HISTORY OF
BOON ISLAND LIGHT, MAINE

Boon Island, one of the most isolated stations off the Maine coast, has provided some very interesting experiences for the keepers, who have been stationed there since the light was established.

Boon Island, built during the war of 1812, was authorized by James Madison. The tower was constructed of grey granite of a conical design 133 feet above high water. It is called one of the most dangerous outposts on the Maine coast.

Boon Island is a very flat piece of land but it is well surrounded by ledges. The tower appears at times to be springing up from the sea. Especially when low vapor is flying and one can just make out the tower those who were not familiar with the site could easily believe that it rose out of the sea from a submerged ledge.

Many have read the poem, "The Watch of Boon Island," by Celia Thaxter, who was the daughter of a one time lightkeeper at Isle of Shoals.

Miss Thaxter beautifully pictures in her poem the lonely life of the keepers, their home surrounded by the wild waves and seabirds and the wintery winds that blow so fiercely across the frozen foam; the faithful hands that lighted the lamp which sent its warning forth through all the night; the steady beam of that sweet light brought back safely sailors from every land.

Some very interesting stories have been told about this light station during the colonial period in which it was built. A story is told of how the keepers were marooned on the place for several weeks, owing to storms and rough weather. Their supplies were getting low and their minds were dwelling on what they would do if they had to go hungry. They really believed starvation stared them in the face and they began to get melancholy which in time caused them to become crazy. When just on the point of doing away with themselves a boat showed up and they set a signal for help. A bottle was thrown overboard with a note in it telling of their predicament. As the message drifted to leeward it was picked up by the passing vessel. The schooner hove to and anchored to wait until the sea went down. They packed the food nicely in a half barrel used to pack mackeral in. When set afloat it drifted right into a little cove and the first good sea caught it and bounded it well up on the bank, out of the surf's way. The keepers said it seemed as if no better place could have been picked out for it to land. With the going down of the sea, shortly afterward, they were able to go ashore, so one of the keepers put off for the village of York, got supplies, told the neighbors his tragic story, and returned to his station that very day.

In the 1949 Light List Boon Island Lighthouse is described as a gray conical tower connected to a dwelling 137 feet above ground and 133 feet above water, being visible 18 miles. It is located on Boon Island 6.5 miles off the coast of Maine at 43° 07.3' N, 70° 28.6' W. A 70,000 candlepower second order light flashes white.

(LIGHTHOUSES OF THE MAINE COAST by Robert T. Sterling)

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A BOON FOR BOON ISLAND - 1890

Keeper Williams tells a good story of how they dined at Boon Island one Thanksgiving Day in the latter part of the nineteenth century. The holiday was approaching, and as nobody had been ashore for several weeks they had got down very close to nothing in the hearty line. He was standing just inside of the light tower on the evening before Thanksgiving, and wondering what he and the boys were going to have the next day for the repast. Suddenly without any warning he heard a terrific blow struck against the parapet deck. Anxious to find out just what had happened he went outside and there lying on the deck were four pair of black duck dead as a door nail. Thinking that it took more than that to make such a thump, he went around the base of the tower and among the rocks he found four more. They had been attracted by the bright beams of the light and so blinded that they could not see where they were going. The birds were in unusual fine condition and he and the boys had some Thanksgiving dinner, for which they were only to glad to give thanks to the Creator for remembering them at such a time. Those on shore all the time were wondering what the keepers on Boon Island were having for dinner that day and the news did not get circulated until a few days afterward when the lighthouse tender MYRTLE made a call and the story was told and relayed to the keepers' families.

LIGHTHOUSES OF THE MAINE COAST by ROBERT T. STERLING

"FROZEN TO THE THWARTS" - 1897

"But speaking of wrecks," said Captain Williams of Boon Island Light, "while I was on Boon Island I believe the most exciting time I ever had was the rescue of a crew when the schooner GULDHUNTER went ashore. It was the coldest morning I had ever seen at such an early date in December, 1897.

"The thermometer registers four below zero; it was a thick vapor, and blowing a gale of wind from the northwest. The schooner struck on Boon Island Ledge about three miles from the light station. The crew succeeded in getting into their yawl boat and after a six hour row reached the light station at 1:30 in the morning. We were aroused by the barking of the dog. This was the first notification that there was people around the island. We got out our lanterns and climbed down over the icy rocks and made out the little boat just outside the breakers. The castaways were instructed to follow the lights around the rocks to the lee of the island, and then, still guided by the glimmer of the lanterns, watched their chance to run in on the top of a sea. The three keepers, covered with flying spray, grasped the boat rails and the dog at the same time took the painter in his teeth and ran up the rocks. The little craft was hauled beyond the reach of the next sea.

"The crew was frozen to the thwarts and almost helpless. The keepers and their wives had a desperate task for the next few hours to resuscitate the almost lifeless men. One of the sufferers was a negro boy fourteen years old. It was only a few years ago that I met this same boy and shook hands with him. The memory of that terrible night was still fresh in his mind and we had a most interesting conversation about the long ago."

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