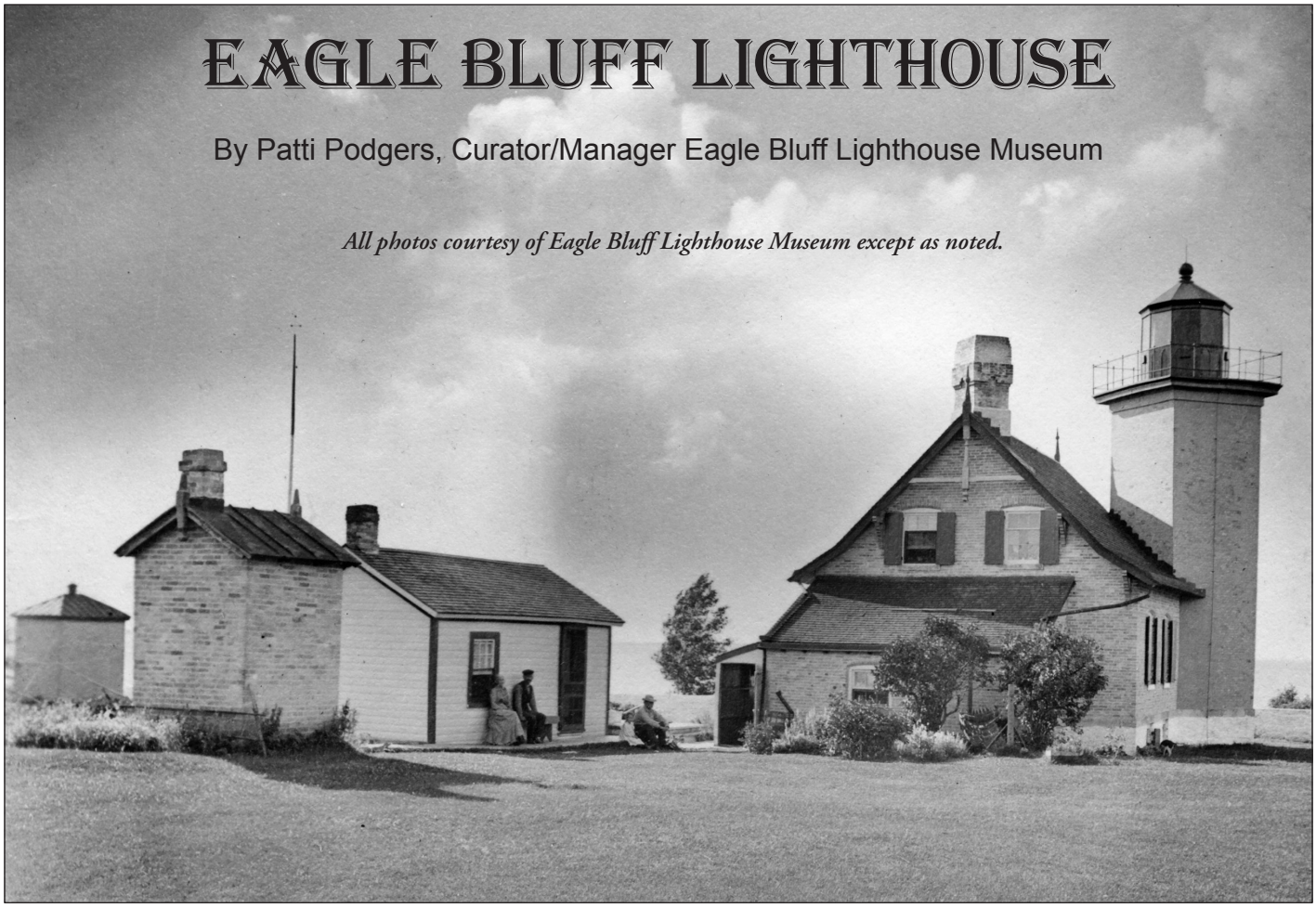
EAGLE BLUFF LIGHTHOUSE

By Patti Podgers, Curator/Manager Eagle Bluff Lighthouse Museum

All photos courtesy of Eagle Bluff Lighthouse Museum except as noted.



