**The Cuckolds Lighthouse and its Legacy**
By James D. Roche

A seven-acre piece of granite marks the entrance to a busy harbor, where the winds are blowing 40 knots and the temperature hovers just above freezing. A keeper and his assistant walk around the light, checking the oil levels and preparing the lamps for a long winter's night. After their duties with the light are completed, they look through the house. They check the doors and windows for a tight fit and peer out into the stormy night, looking for a ship in distress or anything loose about the tiny island lighthouse. While they look out into a fierce winter storm they notice the waves crashing against their warm sanctuary located a quarter mile from the nearest piece of land. This tiny lighthouse was the only thing between the two men, their families and the Sea.

The Cuckolds legacy started in 1874 when the U.S. Congress approved funding for a structure to be built on a small piece of granite just off Cape Newagen, Maine. The Cuckolds Ledge was wreaking havoc with the booming fishing industry and merchant vessels coming to this newest seaport called Boothbay Harbor. Ships and fishing vessels of all sizes started to pile up on this set of rocks marking the approach to the harbor. The first answer to the problem was a 57-foot day marker, but this was only good for the daylight hours. At night and during snowstorms the marker was invisible. Again the townspeople and mariners went to Congress and the U.S. Lighthouse Service for help.

Twelve years after the tripod day marker was built, a bell buoy was placed off the Cuckolds Ledge. This served the purpose until the winter months when the sea began to run its fury covering the Cuckolds Ledge, making transit to Boothbay Harbor very dangerous. Fog and flat calm seas posed as much danger as the raging seas. In the fog and with a still sea, the bell did not sound. By the time the mariner sighted the buoy it was too late and the vessel was set upon the ledge. In rough weather the roaring waves crashing on the tiny island not only covered the entire ledge, but also drowned out the sounds of the bell buoy. At night even a skilled native of Boothbay Harbor had a slim chance of missing these dangerous rocks.

In 1891 Congress once again approved funding to make the approaches to Boothbay Harbor safer. A fog signal station was to be built on the eastern island of the Cuckolds Ledge at a cost of $25,000. The Cuckolds presented a problem: how to build

a structure sturdy enough to withstand the waveswept environment. Builders, architects and the U.S. Lighthouse Service got together and went to the drawing boards. The Cuckolds would be a one of a kind structure never built before and would change the way building experts think. Imagination was the key to success on this project.

Maine's coastal climate only afforded construction engineers a few months to work at the Cuckolds. The delivery of construction supplies and workers to the island depended mostly on the sea conditions. If wave heights were over two feet, landing anything on the island was nearly impossible. In April of 1892 the first building materials were brought out to the island and work began on the Cuckolds Fog Signal Station. U.S. Lighthouse Service vessels and personnel brought equipment and supplies to the island throughout the summer and early fall months. The Cuckolds Fog Signal Station was completed in November, just in time for the station's first keeper and assistant keeper to take over.

This fog signal station served the mariners of Boothbay Harbor well. It served not only as a beneficial signal during periods of bad weather and fog, but due to its large size it also served as a day marker. The only problem associated with the station was that it was a poor marker at night. The light from the keeper's dwelling was not enough for vessels to see until they were very close to the island.

After 15 years of maintaining a fog signal only, the U.S. Lighthouse Service built a light tower on the fog signal building in 1907. This ended one chapter and began another in the Cuckolds legacy. This again changed the way a lighthouse was built. With the tower in place, the heart of the lighthouse was now installed -- a rare American-made fourth order lens. The Macbeth Evans Glass Company, later known as the Pittsburgh Glass Company, constructed the Fresnel-type lens number 493.

The Cuckolds Light Station entered the list of seacoast lights of the United States, and it was also one of the last Maine lighthouses to be built. The Cuckolds Light Station saw little change over the years except for advances in technology. The use of oil lamps was the mainstay of lighthouse technology for many years, until electricity reached the island. The Lighthouse Service was merged with the United States Coast Guard in 1939, and steam engines were replaced by the gasoline engine.

Keepers would come and go, mostly because of the harsh environment the Cuckolds Light Station presented. The Coast Guard sent many families to the island for a tour of duty. Pride in the light never faltered from family to family. Each person spending time on the Cuckolds brought their own way of doing things and also preserved a great heritage. They also joined a very special group, which today has gone by the wayside with the invention of automation. That special group consists of those who have served as one of America's Keeper of the Light.

Today the Cuckolds Lighthouse stands as a reminder of the rich heritage of the families who once inhabited the island. The keeper's house and boathouse were torn down in 1980. The light tower, fog signal building and helicopter pad still stand as a beacon to Boothbay Harbor.