BOSTON LIGHT (B)

in Clough's New England Almanack

More than two generations later--in 1701-- the most popular author of the day, with that incidental manner belonging to the almanac maker, asked "whether or no a lighthouse at Alderton's point may not be of great benefit to mariners coming on these coasts?" The suggestion did not bear fruit; for six years later, in 1706, in apprehension of an attack from the French fleet then cruising in the West Indies, it was proposed to place a beacon here and at other points--still to give warning of any ship which might be "thought to be enemy." The emergency passed before action was taken, and the harbor remained in darkness, as before.

As a possible source of profit some Boston merchants, John George and associates, petitioned for permission to erect a lighthouse and lanthorn on some headland at the entrance of the harbor of Boston. A survey by a committee of the General Court and several of the most experienced masters of ships of Boston and Charlestown selected the southernmost part of the Great Brewster, called Beacon Island, as the most proper location. The report was accepted, a duty of tonnage upon shipping to be laid for encouraging the undertaker. The town of Boston coquetted with the matter "in order to an income." but fortunately it was the Province which constructed the light house, and private has never superseded Government ownership. Out

This action finally resulted in the passage of a bill July 23, 1715, entitled "An Act for Building and Maintaining a Lighthouse upon the Great Brewster called Beacon Island at the Entrance of the Harbor of Boston" at the charge of the Province, and £ 500 was

appropriated toward its construction and the purchase of the site, the town of Hull being the owners of the Brewsters. At a meeting of the owners held on August 1, 1715, they generously granted the site, the said Beacon Island, to the Province of Massachusetts for the use of a lighthouse forever, the grantors to be kept harmless.

On December 20, 1715, the court granted a further £ 500 toward the project and appointed two overseers to look after the work, which was carried out and the light placed in commission on Friday, September 14, 1716, old style, at a total cost of £2,385 17s. 8d.

The dimensions of the original tower, which is reported to have been the first lighthouse erected in this country, are not known; but the structure seems to have been built of stone.

~~with England.~~ September 14, 1716, the lanthorn was first lighted.

The first keeper was George Worthylake, who was drowned November 3, 1718. In July, 1719, the keeper petitioned the General Court for a gallery to be built on the seaward side of the lighthouse in order that he might keep the glass clear of ice and snow in wintertime and for a "great gun" to answer ships in a fog.

On January 13, 1720, a fire occurred in the lantern and upper part of the tower, but the repairs were completed and the lights were burning again on February 17. 1720.

Additional repairs were made in 1726 to the station, and as a result of a report made by a committee appointed in June, 1734, the tower was extensively repaired and incased in wood. In 1738 and again in 1749 the structure was painted white. In 1751 another fire occurred which nearly destroyed the structure, but it was

repaired in a manner similar to that of 1734, and the lantern which was formerly of wood was reconstructed in metal. In 1773 repairs were about to be made again, when the Revolution occurred.

In June, 1774, the British occupied Boston and the light passed into their hands. On July 20 and again on July 31 the Americans dismantled the station and burned the wooden parts of the tower and buildings. In June, 1776, the British, upon evacuating Boston, landed at the light station and blew up the tower, and subsequently the "old top of the lighthouse" (probably metal work of the lantern) was used by the Americans "to supply the cannon with ladles."

The reestablishment of the station, which brought about the reconstruction of the present tower, was the result of a memorial addressed in June, 1783, to the Senate and House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and the passage of an act in July, 1783, directing that it be built as soon as possible on the island where the old lighthouse stood and to be nearly of the same dimensions. It seems to have gone into commission that year, as the pay of the keeper began December 5, 1783. The tower is of stone, conical in shape, and at the time it was rebuilt was 75 feet high, including the octagonal lantern. Actually rebuilt

By the act of August 7, 1789, the United States took over the maintenance of the lighthouses, and on June 10, 1790, Boston Light was ceded by Massachusetts to the United States.

The type of illumination of the original light is a matter of

some speculation. Lamps apparently were in use in 1720. Improvements seem to have been made from time to time, but complaints about its efficiency are of record between 1789 and 1804. New illuminating apparatus or repairs thereto are mentioned in 1811, 1828, 1839, 1849, and 1856. Fourteen lamps were in use in the lantern in 1839, and this number seems to have continued in use up to December 20, 1859, when a second-order Fresnel lens was installed and the same is in commision today. Fish oil as the illuminatnt seems to have been in use in the lighthouse prior to 1812, then sperm oil came into use and so continued to about 1867. Lard oil was used until 1882, then kerosene was adopted and continued in use up to the presant time, the wick lamp in the lens being replaced by an incandescent oil-vapor lamp in 1913.

As already mentioned, the original fog signal put into use at this atation was a cannon. Early in 1851 a fog bell was placed in commission. This continued in use until 1869 when the machinery was replaced by a more modern apparatus. A reed trumpet, using compressed air, was placed in commission in 1872 and was followed by a steam siren in 1887, which has continued in use to the present time.

The record of the second tower from the date of its erection to 1859, contains many items of repairs. A new lantern was installed in 1839. The station was completely renovated in 1859, the tower was raised and lined with brick, the new lens installed, as mentioned above, and a new keeper's dwelling constructed. In 1886 a large bulge in the outer ring of rubble masonry was removed. Since then

many repairs and improvements, some quite extensive, have been made to various buildings, wharf, etc.

The present light is flashing white every 30 seconds, of 100,000 estimated candlepower, 102 feet above high water, and visible 16 miles in clear weather, while the fog signal sounds a double blast of 5 seconds each every minute.

The names of the keepers who have cared for the light from 1716 to date are as follows:

KEEPERS AT THE BOSTON LIGHTHOUSE

George Worthylake 1716
Robert Saunders 1718
John Hayes 1718
Robert Ball 1733
William Munns 1774
Thomas Knox 1783
Johnathan Brace 1811
David Tower 1833
Joshua Snow 1844
Tobias Cook 1844
William Long 1849
Zebedee Small 1851
Hugh Douglass 1853
Moses Bartlett 1856
Charles Blair 1862
Thomas Bates 1864
Alfred Williams 1893
Albert M Horte 1893
Henry Pingree 1894
Levi Clarke 1904
George Kezer 1911 ********** ----Mills Gundersen 1911
Charles H Jennings 1916
Lelan Hart 1919
Maurice A Babcock (last Civilian)
Ralph C Norwood 1941
Franklin A Goodwin 1941
Jules Di Furia 1945
Eldon W Beal 1946
Leo F Gracie 1946
Stanley Batt 1948
Joseph F Lavigne 1948 3/1952 EAW
John D Hall 1950
Robert C. Merchant 1950
Clinton M Davis 1951
Roy O Beard 1951 (now Serving)