Early undated photo of the Eagle Bluff Lighthouse. From left: oil house, privy (or outhouse), and summer kitchen.

In the aftermath of the Civil War, the floodgates of western expansion opened wide. By the mid-1800s more than 9 million pioneers, immigrants, and adventurers had migrated to the Great Lakes region, a rugged wilderness of opportunity. But the trek westward was a challenging, arduous journey of hundreds of miles. Although a few hearty souls trekked through primitive forests, the majority made passage by ship over treacherous waters.



Undated photo of Eagle Bluff Lighthouse includes Keeper Peter Coughlin (far right).

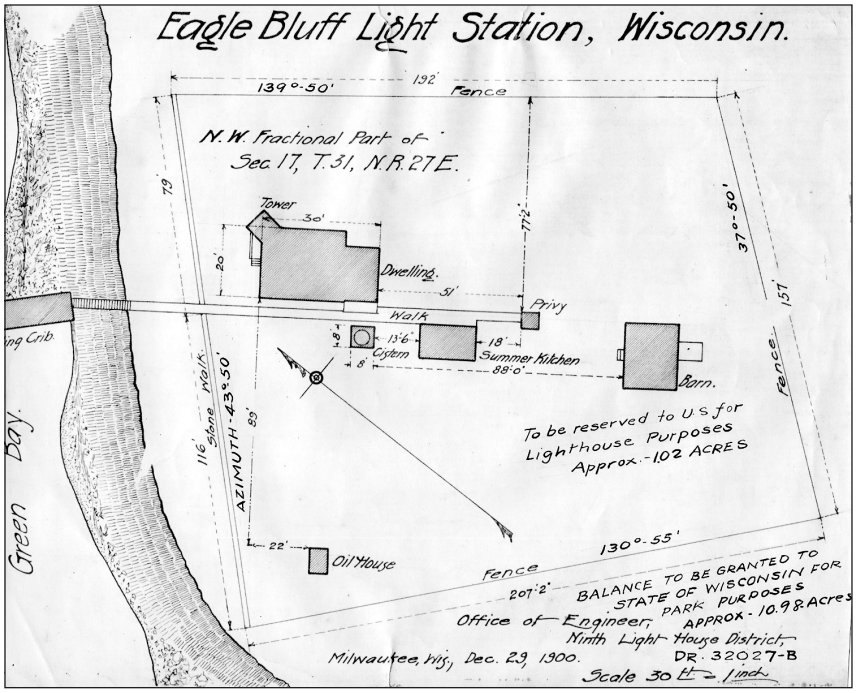
Traveling from the eastern seaboard, most settlers made their way up the Hudson River, which connected with the Erie Canal. Transferring to larger vessels, they sailed through the Great Lakes to various ports of call. The journey was fraught with unseen dangers. Submerged shoals and turbulent storms threatened the schooners and steamboats' safe passage, casting the vessels into harm's way. Hugging shorelines, clinging to rocky bluffs, and speckling solitary islands, lighthouses provided an important guiding light by which ships made safe harbor.

Although a small number of Great Lakes lighthouses were built as early as the 1820s, the majority of Midwestern navigational aid stations were established after the Civil War. In 1865 the U. S. Lighthouse Board reviewed requests for lighthouses in the western Great Lakes region; Green Bay was noted as particularly hazardous.

The Strawberry Channel, a distance of five miles between Chambers Island and the peninsula's shoreline, was a dangerous shipping route, although quite popular with local ship captains. In 1866 President Andrew Johnson, acting on recommendations from the U.S. Lighthouse Board, reserved 12 acres for the construction of a light at Eagle Bluff.

Construction Begins

A construction team of men arrived at Eagle Bluff in the spring of 1868. A shipment of Milwaukee Cream City brick was delivered, and the men commenced construction of a 26 x 30-foot two-story building, perched on a bluff 33 feet above Green Bay.

