

SHINING A LIGHT ON SPLIT ROCK

The Haugen Family

“First you stop at Thompson Hill Rest Stop on Skyline Parkway in Duluth; then you go to Canal Park; then on to Two Harbors, Gooseberry Falls, and finally, Split Rock.”

Like many families, the Haugens have a well-worn route for their annual trip to Minnesota’s North Shore to take in breathtaking views, crisp piney air, and the soothing sounds of Lake Superior. The area has also been a year-round home to six generations of the Haugen family, dating back to Norwegian immigrants in the 1880s. From the grit required of ancestors to withstand punishing winters to more recent memories of fathers skipping rocks on Lake Superior, family stories have been handed down to each generation at the kitchen table.

Proclaimed “the most dangerous piece of water in the world” by novelist James Oliver Curwood in the early twentieth century, Lake Superior is also the stuff of mystery and tragedy. A remarkable storm in 1905, resulting in casualties and damage to 29 ships, was the impetus for the planning and construction of Split Rock Lighthouse, completed in 1910. Under the careful watch of five keepers and nearly 50 assistants since its construction, the lighthouse remained in operation until 1969. The lighthouse was deemed a

historic and scenic landmark in 1971, and responsibility and management of the site was transferred to the Minnesota Historical Society in 1976.

In 1982, Lee Radzak and his wife, Jane, moved to the lighthouse, where he would embark on a 36-year career as site manager and the couple would raise their two children. During his tenure, Lee oversaw the construction of a visitor center on the site in 1986 and developed an expanded interpretive program to provide visitors with more opportunities to learn about the role of the lighthouse, the keepers, and Lake Superior in the region’s history.

In early 2020, members of the Haugen family began exploring options to make a significant investment in MNHS. Through conversations with development office staff and the new site manager, Hayes Scriven, they discussed several options to find the best match for the impact they hoped to make.

Thanks to a generous gift from the Haugen family, a new exhibit gallery will open in the Split Rock Visitor Center in the spring of 2023, named in honor of Lee Radzak and his family. The exhibit will feature artifacts from the MNHS collections, photographs, video, and a full-scale replica of the Fresnel lens that will make this marvel

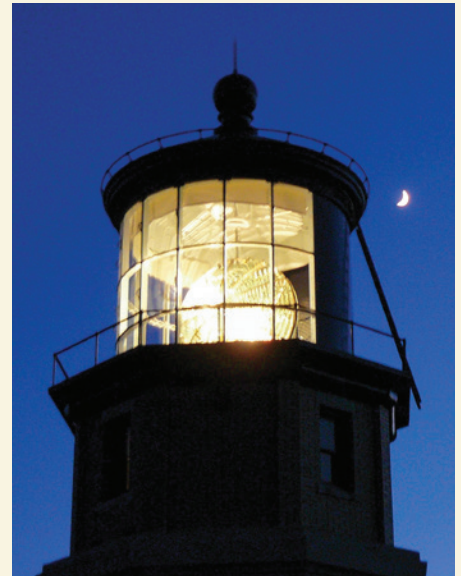


Photo by Lee Radzak, MNHS collections

of engineering accessible to all visitors. The Radzak Family Gallery will present the stories of the people of the North Shore and the frequently harsh conditions that are a part of the lifestyle along the big lake.

The Haugens chose to make their gift so they could witness the new exhibit come to fruition as a family. They will see the impact of their gift, affording thousands of visitors a fuller understanding of this corner of Minnesota and the perseverance of the people who have lived there for generations.



In *The View from Split Rock: A Lighthouse Keeper's Life*, cowritten with Curt Brown, Lee Radzak chronicles his 36 years at the lighthouse. It is available for purchase in the gift shops at the Minnesota History Center and Split Rock Lighthouse, or online at shop.mnhs.org/products/view-split-rock.

A dollar-for-dollar matching donation is currently available for gifts to the Preserve Split Rock Lighthouse Endowment Fund. To learn more about making a gift to MNHS, contact Chief Development Officer Jennifer Payne Pogatchnik at 651-491-5684 or jennifer.pogatchnik@mnhs.org.



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