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WINTER IN THE LIGHTHOUSES

Hard Season for the Keepers and Their Families.

LONELIEST STATIONS IN ALASKA

Dangerous Posts on the Great Lakes—Importance of Sticking to the Job—Monotony on Lightships.

This is the time of year when life in a lighthouse is no joke. Even when the house is on the mainland, where the keeper and his family can get around somewhat as ordinary folks do, the winter is a long, hard pull.

In the United States there are about 1,700 lighthouses, built in a large variety of situations, not one of which was chosen with a view to the comfort and social advantages of the occupants. For instance, when it comes to lighthouses long drawn out the eight families who keep the Scotch cap and the Sarshef lights, off the coast of Alaska, are candidates for first prize. There are four of them at each light but they do not see each other for months at a time.

As for seeing anybody else, a passing steamer occasionally lowers a boat and sends them mail. But as the steamer company charges Uncle Sam \$50 every time it does this, the lighthouse folk have to put up with rare visits.

Life on a lightship is even worse than it is in a lighthouse. The house, at any rate, keeps fairly steady, whereas a lightship is never absolutely still, and in stormy weather rolls and wrenches, douses and trenches its crew until they almost go crazy under the strain. The best of them can't stand too long a spell of that sort of thing.

Effect of Five Months' Service.
 The Diamond Shoals lightship, thirteen miles out in the ocean off Cape Hatteras,

of evil memory to mariners, was kept there once for five months, instead of the three prescribed by the regulations. It was No. 71, and was waiting for No. 72 to be completed and to come out and relieve it.

The five months wound up in a mutiny. It started by the captain taking the mate to task because the latter had beguiled the weary hours by playing cards with the sailors. The mate's feelings were sensitized by his months on the lightship and he brooded over the affair. He told the engineer and the latter sympathized.

The two finally wrought themselves to the point of calling upon the captain and informing him that he was getting stuck up and that it made them tired. The captain promptly pulled a revolver and announced his willingness to put them out of their misery, but they got his revolver away from him and practically kept him a prisoner, the sailors taking their side, until the ship was relieved.

When they got back to port every mother's son of them except the mate deserted the ship which had got so on their nerves. They went on a glorious drunk, captains and all, and were arrested and tried. The captain's offense evidently appealed to the department as the more heinous, for he was discharged and the mutiny was not only forgiven for his little mutiny, but was put in command of the ship.

He had shown one trait which is almost the most important in the makeup of a lightkeeper. He had stuck to his job.

Even when the crew were half distracted from the strain of their long duty it did not occur to them to abandon their post. As a matter of fact, only three or four instances have been recorded of American keepers abandoning a light which was in their charge.

Trials on the Great Lakes.
 Probably when it comes to out and out wintry rigors some of the lighthouses on the Great Lakes suffer more even than those on the seacoast. They become coated with thick ice and have also to stand up against onslaughts of cake ice forced up out of the water and driven against them with terrific force. One

lighthouse in Lake Erie had to stand on one occasion against ice which piled up against it to a height of forty feet.

But it is no summer resort in the tower of any lighthouse this winter. No heat is allowed, as that would cause a dimming of the plate glass windows or of the lenses. The heat from the great lamp is carried off by a ventilator overhead, and the turret is so cold that on the New England coast keepers say that a glass of water will quickly freeze solid if set on the window sill.

The big lamps, by the way, are allowed to burn only four hours at a time. If they burn longer there is apt to be vaporization of the gases in the oil, diminishing the brilliancy of the light. So the lamps are changed twice every night. When there is fog or storm a first class lighthouse will keep three men busy all night tending the lights and the engine which keeps the siren whistle going.

Classes of Whistles and Lights.
 These whistles differ from one another, just as the lights do, so that even if a vessel cannot distinguish a light it can determine its position by the whistle. For instance, if one whistle has a note eight seconds in length, coming every half minute, another whistle may have a note five seconds in length, coming every quarter minute. No two whistles within a section where there would be the slightest chance of confusing them are alike where they might be mistaken one for the other.

There are nowadays five different classes of lights: fixed, revolving, flashing, colored and intermittent. There are some combinations of these also which provide still other variations, such as intermittent flashing lights and group flashing lights.

Oil is still the fuel used. Wherever else it may be a back number it keeps its lead over all other lights for steadiness and reliability in signal work.

There are some buoys which are electrically lighted and some which have Pinta lights. There are some lightships which are electrically lighted. But the instability of buoys and ships are the explanation. Lighthouses stick to coal oil.

The cornfield Point lighthouse, which was the first one to carry an electric light, cost \$10,000 a year to maintain. The Sandy Hook lighthouse was the first to show a revolving light. An oil burning lightship will consume 1,000 gallons of oil a year.

In 1902 there were only fifty-four of these lightships. Last year there were ninety-three first class ones alone, averaging 250 tons each. There were 125 vessels in the lighthouse navy.

You have very little idea of the steady, hard work done by the Lighthouse board until you count up the items of what they have accomplished. There are the 1,700 lighthouses and beacons, the 125 ships, about 2,000 post lights on rivers, about 125 electric and gas buoys, about 200 fog signals, 100 whistling buoys, 200 bell buoys and a thousand day or night beacons.

