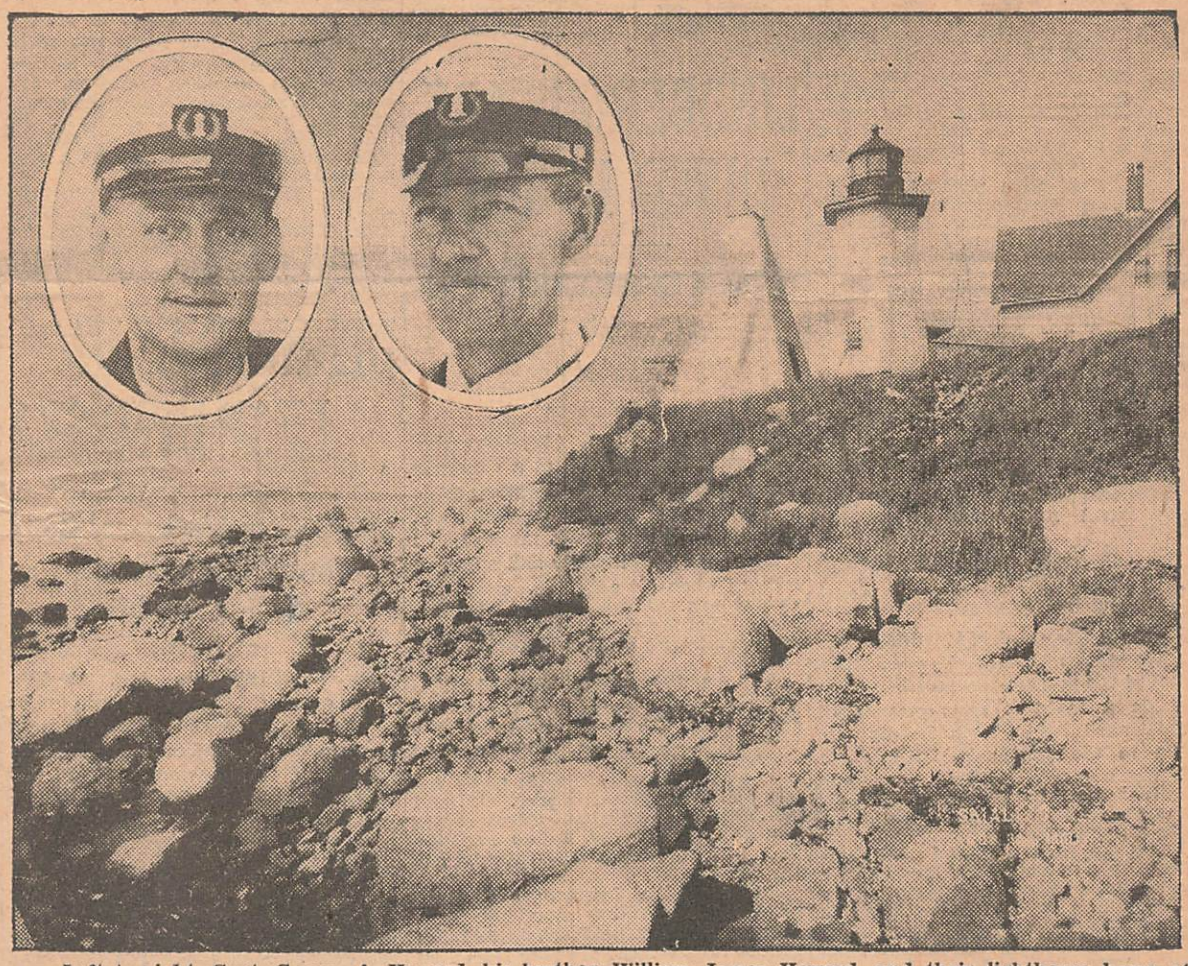
Brave Deeds Win Pocasset Light Keepers Sheaf of Laudatory Letters



Left to right, Capt. George A. Howard, his brother William James Howard, and their lighthouse home at Wing's Neck, Buzzards bay. The pair have many rescues to their credit and a sheaf of letters of commendation for bravery from Washington officials.

Howard Brothers Have Saved Many from Drowning

Capt. George Addison Howard and his brother William (Bill) James, keepers of the Wing's Neck Lighthouse, Pocasset, can each exhibit a sheaf of letters from the department of commerce at Washington that might make the average citizen chesty.

FOR DEEDS OF VALOR

Each of the letters (there were at least a dozen) contained commendation for a brave deed performed at different times by the brothers separately or together.

If men's names were hung up in a Yankee Hall of Fame for acts of valor in hauling half-drowned and nearly-drowned men, women and boys out of the sea, Captain George and Assistant William would be there.

