Historic Wood Island Lighthouse Is Marking 150th Anniversary

This year marks the 150th anniversary of the building of the Wood Island lighthouse, located on Wood Island, a mile off Biddeford Pool, at the southern end of Saco bay.

The eastern third of the island was originally purchased by the U. S. Government in 1806, and the first buildings, including the light, were erected in 1808. The light was renovated in 1858.

At the time of the purchase Maine was not yet a state, and a copy of the original deed describes the island as being in "Biddeford, in the County of York, and Commonwealth of Massachusetts."

The island is about a mile long and a half a mile wide. The lighthouse and adjoining buildings are situated on a nine acre plot at the outermost end, while the remaining 20 acres are privately owned.

The boathouse and landing are located at the inland end of the island, and are connected with the lighthouse by a wooden boardwalk which is estimated to be eight tenths of a mile long. It is about a ten-minute walk from one end of the island to the other.

Unusual Granite

The lighthouse tower is of very unusual granite construction, partciularly the circular stone staircase leading to the top. It is completely without center support, and is laid, stone on stone, supporting itself from the massive outside wall.

The base of the tower is about 27 feet above sea level, while the light atop the tower is about 75 feet above the water line. Exactly 50 stone steps lead to the top.

Only recently the brilliance of the lighthouse was increased from about 120,000 to 170,000 candlepower by the installation of electric lighting. The light operates on a sequence of three flashes every 60 seconds and is visible about 16 miles out to sea in clear weather.

The light is illumined by a common 500-watt bulb, which operates from regular 110-volt house current. The beam is focused through a set of three lenses, which are are rotated around the bulb by a hand-wound clockwork mechanism. The lenses must be covered with a canvas during the day to prevent the rays of the sun from starting a fire.

Prior to the installation of electricity, about three months ago, the lighthouse was illumined by a kerosene mantle lamp which had to be lighted by hand and filled daily.

Should the present light burn out in the night, an automatic alarm sounds to wake the keeper, but all other controls on the light and generating units are operated manually, which means that someone must still be on hand most of the time to keep the light in operation.

Currently manning the lighthouse are David A. Katon, BM3, U. S. Coast Guard, and his wife, Clair, who is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Rudolphe Girouard, 23 Adams street.

Married In April

The couple met locally while Katon was stationed at the Fletcher's Neck lifeboat station, where he served a year and a half before being assigned to the lighthouse last July. The couple was married last April. Katon is originally from Dover-Foxcroft and attended schools in Augusta before his enlistment.

The Katons enjoy all the comforts of a home on the mainland. They live in a spacious, nine-room house which is completely furnished by the government and heated by a coal-burning steam furnace in the basement.

They have a television set and say the reception is better than in town. They are connected with the mainland by telephone, with extensions located at the house and at the boat landing.

The sturdy, steel-covered telephone cable to the mainland can be seen at low tide near the boat landing. Overhead wires lead from there to the house.

Life is never dull on the island, according to the Katons, who say there is always something to be done. Mrs. Katon said that she was so busy last summer that she didn't even have a chance to acquire a suntan. Katon painted the house as a part of his duties.

Both Mr. and Mrs Katon are enthusiastic in their liking for the isolated life on the island.

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Spaceman Facing One More Weary Day In Steel Barrel

SAN ANTONIO, Tex. (AP) — Airman Donald G. Farrell today faced only one more weary, lonesome day and night in the sealed steel barrel where he is trying to prove that man can survive space travel.

Despite his growing signs of "real fatigue", space scientists at nearby Randolph Air Force Base were confident the 23-year-old native of The Bronx would finish his seven-day stint at 9:35 a.m. (CST) Sunday.

International recognition and glowing praise from Air Force military and scientific leaders await the blond, 6-foot volunteer if he successfully sweats out the last long 24 hours.

"He has never, at any time, given any indication that he wants to get out before the experiment is over," Lt. Col. George R. Steinkamp, chief of space medicine at Randolph, said yesterday.

"It has been amazing to us — his cooperation and eagerness to continue the experiment."

The space medicine chief disclosed that early yesterday, for the first time, Farrell showed signs of "real fatigue." The scientists had expected indications of serious weariness about Wednesday.

"However, he had a real sound sleep and this morning was much more alert than he was last night," Steinkamp reported.

"It does not change our optimism at all that he will finish out the seven days in good shape."

Steinkamp said the obvious fatigue caused Farrell to make mistakes while working a radar tracking problem presented as part of the make-believe ride in the space ship.

Today's Chuckle

The only thing children wear out faster than shoes is parents.

If you don't want your children to hear what you're saying, pretend you're talking to them.

(Copr. Gen. Fea. Corp.)

AUCTION

Log Cabin Ballroom
TONIGHT — 7:30 P. M.
New Merchandise, Gifts, Jewelry, Groceries, Etc.
Emmons & Meserve, Auctioneers.

Historic

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They live alone with only two small dogs, Sandy and Butch, for companionship.

A bit of a farmer at heart, Katon keeps a half a dozen hens on the island for a supply of fresh eggs. They are housed in a coop a few yards from the lighthouse. Katon said he plans to grow vegetables on the island next summer and has an area all ready to plow for the purpose.

Hunts And Fishes

In his spare time, Katon likes to hunt and fish, and has done a lot of fishing near the island during the warmer months. He said it is a great spot for duck hunting, too, and has shot his share this fall.

Supplies are delivered to the island once a year, usually during the month of August. Coal arrives by ship in burlap bags, 12 to 14 tons at a time. Two huge tanks near the lighthouse contain a year's supply of fuel oil for the kitchen range and the two deisel generators which furnish electricity for the light and the house.

An oil line is floated ashore from a tanker to fill the two tanks, which hold about 4,275 gallons of oil and take about six hours to fill.

The only thing that's not supplied by the government is groceries. When they took the assignment, the Katons were told they must keep a minimum two weeks' supply of groceries on hand at all times in case they can't get ashore in stormy weather.

During fair weather Katon goes ashore about every day to pick up his mail and groceries. Fresh water is supplied by a deep well located near the lighthouse, and is pumped inside through a modern plumbing system, complete with bath.

In the basement under the house is a large cistern for emergency water shortage. The cistern holds water from the roof and eaves of the house, should the well run dry, which it has not done recently.

He has to use his own judgement about the light on dark days. Katon said. Regulations call for the light to be on 15 minutes before sunset and 15 minutes after sunrise, but there have been some dark mornings when he has had to leave it on as late as 9 o'clock.

Rather than a fog horn, the station is equipped with a bell which sounds during times of poor visibility. The striking mechanism is a hand-wound clockwork powered by weights. It strikes once, then twice, at 25 second intervals.

Bell Cast In 1883

The bell was cast in 1883 at the bell foundry of Henry McShane and company, Baltimore, Maryland. An older bell, bearing the date, 1872, was once used on the island and now stands idle at the corner of the yard surrounding the light.

The shores of the island are lined with cords and cords of driftwood, but there is no place in the keeper's house to burn it. The only fireplace, located in the living room, is sealed up to prevent drafts during high winds.

Among the dense, bushy growth covering the island are bayberry and juniper, together with scrub pines and a few fir and white birch trees. The terrain of the land is rough and rolling, with several ponds and gullies.

According to local historians, the island has been the scene of more than 100 shipwrecks, a murder and a suicide, all of which would make full length stories in themselves.

A well known landmark on the coast of Maine, the Wood Island lighthouse has weathered the storms and disasters of 150 years well, and appears ready for a century and a half more.