Reprinted from the U.S. Lighthouse Society's The Keeper's Log – Winter 2000 <www.USLHS.org>

Only Yesterday

Egg Rock, Massachusetts

By George Worthylake



Located in Nahant Bay, of northern Boston Harbor, the Egg Rock Lighthouse became operational on Sept. 15, 1856. The structure consisted of a lantern on the keeper's dwelling. A fixed white light was produced by a 5th order Fresnel lens. The station was a single family station.

In 1897 the structure was destroyed by fire. The replacement structure, constructed the following year, consisted of a 34-foot-high, brick tower attached to a white wooden dwelling. The new characteristic was a fixed red light. Egg Rock was automated in 1919 and the keeper removed. The aid was discontinued in 1922, and in 1927 the buildings were removed and the islet turned into a bird sanctuary. Following are newspaper articles about the demise of the station.

Photo courtesy of Robert Lewis.

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EGG ROCK IS NOW DESOLATE AND UNTENDED
Daily Evening Item, Lynn, Mass.
January 31, 1919

"It gives one a queer, unromantic sort of feeling to look out upon the sightly landmark of Egg Rock on a winter's evening and see the clear white beacon gas light which now shines from the famous rock, untouched by the hand of man. For the long-to-be-pitied, forlorn, lonesome light keeper of Egg Rock is no more. Modern invention has supplanted this heroic figure of the north shore by an automation, in the shape of a huge tank, which quite uncannily, feeds the great beacon light of Lynn, Nahant and Swampscott shores.

"No more sob stories will be written of the dreary life of the Egg Rock light keeper, no more thrilling tales of his stormy voyages back and forth to the mainland will be told, no more adventures of wild winter nights can be cited. The romantic spot, familiar to strolling moonlight lovers of the past 60 years, has reverted to type and is once more nothing but a deserted isle. To be sure, the buildings of this picturesque site still remain, but of what use? Only barred doors and shuttered windows will greet the once heartily welcomed visitor.

"Than Egg Rock there is no more historically disputed site around Lynn. Its name, first of all, has aroused heated discussions as to its origin, although the pretty legend 'that a chicken laid it there and there it has remained ever since,' is generally accepted by the mythically minded. Another point in equal dispute, and still a quandary, is the fact that Salem, of all places, was the owner of the rock previous to its being ceded to the United States government 65 years ago …

"Fact and not fiction tells us that the lighthouse was built on Egg Rock in 1856, and that the first light, whose bright red gleam was familiar until recent years, was duly established on September 15, 1857."

DISMANTLING OLD EGG ROCK
Daily Evening Item, Lynn, Mass.
September 16, 1922

"One week from today Egg Rock will be devoid of the picturesque buildings which adorned this rocky pinnacle for nearly three quarters of a century and warned mariners from the treacherous rocks of the peninsula of Nahant. John Philips Cavanaugh of Milton [MA], purchaser of the keeper's house and the fuel house on the rock, has started operations to remove the buildings to Dorchester Bay. Both buildings will be removed from the rock intact. Workmen have made rapid progress in moving the keeper's house, and it now rests some 50 feet from the original foundation ... Old Egg Rock light tower, a structure some 15 feet square, now stands alone, and is leaning southward toward the broad Atlantic. This tower adjoined the keeper's house at one end.

"The house was jacked up and placed on rollers a few days ago. About 150 feet will bring the house to the edge of the 35-foot embankment of rocks which rises straight toward heaven from the water's surface.

"It is planned by the purchaser to bring a lighter to the rock next week and build a staging level with the embankment. The house will then be moved to the staging and thence lowered to the lighter's deck by powerful jacks. No trouble is expected by the workmen in moving the fuel house.

"The buildings were purchased from the United States Department of Commerce by Mr. Cavanaugh this spring for $160, and will be floated to Dorchester Bay where the keeper's house will be used for a dwelling, and the fuel house turned into a garage. The buildings were sold by the government when Egg Rock, together with a large number of lighthouses, was abandoned. No keeper has lived on the rock for some years, the government having installed an automatic flashing light ..."

EGG ROCK LIGHT KEEPER'S HOUSE SLIDES TO SEA
Daily Evening Item, Lynn, Mass.
October 13, 1922

"Having been brought to the rock in pieces, the famous keeper's house at Egg Rock, which is being removed by its purchaser, John P. Cavanaugh of Milton, is scheduled for removal the same way. Notwithstanding the handling by the skilled crew of building movers, the two and a half story house broke away from a hawser [rope line] used in the moving and slid down the steep sides and hung itself on a point of rock just above the water line Wednesday. Today it hung like a spectre building in such a condition of collapse that the movers believe that the best they can do now is to float it in pieces to the Nahant shore.

"When the building slipped Wednesday, several men employed by Mr. Cavanaugh narrowly escaped injury. When the hawser broke, several of the men were inside the house, but they smashed several windows and jumped to safety. From the shore the roof appears badly twisted, but the workmen have again made the building fast by additional hawsers, so that unless a heavy sea starts, the whole building can be saved, although removed in pieces.

"The house now hangs on a point of rock on the side of Egg Rock facing the Coast Guard station on Nahant."

EGG ROCK BLAZE STARTLES SHORE DWELLERS
Daily Evening Item, Lynn, Mass.
May 12, 1927

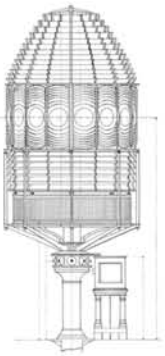
"A spiral of smoke twisting up into the sky from Egg Rock ... at 9 o'clock this morning, aroused an immense amount of interest among householders and traffic along the north shore, especially in Lynn, Swampscott and Nahant, as to what sort of conflagration had developed on the forsaken rugged isle that rears out of the ocean, a far out sentinel of Nahant Bay.

"The rocky island is being restored to a condition that will be true to nature for the benefit of the bird sanctuary, into which the island is being converted as a special state memorial to the late United States Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, the plumed knight of American statesmanship, whose home is on the crown of the bluff at Nahant, looking out over Pulpit Rock at Egg Rock.

"The contractor who has the job of wiping all vestiges of man from the island has six men working there in the clearing off job. They burned today a huge pile of lumber and other refuse gathered in the clean-up job ... they engaged also in blasting off the last traces of the stone lighthouse tower that pointed like a cold white finger into the sky from the topmost ledge point of the rocky isle ..."

For sixty-three years a keeper kept the light burning in the lantern of the Egg Rock Lighthouse in northern Boston Harbor. That steady red light welcomed lobster men and other mariners back to their home port. They steered on the light to a certain point and then fell off to starboard to miss the Nahant reef, thus heading into safe harbor. It was a small harbor light important in its day, and although no longer there, it seems like it was Only Yesterday.

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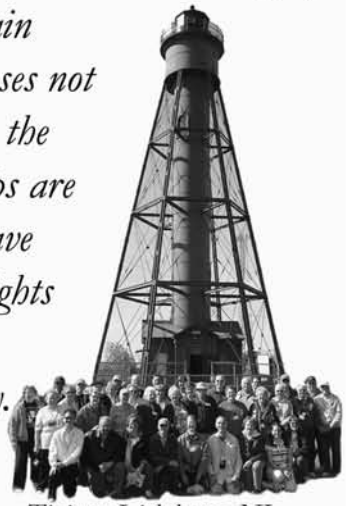
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