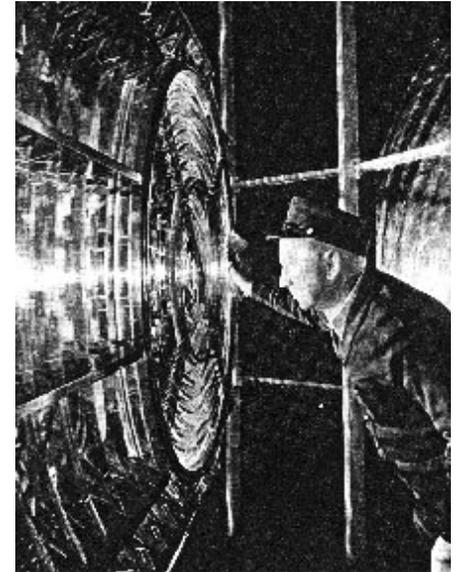


A Keeper's Life

The Light Keepers



We often think of lighthouse keepers as lonely men working in isolated, water-based towers, separated for weeks at a time from friends and family. This was hardly the case at the Twin Lights. Some of the Twin Lights keepers lived here for a decade or more. They raised families and became integral parts of the community. It may not have been a typical home, but we know from photos and written accounts the families left behind that they lived normal, happy lives up here on the hill.

Keeping the lights lit and in good working order required a Principal Keeper, or head, keeper and three assistant keepers. Over the years, more than a dozen Principal Keepers and seventy assistants served at Twin Lights. Their primary duty was to maintain the light from sunset to sunrise. Other duties included trimming the wick,

winding the clockwork mechanism that rotated the light, replenishing the oil supply and later—after the South Tower was electrified—ensuring the machinery in the powerhouse was operating all night long. The keepers also had to maintain the buildings and grounds.

Tough Men, Tough Jobs

At times, a keeper's life was an arduous one. In January 1875, three assistant keepers requested that the night watch be divided into three shifts "...owing to the extreme dampness and cold existing in the Towers." At other times, it could also be a perilous one. In 1883, a keeper accidentally set himself on fire while lighting the South Tower light.

Lighthouse keepers received little formal training. Most of them learned their duties on the job. Many were former sea captains, sailors or military men who were appointed to their positions by the federal government. Yearly salaries were based on experience and rank, and ranged from \$400-\$600 in 1861, to a top salary of \$1000 in 1921.

The keepers and their families lived in quarters specifically designed for this purpose. The Principal and First Assistant Keepers had the most spacious quarters, with four to five rooms each located in the center section of the lighthouse. Indoor plumbing, electric, and central heating were not installed until the 1920s. The other two Assistant Keepers lived in the lower gallery sections to either end of the building, now the Twin Lights Museum and Auditorium. Look up at the ceiling the next time you walk through the Museum and you can see indications of how the rooms were divided.

List of Keepers

Between 1828 and 1952, 17 different men served as Head Keeper at the Twin Lights. Many are still "familiar" to local residents—several streets and businesses within a few minutes of the lighthouse continue to bear their family names.

- 1828—???? Joshua Doty
- ???? —1841 James L. Wilson
- 1841—1844 Joseph Lopez
- 1844—1849 Joseph P. Thompson
- 1849—1853 James D. Hubbard
- 1853—1861 Samuel Mullen
- 1861—1867 Gordon Sickles
- 1867—1869 Joshua C. Conover
- 1869—1872 Taber Chadwick
- 1872—1879 Gorsham Van Allen
- 1879—1888 Daniel P. Caulkins
- 1888—1893 David H. Caulkins
- 1893—1898 Charles E. Thompson
- 1898—1906 Robert A. Bishop
- 1906—1928 Ole Anderson
- 1928—1931 Charles Lucas
- 1931—1952 Murphy Rockett EndFragment