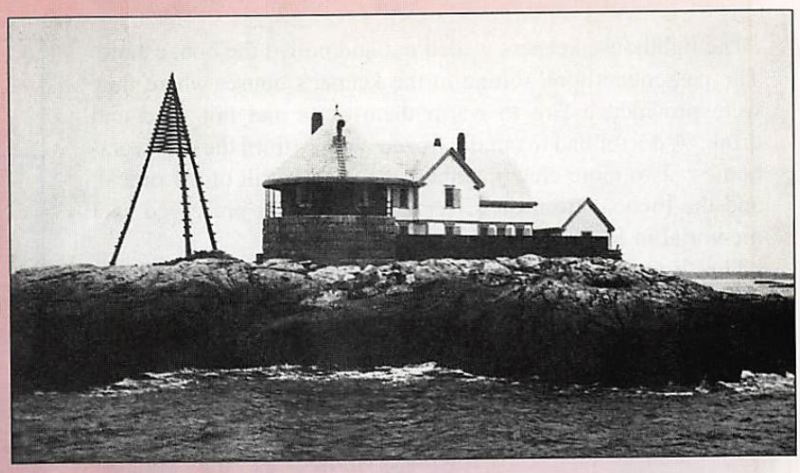
Life on the Cuckolds

By Kelly Farrin

Kelly Farrin and his wife and son were the last family to live at Maine's Cuckolds Lighthouse before it became a male-only "stag" station. They were at the lighthouse for two years, 1969-1970. The Cuckolds Light is located off Cape Newagen at the southern tip of Southport Island, near Boothbay Harbor.



Cuckolds Fog Signal Station, Boothbay Harbor, Maine before a light tower was added to the station. American Lighthouse Foundation archive photo.

The Cuckolds was about a mile or so offshore and was exposed to the open ocean. The waves washed on the shore relentlessly and were never silent. I measured the island with a tape measure and calculated it to be roughly 520 feet in circumference at the high water mark.

Life on the island was pretty much a routine of standing watches and cleaning and painting any non-moveable items on the island. The Cuckolds was a family light with two families assigned, and the personnel stationed there got two days a month shore leave. Occasionally the women and even the men could leave the island, but the men always had to be there at night. There were often weeks at a time when the water around the island was so rough that we couldn't leave at all. Because we seldom got off the island, we always needed at least a month's worth of food and other supplies.

They say lighthouses are romantic, but I do know that this one had quite a reputation concerning the divorce rate. I would say it takes a sturdy relationship to endure that much togetherness. There is no time apart unless the wife goes ashore alone.

None of us really wanted to be there all that much as we were young and thought other places would be better. I hadn't been married that long and I had a choice of the station or Vietnam at the time. I also was quite happy there because I grew up in a town just a few miles to the east. It was close enough so that my Dad, a lobsterman, brought over our Christmas things and a tree in his lobster boat. I figure I had it better than most that had stayed on the island.

At the Cuckolds the keepers had to 1) clean and maintain the station; 2) check the aids to navigation frequently to assure proper operation; 3) stand duty watches (the watches were six hours on and six hours off); and 4) order supplies for station operation and maintenance. Because there were only two men on the station it was understood what had to be done and it was just taken care of. There was no such thing as a boss in this type of situation.

During my second winter at the Cuckolds Light Station, one storm was predicted to be a little worse than normal. By this time my wife and I were used to the storms there and didn't concern ourselves with it. We figured it was just another little snowstorm.

Shortly before dark I walked around the station and double-checked things, looking to see that the storm shutters were closed and that the boathouse was secure. I told the assistant keeper that I had turned the light on and was going to my apartment.

At about 8 o'clock I noticed snow falling, so I started the compressors and turned the fog signal on. My wife and I watched the news and saw that we were supposed to get about a foot of snow and that gale warnings were up. They said it would be the worst storm in several years.

About 3 a.m. my son woke us up, so my wife went and got him a bottle and he went back to sleep. While she was getting the bottle I was lying there listening to the wind, which was screaming by now. I decided to have a look outside.