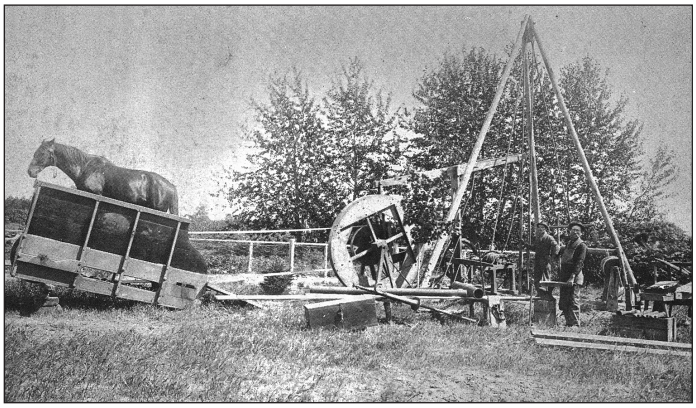


Site plan for the lighthouse dated December 29, 1900.

The three-bedroom dwelling included a dining room, parlor, and office; a 12 x 20-foot kitchen was built several steps below the level of the main house. One bedroom on the main floor and two bedrooms on the second floor served as sleeping quarters. A full basement provided ample storage space for the staples supplied by the U.S. Lighthouse Service.

The adjacent lighthouse tower, a 9-foot 4-inch square, was accessible by an interior, shared spiral stairway. Built at a height of 43 feet, the completed tower rose approximately 76 feet above the water's edge. The interior 55-step stairway and the 10-sided lantern and deck were cast iron. Total construction costs were $12,000.

On October 15, 1868, the light beamed from the Eagle Bluff Lighthouse tower for the first time.



A horse-powered treadmill was used to drill the well at the lighthouse. Previously the keepers' families had to use water from the bay.

Lighthouse Keepers

Lighthouse keepers were appointed and dismissed by order of the president of the United States. The position was often political; veterans of the Civil War were given priority consideration. Men of the sea were considered some of the best keepers. A degree of proficiency was expected, and on-the-job training was the standard of the day. A manual provided day-to-day instruction and guidance in the performance of duties and responsibilities.

Although the majority of lighthouse keepers were men, women also served. Some women were employed as keepers or assistant keepers, while others worked alongside their husbands, fathers, and brothers as unpaid staff. In cases of illness or death, women might be considered for the vacated position. Mary Terry is such an example. John Terry, her husband, was appointed the keeper of Sand Point Lighthouse at Escanaba, Michigan. Unfortunately, he succumbed to consumption before the lighthouse construction was completed; Mary was appointed in his place. The local newspaper, the *Iron Port*, reported that "she was a very methodical woman, very careful in the discharge of her duties and very particular in the care of the property under her charge."

Keepers were civilian federal employees of the U.S. Lighthouse Service. Based on experience, a keeper's salary averaged between $30 and $60 a month. According to the document of commission of William Duclon, one of the keepers at Eagle Bluff, he was to receive $600 per year as of 1883. In addition to a salary, keepers were provided housing, annual shipments of supplies—including barrels of staples such as sugar and flour—and a pension upon retirement.

Henry Stanley (1868 – 1883)

In October 1868, Eagle Bluff Lighthouse was completed, and Henry Stanley was appointed the keeper. A native of Norway, Stanley immigrated to the United States in 1844. Following his arrival in America, Stanley was employed as a sailor on the Great Lakes; he also shared ownership of several ships. Upon his appointment as Eagle Bluff's first keeper, Stanley settled into life on land with his wife, Katherine, and their two children.



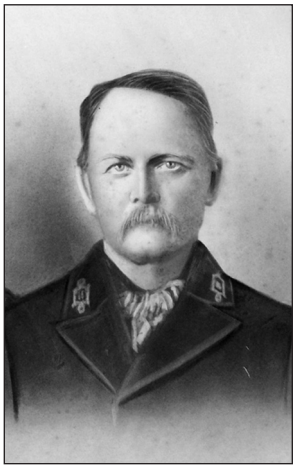
Henry Stanley, first keeper of Eagle Bluff Lighthouse.

