality.

Visitors can now experience all five buildings that once made up this lighthouse complex. They can walk through spaces that tell the story of daily life, hard work, sacrifice, and service. They can better understand what it meant to maintain a lighthouse before electricity, automation, and modern conveniences.

Most importantly, they can connect with the people who lived here and appreciate the vital role this station played in Door County's history.

Projects like this do not happen by accident.

They happen because people care.

And there are many people we need to thank today.

First and foremost, I would like to thank the 123 friends who donated or granted nearly \$1.7 million to allow this project to be completed.

Historic preservation requires vision, commitment, and investment. Every gift—whether large or small—helped make this project possible. Some of you made financial contributions. Some purchased commemorative pavers. Some sponsored specific elements of the project. Others attended fundraisers, spread the word, or encouraged friends and neighbors to get involved.

Every contribution mattered.

Every contribution helped bring us one step closer to this day.

Because of your generosity, future generations will be able to experience and learn from this remarkable place.

To our grant partners and funding organizations—which includes The David L. & Rita E. Nelson Family Fund, the Non-State Project Grant program from the State of Wisconsin, The Raibrook Foundation, the Dwight & Linda Davis Foundation, the Destination Door County Community Investment Fund, and many more—**thank you** for believing in this project and for recognizing the importance of preserving Wisconsin's maritime heritage. Your support provided critical resources that allowed us to move from vision to reality.

I would also like to extend our deepest appreciation to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and Eric Hyde, Peninsula State Park Superintendent.

Peninsula State Park is one of Wisconsin's most treasured public spaces. While the Door County Historical Society operates and interprets the lighthouse, preserving this historic landmark has always required a strong partnership with the DNR.

From the earliest planning discussions through the completion of construction, the DNR worked alongside us to make this vision possible. They shared our commitment to preserving this important piece of Wisconsin history and supported the restoration and reconstruction efforts every step of the way.

This project demonstrates what can happen when public agencies, nonprofit organizations, private donors, and community volunteers come together around a common goal. The result is far greater than any one organization could have achieved alone.

We are proud of the partnership we have built with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, and we are grateful for their stewardship, collaboration, and continued support of Eagle Bluff Light Station.

I would also like to recognize the architects, engineers, contractors, preservation specialists, craftspeople, and skilled tradespeople who worked on this project. In particular, John Fletcher and National Restoration, Inc., and Mike Laaksonen with Laaksonen Builders and all those who worked with and for them.

Historic preservation is unlike any other type of construction. It requires patience, research, expertise, and an extraordinary attention to detail. Thank you for your dedication to preserving the authenticity and integrity of this site while ensuring that it will continue to serve visitors for decades to come.

And then there are our volunteers.

The Door County Historical Society simply would not exist without volunteers.

Since the initial restoration that saved the lighthouse in 1960, and throughout the subsequent decades, volunteers have cared for Eagle Bluff Light Station. They have painted walls, maintained grounds, led tours, welcomed visitors, raised funds, served on committees, researched history, and shared their passion for this place with thousands of guests.

Many of you will see the finished buildings today and admire the results. What you may not see are the thousands of hours contributed behind the scenes by people who care deeply about preserving Door County's history.

To all of our volunteers, past and present, thank you.

This project belongs to you as much as it belongs to anyone.

Among those volunteers, I would like to recognize our Board of Directors, our dedicated staff, but most importantly, our incredible Eagle Bluff Committee. Their leadership, persistence, and belief in this project carried us through years of planning, fundraising,

decision-making, and construction. I'd like to recognize them each by name. Please stand or wave as I read your name:

- Ann Sheridan, committee chair
- Laurie Baum
- Linda Faust
- Sandy Miller
- Kathy Renderman
- Mary Stephenson
- Deanna Swanson
- Myrv Somerhalder, who passed on last January but is certainly not forgotten

And the Sub-committee within the Committee. There are three gentlemen who have logged thousands of hours EACH, and an unknown number of days at the lighthouse during the past 3 years to ensure the project was completed on time, under budget, and historically accurate. I would ask them to stand so we can acknowledge them but they are, of course, working. But we are recording this, so they can watch it later. Please show your enthusiastic appreciation for:

- Our lighthouse Chief Engineer, Chuck Baum
- Our Light Keeper and photo-journalist, Ed Miller
- Our “whatever you need, I’ll take care of it” guy, John Swanson

These three men - their knowledge, dedication, craftsmanship, and unwavering commitment to excellence helped guide this project from concept to completion. They solved problems, shared expertise, coordinated efforts, and ensured that every detail reflected the quality and authenticity this site deserves.

Chuck, Ed, and John - thank you for everything you have done to help bring this vision to life.

As we celebrate today, it is important to remember why this work matters.

Historic places connect us to those who came before us.

They remind us that history is not something that happened somewhere else. History happened right here. It happened in these buildings. It happened on these grounds. It happened through the lives of ordinary people who did extraordinary things.

When a child visits Eagle Bluff and imagines climbing the tower for the first time, when a family learns about the Duclons and the sacrifices required to keep the light shining, when a visitor gains a deeper appreciation for Door County’s maritime heritage—that is why we do this work.

Preservation is not about buildings.

Preservation is about people.

It is about preserving stories, experiences, traditions, and connections.

As the Door County Historical Society celebrates its 100th anniversary this year, this project stands as a powerful reminder of our mission: to collect, preserve, and share the history of Door County.

The work completed here ensures that Eagle Bluff Light Station will continue educating, inspiring, and welcoming visitors for generations to come.

I invite all of you to spend time exploring the site today. Visit the buildings. Talk with our volunteers. Learn about the restoration project. Reflect on the many people whose efforts made this day possible.

Together, we have preserved something truly special.

Together, we have honored the past.

And together, we have ensured that the story of Eagle Bluff Light Station will continue to shine brightly into the future.

Thank you for your support.

Thank you for your partnership.

And thank you for joining us as we celebrate this historic day.