The wind was making the old house creak and groan. I went up the stairs in the tower and all was fine. I couldn't see outside because of darkness and snow, but I knew that the tide was low. There was no problem anywhere so I went back into the house and made some coffee.

When daylight came around 6:30 I got dressed and went out and looked around. The only things out of the ordinary that I noticed were a couple of loose planks at the lower end of the boat-slip and the fact that the flag was slightly tattered from the wind. It was blowing so hard now that I had to really lean into it to remain standing. We figured we had gale force winds, possibly close to hurricane force by now. The snow cut visibility to only a few yards.

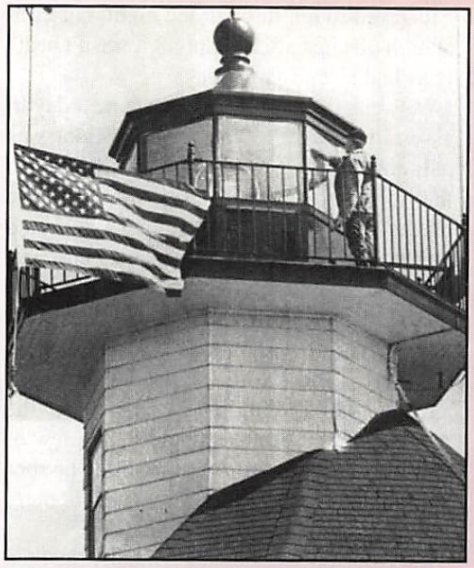
By 9 a.m. I was getting more concerned. The wind wasn't lessening and the tide, which had over two more hours to go before reaching its full height, was already washing well over the usual high water mark.

Around this time the power went out and I started the generator. I called the station at Boothbay Harbor to see if it was our line or if the power had gone out onshore. It turned out to be an onshore problem, which was a relief, as it would have taken weeks to get a new line if the undersea cable had been damaged.

The helicopter pad already had waves starting to wash over it. With water over the pad there was no way we could get off the island. The waves were washing up against the seawall that protected the assistant's side of the dwelling and were also just reaching



Cuckolds Light as it appeared when Kelly Farrin was stationed there in the 1970's. Photo courtesy of Kelly Farrin.



Kelly Farrin cleaning the windows of the Cuckolds Light lantern room, 1970. Copied by permission of Downeast Magazine. Copyright 1970, all rights reserved.

the side of the boathouse, which was on the protected side of the island.

Soon the waves were washing over the seawall and against the side of the house. I went to the tower to look out at the massive swells. From here I could see the whole island was awash except for the house. The seas were now washing across the front lawn (what we called our few blades of grass) and the boathouse was taking a real beating on the northeast side. By now the house was taking quite a beating. I offered to let the assistant and his wife come to our side of the house, which was in the lee, but he chose to stay there.

The roar of the wind and the blaring of the foghorn made things seem very spooky. I went into the house for coffee. My wife kept looking out the windows and wondering if this would be the storm that would force us into the cistern room, where the granite walls were three feet thick, to keep from getting washed away.

Then we heard a tremendous crash, followed by the sound of water running. I opened the door to the station to find several inches of water on the floor. A window by the boiler had broken and the shutter was flopping. The waves had smashed the window, flooding the whole area. The assistant and I went outside and debated for a few seconds what to do. I waited for the waves to wash back at the boathouse door so I could get there without going through five feet of water. I got in and closed the door. On the floor there was close to a foot of water and the boat was floating inside the boathouse. I went to the bench and grabbed a hammer and a handful of nails and returned to the patio.

One of us had to go behind the seawall between the waves washing in and out to somehow get the shutter closed and nailed. By this time there was about three to five feet of water coming over the seawall with every wave. I wonder to this day how the side of the house stood this abuse without more damage.

The assistant offered to go behind the wall and nail the shutter. I didn't argue with him, so he took the hammer and nails and waited for the waves to recede. The first time in he got the shutter closed and a nail part of the way in before I screamed for him to get out. This went on for a half hour or more. He kept running in and out between the waves and getting a few pounds in. Eventually he got half a dozen nails down the side and we assumed the shutter was secure. If another window a few feet back had broken, it would have been in his living room. It would have filled the room and shattered glass would have gone everywhere.

