HISTORY OF
BAKER ISLAND, MAINE
LIGHTSTATION

Baker Island Light Station was first established in 1828. The Act of March 3, 1823, provided that the Secretary of the Treasury be empowered to contract for its construction. An initial appropriation of $2,500 was made and this amount was later supplemented with appropriations totaling $5,100. The cost of completing the original structure was $3,798.26.

The title to Baker Island was deeded to the Federal Government on December 28, 1827 by the trustees of the estate of William Bingham of Philadelphia. The consideration was $300. The land area was 123 acres and 75 rods.

The first keeper of Baker Island was William Gilley, who received his appointment June 12, 1828. Gilley was a resident on Baker Island for some 17 years prior to the purchase of the island by the Government. He served as keeper for 21 years and was removed on July 28, 1849, at which time he left the island. His sons, however, remained on the island and in time came to be a source of irritation to the keepers that followed the elder Gilley.

The first record, dated December 10, 1853, on file in the controversey that was to span more than half a century is from W. B. Franklin, a Light House Inspector in the First District. It describes the disagreement as follows:

> "It has become necessary for me to call the attention of the Board to the fact that Baker's Island in this state which is owned by the United States as a light house site is now occupied by two men named Gilley, and that the light house keeper is almost debarred from the use of the land, and from free access to his landing place, and that quarrels are continually taking place between him and these men. Each one of them has a house on the island and lately a third family has moved there. They allow cattle to graze there, and receive money for the use of the land

which the light keeper is entitled to if any one is. They have been ordered to leave repeatedly but have always refused to go threatening to use force, and are very abusive."

Franklin closed his letter to the Board with the recommendation that the Gilley brothers be ejected. He also suggested that a Revenue cutter might be required to "have the business thoroughly done."

On December 27, 1853 the Secretary of the Treasury directed that legal steps be taken to eject the trespassers. About May 1, 1853 the District Attorney reported that the squatters would contest the title and asked for original or certified copies of the deed of conveyance and correspondence at the time the land was purchased. The Board sent copies of the deeds of conveyance and cession on May 6, 1854.

On September 15, 1854 the District Attorney reported that there would be difficulty in securing evidence to prove the United States title, owing to the death or great age of witnesses, the question hinged upon possession having been taken about 1806. He suggested a survey and marking boundaries with a view to a possible compromise. An agreement, made with Elisha and Joseph Gilley, provided that the Government shall have the right of way from the landing on the island and the road leading to the lighthouse. The agreement also provided for the use of pasturage for the keeper and set aside an area of about 19 acres for the lighthouse.

It was not until 1896 that the matter of alleged trespass of the Gilley brothers came up again. In March, 1898 the U. S. Attorney at Portland wrote to the Attorney General and concluded that the Government had title only to that part of the island upon which the lighthouse was built and had waived its title to all that part of the island not embraced by the disclaimer given by the Gilleys in 1855. He felt that it would be "unfair and oppressive at this late day to assert the paramount title of the Government as against the few poor and hardy fishermen living there; and if the United States has and intends to allow them

peaceable possession of these scanty and sterile lands, I can see no earthly objection to allowing the town of Cranberry Isles to build a school house for the proper education of their youth. This school house is not built upon what is known there as the Government reservation....."

The Government decided in 1909 to clearly and finally settle the matter of its rights on the island. On May 26, 1909 the United States Circuit Court District of Maine, found that the Government was entitled to the possession thereof as tenant of the freehold; and "as such owner is entitled without let or hindrance to have and enjoy the right of way and passage from the landing on said Island used for boats and landing, to the Lighthouse and buildings of said United States, as the same was laid out as a Town way and used and traveled on said 29th day of September, 1855 (the date of the original agreement)." The conclusions of the court provided that the boathouse site and landing would forever remain open and used in common for landing purposes by the Government and all other persons who may have an interest in the island.

In 1855 an appropriation of $5,000 was authorized for the rebuilding of the lighthouse. All but $36.93 of the appropriation was spent. In the 1855 Annual Report it was stated that the rebuilding was completed and that a fourth-order lens, showing a fixed light, varied by flashes" was to be installed.

According to the 1953 Light List, Baker Island Light is fixed and flashing white, with candle power of 4,000 and 25,000 respectively; 105 feet above the water and visible 16 miles. The structure is a white tower.

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