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MUSEUM RECEIVES GRANT TO MOVE HISTORIC FRESNEL LENS

Edgartown, MA—September 20, 2016 — The Martha’s Vineyard Museum has learned that it is the recipient of a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services’ Museums for America program to move the historic 1854 Fresnel Lens to the new museum at the former Marine Hospital/St. Pierre School of Sport. The grant, totaling \$109,040, includes conservation and reinstallation of the 1,008 prisms that make up the original Gay Head Lighthouse lens.

The 1854 Fresnel Lens is central to the Museum’s mission of inspiring all people to discover, explore, and strengthen their connections to this Island and its diverse heritage. As the Museum prepares to move its central operations to the 1895 Marine Hospital in 2018, the lens’s care and maintenance will remain a top priority. The lens requires conservation treatment to alleviate corrosion, stabilize cracked panels, and replace damaged or missing elements. The entire structure will also receive a thorough cleaning. With the lens installed in the renovated and restored facility, its condition will be more easily monitored and its routine maintenance will be achievable in a way that is not possible at the current Museum campus in Edgartown.

“We are thrilled to receive this grant that allows us to repair, conserve, and move one of the most important objects in the Museum’s collection,” says Executive Director Phil Wallis. “The Fresnel lens will be the centerpiece of the new Museum connecting the 1895 Marine Hospital to a new exhibition wing. For generations to come, Islanders and visitors will be able to enjoy and learn about this beacon that is so significant to Martha’s Vineyard history.”

Ordered by the United States government and built by Henri LePaute of Paris, the lens originally served as a beacon to seamen beginning in 1856. The Fresnel’s hundreds of prisms, arranged in a beehive shape, refracted and reflected light from an oil-burning lamp, directing it into a single beam that could be seen 20 miles away. It was a scientific wonder of its day, the invention of Augustin Fresnel (1788-1827). The Fresnel design became the standard lens in many lighthouses around the world and smaller, fourth-order lenses were installed in four other Martha’s Vineyard lighthouses. After almost a century in the Gay Head Lighthouse, the Museum’s lens was replaced with an electric beacon and moved to its current location in Edgartown. The lens is the largest made and is one of only 39 first-order Fresnels remaining in the United States. With its clockwork, pedestal, chariot assembly, pulley, and weights, it is also one of the most complete.

The Museums for America (MFA) program, part of the Institute of Museum and Library Services, supports projects that strengthen the ability of an individual museum to serve its public. The grant will be matched by the Museum.

Visit www.mvmuseum.org for more information about upcoming programming and exhibits. The Martha's Vineyard Museum inspires all people to discover, explore, and strengthen their connections to this Island and its diverse heritage. The Museum is open year round. Summer hours are Monday-Saturday 10am to 5pm, and Sundays Noon to 5pm. Admission is free to Members; admission for non-Members is \$10 for adults, \$9 for seniors, \$5 for children 6 to 12 and free for children under 6.