Probably in the record of the Department of Commerce Lighthouse service, no two men together have any record approximating that of the brothers for saving human life.

At Wing's Neck, since Jan. 1, the pair either singly or together, have fished eight half drowned persons out of the

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CREDITED WITH MANY RESCUES

Pocasset Light Keepers Are Commended by Washington

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water. In one case, a life would have undoubtedly been lost had it not been for the experienced first aid knowledge of William and his ability to apply that in resuscitating a man unconscious and half filled with sea water.

Brisk sou'westers fling heavy seas coming from far down the bay—from the broad sweep of the Atlantic ocean in fact, up against the foot of the "Neck" bluff.

CAUGHT IN SHALLOPS

Innocents of summer colonies in different parts of the district in their canoes, shallow boats, are caught unawares a mile, sometimes two or three miles off-shore when the wind from this direction brisks up. In a half hour and sometimes less, the seas become so high that you cannot make out small boats a mile out except when the swells and billows carry them up on their backs. Down in vast water hollows, they are completely lost.

A letter from President Hoover when he was head of the commerce department is among those in William's desk. He will tell you "it just happened that the President was then our secretary. I consider that a first rate letter to have though," he naively commented.

That letter was for hauling a man out of the water on the afternoon of Feb. 24, 1921, at Boston light.

Both served their novitiate, as it were, at other lights. Both are sons of a former captain of the famous Cross Rips lightship out in Vineyard sound. They were not born on board the lightship nor in a lighthouse, but since boyhood they have served mostly in the lighthouse service.

Capt. George, who is keeper in charge, sits close to the edge of the bluff and stares out to sea, giving you a friendly eye now and then. It is smooth on the bay, but at his elbow is a pair of strong lensed binoculars.

"This rescue was Bill's," he explained. "It happened on an evening this summer. Bill heard the men shout across the water after the four, two girls and two young men had tipped over.

TRYING OUT BOAT

"It was pretty rough, you can believe. They were trying out a brand new racing boat and I suppose turning in the sea they hit a broad-backed comber and just flopped over like a duck. But the boat remained upside down.

"One of the girls could swim. She said she couldn't, but when she got into the water she found, she told us, she could—because she had to. They get like that. Pluck! Just pluck! Well, I was away, ashore on an errand connected with the light. Bill heard them shouting. He got his son, Gilbert.

"How they did it we don't know, but one of the men and the other young woman who couldn't swim got to the shore. They both were unconscious. Gilbert telephoned for a doctor. Bill got launched from the shore round where the gale was less stiff, and went out. It was pitch dark. He didn't know where this last young man was drifting. Something told him, he said, to go toward the northwest and he rowed as best he could that way. Then he heard the man shout. Finally he found him clinging to a rubber cushion. It was too rough to try and get him aboard the small boat there, so he got his arms over the stern and pulled him like a log. He kept hanging onto the cushion and refused to let go until the boat scraped the shore and Bill had got him up on the beach.

"Then Bill went into the house where the two unconscious people were and worked over them until both came to."

ANOTHER RESCUE

Nine days later William brought ashore a man and four boys swamped in a small boat off No. 10 channel buoy a mile off the point.

Bill saw them go over; the boys ranged from 12 to 15, and the others watching on the point (it was shortly after noon) saw them get hold of the boat and climb on top. It had blown up within an hour. It was so rough when Bill set out in his small boat that you could only see the marooned group at intervals.

"I didn't dare go too close to that drifting boat," said the brother. "Somehow keeping my oars in the water I got the four boys into the boat. I didn't dare to turn round for fear the boat would go over if hit side-to by one of the seas. I got the man's hands over the bow and backed the boat into the point and round where the water was smoother, so that we could get ashore.

"I wish they wouldn't go off here fishing or cruising in such small craft. If it comes up a quick blow there's sure to be trouble."

The speaker went back to the Hoover letter of commendation.

"I was at Boston light then. The second assistant keeper started away from the light on an errand. A quarter of a mile away he capsized. Then we, the keeper and I, set out to get him in a small boat from the light. We beat the coast guard boat by 10 minutes in getting to him.

William has 26 or 27 rescues of human beings to his credit. He can't be sure which the number is. Prior to coming to Wing's Neck, Capt. George was at Thatcher's Island, at Ipswich Light, at Tarpaulin Cove (Vineyard Sound) and at Duxbury Pier. He has been at Wing's Neck for 11 years.

James was a U. S. Navy man serving in the Far East, then a member of the coast guard at Rockport, finally coming to join his brother six years ago.

Three sons of George plan to enter college this fall.