Fortunately, the boiler didn't quit and there was very little damage. Back out on the patio the waves were hitting the house so hard that a sheet of water was forming a solid wall when they hit the house and washed back. Before the storm was over the waves were washing so high that they was taking shingles off this side of the house.

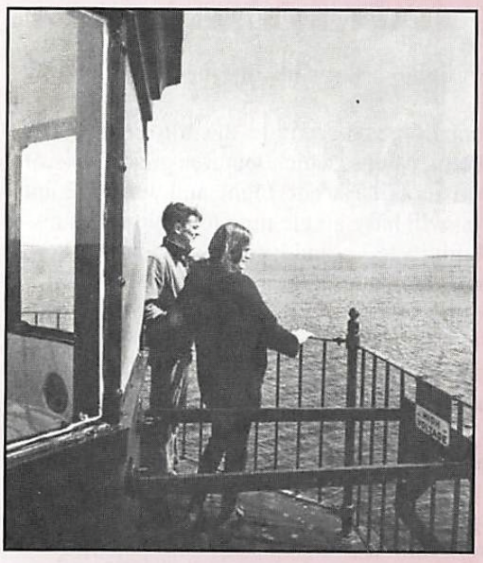
I went back between the waves into the boathouse, and where the waves were hitting the north side, the siding had pulled up and water was shooting up beside the foundation and the wall like a geyser.

Aside from that I saw no real damage. I took a quick look outside and closed the door and waited until a wave was just starting back so I wouldn't have to swim to get back to the patio. It was like being on a ship in a storm with everything awash, only the deck didn't move. There was no place outside where you could escape the salt spray and water hitting you.

The helicopter pad was basically not visible at all. I think because of its location on the southwest corner of the island it was breaking the waves enough so that the waves didn't hit the island from that direction. I still don't understand how those waves, which appeared to be at least 20 feet higher than where I was standing, didn't wash onto the island on that side and do much more damage.

When the tide finally turned the wind dropped almost as rapidly. It was nearly halfway out before the water stopped hitting the side of the house and boathouse. We all just sat in the house looking out occasionally to make sure the light was working, but we couldn't assess the damage until the next day when we had daylight with us.

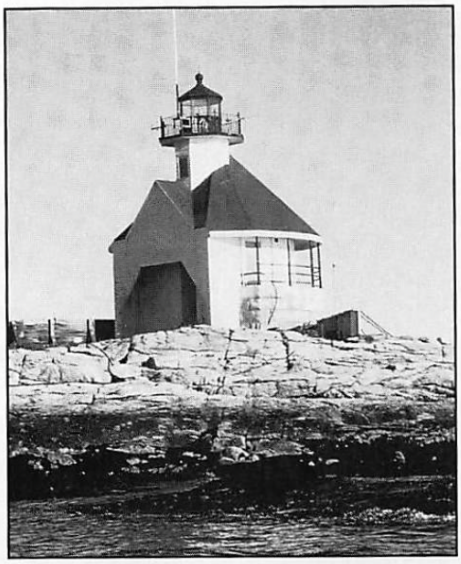
We just were happy that no personal belongings were damaged, like what had happened a few years earlier when the assis-



Ramon (Kelly) Farrin and Jan Farrin on the gallery of the Cuckolds Lighthouse in 1970. Copied by permission of Downeast Magazine. Copyright 1970, all rights reserved.



Kelly Farrin checking on a fuel tank at the Cuckolds, 1970. Copied by permission of Downeast Magazine. Copyright 1970, all rights reserved.



Cuckolds Light as it appears today. Most people think that all lighthouses are on the National Register of Historic Places. However, this is not true. It wasn't until March of this year Cuckolds was nominated by the U.S. Coast Guard for inclusion into the National Register. Cuckolds was originally built as a fog signal station in 1892. The lighthouse was added in 1907 and it originally housed a 4th order Fresnel lens that was replaced in modern times by a 300-millimeter optic. A few years after the Farrins left the Cuckolds, the keeper's dwelling was destroyed in the famous Blizzard of 1978. The light had been automated and de-staffed in 1975. If you want to read more about Kelly Farrin's experiences at the Cuckolds, visit his website at www.kellys-stuff.com. Photograph by Bill Harnsberger of Portland, Maine.

tant keeper's windows broke and he lost half his things that were on the first floor. I easily understand how this could happen after seeing the power of the waves during this storm.

