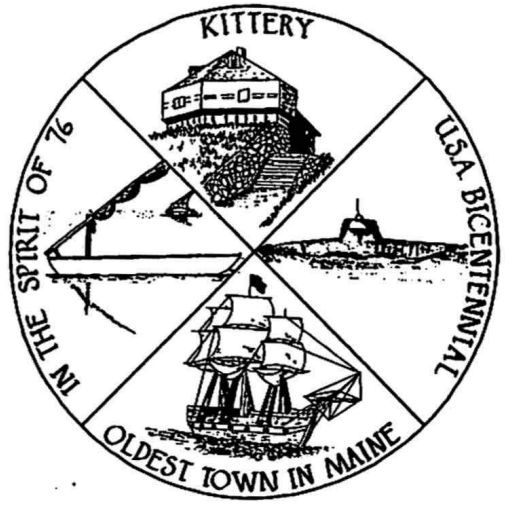
Kittery Kaleidoscope



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DOES NOT CIRCULATE

LIGHT KEEPERS

WILLIAM CONVERSE WILLIAMS (June 3, 1845-April 27, 1938) When on September 1, 1911 Captain Williams resigned his post at Boon Island, he had served 26 years, 6 days, the longest recorded time for a lighthouse keeper.

At 18 he started to work on the Navy Yard in construction under foreman William Leach of Kittery, then in engineering under Marlin Bickford of Newcastle. He was working at Fort McClary with Captain Albert Wilson of Kittery Point when Lincoln was assinated.

On March 21, 1876 he helped fellow townspeople form a human chain to bring ashore the few survivors of the *Hattie Eaton*. She "struck on Jordan Point, a reef of rocks which makes out from a point of land located on the old Gerrish Farm."

Charlie, his son, remembered the father, "He was a tall, sparse man, dignified, and a refined gentleman of the old school. He had a soft, low voice, and his language was marvelous with none of the bluster of the average toiler of the sea."

CHARLES SAMUEL WILLIAMS (January 19, 1874-March 4, 1974) Charlie was twelve years old when on August 5, 1886, his father Willie Williams took the position as assistant keeper at Boon for a salary of $450. a year. Living on the island, ten miles out from York, was the end of his schooling, though Alfred Levitt, lighthouse keeper and one-time school teacher from Hampton, tried to continue Charlie's education.

The boy was seventeen, weighed 175 pounds, and knew what a hard day's work was when he left the island to take a job aboard a large fishing vessel. He fished out of a two-man dory, which carried about four miles of line and 4,500 hooks.

After several years fishing, "I went before the mast-coal colliers along the coast, working for $13. a month and board. I was a tough bird in those days." When twenty-one, he was second mate on the *Annie F. Conlan*, and a year later was mate of the same vessel. "Only a scrap of a kid, but I thought I was quite a man."

Soon after, he returned to Boon Island Light as assistant keeper, with his bride, Susannah Whittaker, of Fall River. They lived there for ten years, until their two children were school age. Charlie vowed his children would have the education he missed. He went to work on the Navy Yard. Susannah died many years ago, and Charlie married Myrtle Doyle of Wakefield, New Hampshire. When he died, the centenarian of the town, they lived in a neat, white cottage on Gerrish Island in Kittery Point.

Yvonne Brault Smith

"Guardians of both Sea and Land, on rockbound Cape or beside tidal riverbank, the Lighthouse and the Garrison Fort each filled a desperate need, protecting from unruly enemy—whether of the Great Deep or the hostile savage."

Charles Penrose
from a Newcomen Address
at the Navy Shipyard, 1947

From the Report of the Fire Department, Town Record 1924

. . . The department has answered two out of town alarms this year, one in South Eliot and one at York Beach.

The most serious fire was that of Roberts & Grace Garage on Jones Avenue, which threatened to wipe out the business section. The hose truck from the Foreside broke down going to the fire making it necessary to call help from the Navy Yard, Kittery Point and Portsmouth, N.H.

. . . The siren alarm at the Foreside should have a brake applied to it so to be able to ring in box numbers, so people can easily count the alarm.

The fire house at the Point should have heat to keep the chemical tank and the whistle apparatus from freezing.

Leo J. Flynn,
Fire Ward