No Child Left Behind

By Gordon Corbett

Comments?



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Maine's Little River Island Lighthouse where the ...

Whenever I get the opportunity to docent at Maine's Spring Point Ledge Lighthouse I look forward to the variety of visitors I will meet that day. They come from all over the world and their reasons for being there are many. For some it is the curiosity of what this "sparkplug" shaped lighthouse is really like inside. Some come because they love lighthouses . . . any lighthouse and their goal is to visit as many as they can. For certain others it is a trip back in time to their own family's lighthouse history and a connection to an interesting and somewhat romantic past. Some including myself, come for all of the above reasons.



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This old newspaper clipping shows Rickie ...

My favorite position when I am on duty is at the base of the ladder on the breakwater granite. This is where I am ready to great each new visitor and where I have a fleeting chance to get to know a little bit about them and share my own lighthouse connections and history. As a retired educator I still love the opportunity to teach.



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Russell and Barbara Ahlgren and their child Chris ...

My grandfather was Willie W. Corbett and he was a lighthouse keeper for nearly 37 years. His first posting was on Saddleback Ledge Lighthouse. A remote Maine island station, where he spent six years, followed by Maine's Monhegan Island Lighthouse where he was 2nd assistant keeper for six more. Then it was on to Southern Island as head lighthouse keeper at Tenants Harbor Lighthouse for three years and finally on to Little River Light Station in Cutler Harbor, Maine, where he spent the last twenty one years of his long lighthouse career as head keeper.



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Myron Corbett, (1913-1987) is shown here in 1954 ...

With the exception of Saddleback Ledge (a 'stag" station) he had his family with him. The posting to Monhegan was a wonderful opportunity to have his family with him. Monhegan and each station forward would see the Corbett family grow to include eight children and they all had to be educated. On Monhegan this was no problem as the one room schoolhouse with its resident teacher did quite well by the island children.

However, Southern Island and Little River were different stories. The only inhabitants on these two



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Horseback, three at a time, was the way these ...

small islands were the keeper and his family. Going to school meant a boat ride every morning and afternoon when "papa" would ferry them over to the mainland and back. A lunch would be packed for each child consisting of a piece of fish, a cold potato and maybe a molasses cookie or Johnny bread. Water was dipped out of the well bucket to wash it all down.

Weather, of course, was a factor. There were days when it was too rough to row the children to school or days when it was too rough to pick them up. Arrangements for the latter situation were already taken care of when the children would stay with assigned families on shore. There were many rough crossings as well, causing the children to huddle down in the cuddy of the station boat as Papa handled the oars. Wind and waves would batter the small boat as it was maneuvered by my grandfather towards the landing in the harbor or back on the island. There was never a mishap but there were close calls. In the 1920's a writer who was writing a book about lighthouse families visited Little River Lighthouse. When he saw the mile or so that Papa had to ferry the children to school and knowing full well what the sea could offer up for weather he was curious as to their thoughts about it.

"Are you ever scared when there is a storm and you have to make a rough crossing?: he asked. Florence, the second born, spoke for the group, "No! Not when Papa is rowing the boat." They had complete confidence in my grandfather's ability to deliver them safely and he did. No child was left behind.

On Maine's Nubble Lighthouse in York during the period that keeper David Winchester was stationed there with his family he too, had to get his children to the mainland for their schooling. During one rough and wet crossing his son Richard, at about age seven, was nearly flipped completely out of the boat. With quick work and seamanship, "Ricky" was snatched right up and made it to school, a little shaken with dampened clothes and spirits. From that day forward young Ricky was not too keen to go in the boat especially when the sea was unsettled. The problem was solved when Keeper Winchester rigged up a breeches buoy type rig to transport both Ricky and his younger sister Robyn from the island to the mainland. A box had been previously built to run on a pulley system to carry supplies out

to the island and return. The sturdy box built of wood was large enough to accommodate the children. The box was attached to a strong pulley system much like a clothesline set up. The 200 plus yards traveled each way was challenging, but very doable with this contraption and Yankee ingenuity. Ricky and Robyn got to school high and dry. Again, "No child was left behind."

Every remote family light station faced similar problems with getting the children to and from school. However, some of the larger light stations had the privilege of having a one room school house where the children could be taught by a traveling school teacher or other adults. Others had the luxury of being on a populated island where education was available, but that was certainly not the norm at most remote lighthouses.

In some instances a keeper at a remote family station would hire a teacher to come and live with the family and in other cases the children were boarded on the mainland during the school season and returned home only on the weekends, weather permitting. Even many mainland based light stations had problems getting the children to school, especially those located in remote areas far from any community where travel to school could mean a great distance, something that was extremely difficult in the days before the automobile or decent roads. But again, one way or another, "No child was left behind."

I wonder if President Bush's "No Child Left Behind" initiative will ever match the commitment and success of lighthouse keepers Corbett, Winchester and others who overcame many obstacles so their children would get a proper education?

Finally I would like to report that all the children in the Corbett and Winchester families did get their education. My father, Myron Corbett, was, one of those children.

What a wonderful chapter in lighthouse lore and history.