It stayed rough through the night, but even at high tide just after midnight it wasn't nearly as bad as during the day.

We went around the station the next day to assess the damage. The fence in front was half down and we had lost most of the soil in the front yard, but that was the only damage on the west side of the dwelling. We found that the boat-slip had many planks and part of one rail missing, making it impossible to get the boat off at low tide. Inside the boathouse, the wall was pulled out and you could look down and see the shore, but we managed to nail it shut. The east side of the dwelling had asbestos shingles and a few of them were broken off and missing. The roof was missing a few shingles but there appeared to be no structural damage.

It took a few weeks but eventually the men from Group South Portland came and rebuilt the slip and repaired the damage. Later that day we were able to go back on shore power. We cleaned up the station where the water had come in.

You're Invited to Compete in the 7th Annual Lighthouse Depot Road Rally

Fundraiser for the American Lighthouse Foundation to be held on Saturday, September 14, 2002.

by Patti Mikkelsen

The Lighthouse Depot of Wells, Maine, known as "The World's Largest Lighthouse Gift Store" is the title sponsor for this annual road rally, which traverses scenic back roads of the Pine Tree State and a few in neighboring New Hampshire. The sport of road rallying is a mystery to many people, so here are some questions and answers to offer some insight.

Q: What is a road rally?

A: A time-speed-distance (TSD) road rally is a low-cost competitive automobile event contested on public roads by teams (each made up of a driver and a navigator) who obey ordinary traffic rules. Each team traverses the course independently. The object is to stay on course, as described by a set of route instructions, while maintaining precise average speeds that are set at, or just below, posted speeds. A rally is not a race! Each vehicle is timed at checkpoints found along the course at locations unknown to competitors beforehand.

Q: How are scores determined?

A: Penalty points are acquired for arriving either or late, at a checkpoint, as compared to the pre-calculated perfect target time. Low score wins.

Q: Do I need to have a special license or previous rally experience?

A: No to both questions. A valid driver's license is adequate. No prior rally experience is necessary to compete. A rally school for novices will be held on the evening before the event to provide guidance to beginners. Also, a separate novice class is offered, so beginners won't have to compete against seasoned rallyists.

Q: Do I need to have a sports car to enter?

A: Just about any kind of vehicle is suitable, for example SUV's, sedans, pick-up trucks, and mini-vans. (Of course, 2-seater convertibles look even cooler coasting down a curvy rally road!) The vehicle must be legally registered.

Q: What equipment do I need?

A: Bring a watch that reads seconds (digital is best), a clipboard, pencils, pens, paper, highlighting markers and a basic pocket calculator.

Q: Will I see a lot of lighthouses while driving along the rally route?

A: Not this year; but before you grumble, the rally ends at Fort Foster Park, Kittery Point, Maine, which features great views of Whaleback Light, Portsmouth Harbor Light and Jerry's Point Lifesaving Station. You will have ample time to explore this historic fort, originally built in 1872, and its many nature trails.

Q: How much does it cost to enter the rally?

A: $60 per car (not per person). This includes the entry fee, lunch for two, a pair of screen-printed travel mugs, awards to class winners, admission to Fort Foster Park, and a donation to the American Lighthouse Foundation.

Q: Where can I stay?

A: A block of rooms is being held at The Mariner Resort, Ogunquit, Maine until August 13th. See the resort's website for room descriptions and rates: www.marinerresort.com.

Q: How do I sign up to run the rally?

A: You could pick up an event flyer/entry form at the Lighthouse Depot or obtain one from the rallymaster: Patti Mikkelsen (207) 926-5660. For more information check out www.cumberlandmotorclub.com/rallys.htm.