Reprinted from the U.S. Lighthouse Society's The Keeper's Log – Fall 1988 <www.USLHS.org>

Less Than Noble Lighthouse Keepers

By Neil E. Hurley

Not all lighthouse Keepers were the heroic, resourceful and dedicated workers you've heard about before. Neglect of duty, drunkenness and conflicts with co-workers were common and often provided the basis for dismissal. These weren't the only problems experience by those tending lighthouses. Here's a sprinkling of reports from National Archives records:

- John Dubose was the Keeper of Cape Florida Light, Florida, during the early 1830's. At one time he was accused of using his negro slave woman to tend the lighthouse while he lived 5 miles away (he claimed conditions at the lighthouse were too harsh). Later, it was reported he had sold lighthouse supplies for profit, defrauded the government and send "verbal messages to insolent and filthy to be repeated" to his boss the local Collector of Customs. He retained his position and was luckily on leave when the lighthouse was destroyed by Indians in 1836.

- Indians also attacked Manitou Island Light, Michigan (on Lake Superior) in 1886. Assistant Keeper Nathanial Fadden was dismissed and jailed when it was found that the attack was a result of Fadden's sale of liquor to the Indians. Fadden may have had company in jail since George McGregor, the acting Keeper of another Michigan lighthouse, (Grand Island Harbor Light) was fired in 1893 for "absences due to jail confinement."

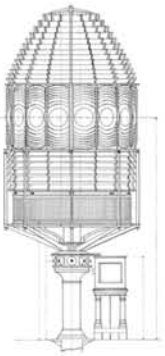
- Sometimes, even being fired for theft and unauthorized absence wasn't enough to disqualify one for a new lighthouse post. Removed from his job of Assistant Keeper, for the above crimes, John Evans (Thimble Shoals Light, Virginia), was rehired at another lighthouse 10 years later. It wasn't too unusual for Assistant Keepers to walk off the job, but it was rare for Head Keepers. Yet it did happen, in 1873, at Brandywine Shoal Light, Delaware, when Keeper Thomas Calhoun was dismissed for leaving the lighthouse unattended.

- Keeper Charles A. Johnson, the Keeper of Fort Pickering Light, Massachusetts, was somewhat more responsible than Calhoun. In 1877, he hired another man to tend the light while he worked as Superintendent of a Reform School. A letter requested his removal.

- Working in often cramped lighthouse quarters in isolated locations led to interpersonal problems that sound like today's soap operas. At Choptank River Light, Maryland, Assistant Keeper Noah Farres was dismissed in 1879 for making "immoral proposals" to the Keeper's wife. First Assistant Keeper John Sandstrom took drastic action (in an attempt to get a promotion?) when he served the Keeper a meal containing broken glass at Tillamook Light, Oregon, in 1894.

- Last but not least, Assistant Keeper James Marner (Piedras Blancas Light, California), resigned in 1896. Soon after, he tried to cancel his resignation. His excuse: he was under the influence of grog at the time.

Join the U.S. Lighthouse Society Today or Give the Gift of Membership!



Restoration & Preservation



Thomas Point Shoal Lighthouse, MD

The U.S. Lighthouse Society has donated to many lighthouse preservation projects throughout the U.S. Most recently we were honored by being presented with the Preserve America Stewardship Award from The White House for our restoration work at Thomas Point Shoal Lighthouse.

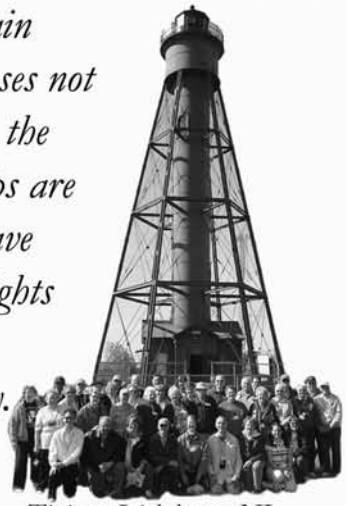
Help Support Our Important Mission!

Education



The Keeper's Log *magazine is the only one of it's kind and has been published quarterly since 1984. Receive this award-winning publication as a benefit of membership.*

The Society organizes domestic and international lighthouse tours. Many of our excursions gain access to lighthouses not normally open to the public. These trips are a great way to have fun, see lots of lights and learn about lighthouse history.



Tinicum Lighthouse, NJ

To learn more visit

www.uslhs.org

or

call Headquarters at

415-362-7255