The oldest lighthouse the United States can show is Boston light, on Brewer's island. Boston light, as it is always called in spite of the fact that there are a good many other lights in Boston harbor, dates from 1715. The Massachusetts coast was the first to have a lighthouse, and it still leads in the number it can show. There are several times as many on and off the Massachusetts shore as there are on the whole Pacific coast. This is not a case of partiality. The New England shore is the most dangerous, and owing to the amount of shipping involved, the risks are doubly great.

This is not saying that more protection on the Pacific coast is not needed. On the inland route to Alaska there are only thirty-five lights protecting the entire 1,000 miles. Nineteen of these are along the Canadian coast.

This does not compare very well with Japanese island sea, where there are forty lights covering a distance of 200 miles. The Pacific coast, however, enjoys the distinction of having some of the most famous American lighthouses. The Tillamook light was one of the most difficult problems American engineers ever tackled. It cost \$125,000 to build and is one of the famous achievements in its line.

The pay of lighthouse keepers averages from \$10 to \$1,000 a year. The isolated ones

are supplied with food and fuel, too. As a matter of fact, it often costs more to get these supplies to the lighthouse than the supplies themselves cost.

Men who receive \$100 a year or other small salaries do not have charge of first class lighthouses. They are the men who attend to lighting one of the small beacons, but even in that case they earn their money.

Lighthouse keepers are not allowed to take up any occupation that would interfere with their duties, but some of them manage to turn an honest penny occasionally by making shoes or doing tailoring or other intermittent work.

The wife of one who preached every Sunday at a little church near the light. Another was a justice of the peace. Another taught school.

Several more or less famous men and women have spent a part of their lives at a lighthouse. Collis Thaxter, the poet, was born and brought up in the lighthouse at the Isles of Shoals. Perhaps people who have read her well known account of "My Island Garden" do not know that the government supplies lighthouse keepers with all the seeds they want. In the nature of things some of them want mighty few, but the government encourages all the beautifying possible.

One of the most alleviating features of modern lighthouse existence is the traveling libraries. These collections, numbering about forty volumes each, are provided by a philanthropic organization of women.

They are carried to the lighthouses by the tenders which change the books at any one light about twice a year. At isolated stations these libraries are worth almost their weight in gold during the long winter months.

The summer isn't so bad anywhere. On the northern Atlantic coast things go to the other extreme. Summer folks become a veritable pest at many of the lights. Those which are near the large resorts are made the objective point of hundreds of yachting parties, of launches, of idlers in any kind of a thing that will float.

When these visitors come by scores

every day and must all be taken up to see the light—a very respectable little climb if the tower happens to be a hundred or more feet high—and must all be fed with the same facts—all of them indigestible to the average mind on a summer vacation—and must all peek and peer into the private quarters of the family then the isolation of January doesn't seem to be without its redeeming features.

The wife of a lighthouse keeper has no sinners. One wonders what happens if a man in that position marries an untidy wife. According to the testimony of one woman who lives in a lighthouse the inspector would make short work of a domestic slattern.

"He examines every corner of the house every time he comes," said this woman. "Looks at the windows to see if they have a spot on them, lifts the kitchen drain to see if there's any grease, draws his fingers across the parlor table to find out if there's dust, looks over the traveling library to see if we wash our hands before we touch the books, and as for anything that's made of brass—and you've no idea how many things in a lighthouse are made of brass—if it doesn't shine so that it makes him squint—well, he squints anyhow, but it's out of his other eye, so to speak."

In spite of the loneliness of the life many women seem to like it. Some of them have even stuck to the place after the death of their husbands.

Mrs. Baker, who was the keeper of the house at Robbins Reef, off Tompkinsville, in New York harbor, succeeded her husband there when he died. Mrs. Baker, by the way, had some brave rescues to her credit.

Another woman lighthouse keeper was Ida Lewis, who kept the Lime Rock light at Newport, and who rescued eleven persons from drowning. In one instance a mother and daughter had charge of the same light for over fifty years.

There is an age limit in the lighthouse service. A man is not retired so long as he is able to discharge his duties. If he is forced to resign there is no provision for pensioning him.

The appointments are made under the

civil service rules, men being promoted from grade to grade in accordance with the regulations. Most of the men who go into the service along the coast have been at sea.

One of the least inviting lighthouses as a place of residence is in a Louisiana swamp. The locality is described by the officials as too soft to be land and too thick to be water. The lighthouse is needed for the guidance of vessels in the open water beyond, but its own immediate surroundings are so much like mush that when the keeper wants to get away he has to push his boat through by main force.

If there are any children living at this swamp light, it is a problem just what precautions their mother could take against their falling into the mush. The wife of the keeper at Sabina's point used to put life preservers on her children when they were playing outside, lest they fall through the railing. But there was real water at Sabina's point.

One of the most disastrous storms in its consequences to lighthouses was in September, 1896, when fifty-four were either swept into the sea and lost or were so badly damaged that no light could be shown. Four of the keepers were drowned.

The importance of sticking to the job is shown by the experience of two sets of keepers of small lights in a certain bay. The bay, though it was more a river than a bay, was full of ice, which threatened to carry the lighthouse away. The two men at the light, nevertheless, stuck to their post.

The structure was carried off, was swept down a considerable distance, but finally lodged so that the men could escape. They made things as fast as they could and reported the damage.

The other two men, meanwhile, had figured that no vessel could possibly be out in that particular ice gorge and that the lighthouse itself was in a precarious position. They got out while they could and made their way to safety. They were severely reprimanded for doing so, while the first two named were warmly praised.

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