

Keeper H. M. Cuskley Leaves Fort Point Light



(Portsmouth Herald Photo)
Keeper Henry M. Cuskley wipes the windows for the last time at Fort Point Light. Today he retired after 44 years of service in the United States Lighthouse service.

The steps on the spiral stairway in the little white lighthouse at the mouth of the Piscataqua river will miss the familiar tread of Keeper Henry M. Cuskley tonight. He retired today after 44 years of active duty in the United States Lighthouse service.

The Fort Point light, as it is known to the residents of New Castle, but is on the records in Washington as the Portsmouth Harbor light, has been the Cuskley home for the past 23 years.

Mr. Cuskley came here in 1915 to relieve his father-in-law after serving 19 years in lighthouses along the Maine coast. It was through his father-in-law, Leander White, who was at the Portsmouth harbor light for six years that Mr. Cuskley became interested in the lighthouse service.

His first position as a lighthouse keeper was at Cape Elizabeth, Me., near the Portland Head light. From there he went to Lubby Island, Me., six miles out at sea off Machona. Gradually moving inland he was transferred to the Seguin light which is at the mouth of the Kennebec river, three miles from shore. From Seguin he came to New Castle.

Remembers Oil Lamps

Mr. Cuskley has seen a radical change in illuminating methods in lighthouses. When he first entered the service he said all the houses used to use the incandescent oil vapor lamps and also at that time some of the houses were lit with whale oil lamps.

Now most of the houses use electricity but he said that the light on the Isles of Shoals still uses vapor. The lamp at the Fort Point light which burns green now instead of white was electrified some 15 years ago. Electricity is a distinct advantage over the vapor light for Mr. Cuskley said that he used to have to stand by the lamp for half an hour heating the oil with alcohol before it would vaporize and ignite.

He added that the Portsmouth harbor light has been selected as an interceptor station for airplanes. All planes flying over or near the lighthouse will have to be reported to Mitchell Field, Long Island. While this is not in force yet he expects that the new keeper will have that added to his many duties. Another station on the New England coast near here is the Nubble light at York beach.

While terrific storms never lash the lighthouse in New Castle, Mr. Cuskley enjoys recalling funny incidents that have befallen navigators of the river.

Once there was a submarine trying to cut the tide just a little too much and she grounded on a rock off the light. She had to stay there

for nearly six hours till the high tide lifted her from the reef.

He said that he used to like to watch the high seas pound Whaleback light and recalled the time that the drinking water at the Wood Island Coast Guard station was spoiled by the surf.

The smell of salt air will never leave his nostrils for he has bought a little home in Cranfield street New Castle, overlooking the inner harbor. He moved yesterday afternoon.

Mr. Cuskley has been active in town affairs in New Castle. At present he is chairman of the school board and also chairman of the School union which includes seven towns in the Greater Portsmouth area.

He has one daughter, Mrs. John C. Hall, whose husband is a professor at the Colorado School of Mines in Golden. She is a graduate of Smith college and received her Master's degree at Columbia.

While he does not officially leave the service today Mr. Cuskley begins a furlough which ends Jan. 1 the date of his retirement.