The specifics of the first four years of Stanley's assignment at Eagle Bluff have been lost in time; his first surviving log is for the year 1872. Scant records recount the delivery of supplies, the district inspector's visit, or an overhaul of the lamps. After 1876, however, Stanley's log-keeping improves and details of daily life at Eagle Bluff emerge. Frequent visitors, late-night parties, and the arrival of a piano are chronicled in the pages of the log book. Sadly, no mention is made of the passing of Stanley's young son John, who died between 1870 and 1872.

Stanley and his wife remained at Eagle Bluff Lighthouse until September 30, 1883, when he was appointed keeper at Sherwood Point Lighthouse, south of Sturgeon Bay. His replacement, William Duclon, was an experienced keeper who had served as an assistant in training for 10 years.

William Duclon (1883 – 1918)

A veteran of the Civil War, William Duclon, a native of Alexandria Bay, New York, moved to Mackinaw, Michigan, following an honorable discharge from the Union Army. The son of a fisherman, Duclon may have been continuing in his father's trade. During his stay on the island, Duclon met and married Julia Davenport, the local keeper's daughter.



William Duclon.

In September 1873, Duclon was appointed second assistant keeper at Waugoshance Lighthouse in Michigan. Over the next 10 years, Duclon steadily advanced in the ranks, gaining knowledge and experience with each posting. In October 1883, he was appointed Eagle Bluff Lighthouse's second keeper.

During Duclon's remarkable 35-year tenure at Eagle Bluff, the lighthouse and its property experienced many significant improvements. A work crew constructed a 1½-story barn, a well was drilled, a flagpole was installed, and an oil storage house was built. The family fished and farmed to supplement their income; the Duclon's seven sons—talented musicians—performed as a band for parties and dances throughout the county. Following in the tradition of the Stanleys, friends regularly visited the Duclons, often staying overnight.

In 1910 William and Julia Duclon (both of whom were 65 years of age) built a home in Fish Creek, where they began wintering. Returning to the lighthouse each spring, the elderly couple resumed their duties. Due to his advancing years, it can be assumed Duclon was assisted in the delivery of his keeper's responsibilities by his wife and sons. The couple retired to their cottage in 1918, following Duclon's career as keeper that spanned 45 years.

Peter Coughlin (1918 – 1926)

Eagle Bluff Lighthouse's third and final keeper, Peter Coughlin, officially assumed his duties on March 1, 1919. He had previously served on Green Island, five miles off the coast of Marinette, Wisconsin, an assignment Coughlin thoroughly enjoyed. Unlike his predecessors, both of whom exhibited a dislike for log-keeping, Coughlin was meticulous. Recording weather and water conditions, as well as general information and observations, he provides a detailed description of life at Eagle Bluff Lighthouse. Coughlin rarely failed to pen an entry in the log.

On December 19, 1925, the keeper and his wife, Margaret, closed the lighthouse for the winter. Sadly, Margaret died several months later, and Coughlin returned alone the following spring. With a pension awarded by the federal government, Coughlin, then 70 years of age, retired the following September. His final entry in the log noted, "Green Is light not vis.rain and fog N wind."



Peter Coughlin.

Life at Eagle Bluff was far from isolated, and the lighthouse was socially active throughout the three lighthouse-keepers' tenures. Located close to the villages of Ephraim and Fish Creek—and accessible by road—Eagle Bluff's keepers wintered in the lighthouse for the most part. If the roads became impassible, the keepers and their families traveled over the ice, skating or sledding north or south. Winter was also the time of year when the keepers devoted themselves to interior improvements, painting walls, and completing repairs. The lamp might not be lit, but duty continued to call.

The Keepers' Duties

Prior to the Lighthouse Act of 1789, navigational aids were not regulated, and operated independent of local, state, or federal regulations. The new law, however, required all navigational aids to comply with standards and regulations. The establishment of the U.S. Lighthouse Board in 1852 further standardized the operation of lighthouses, and a formal instructional manual was written.

Directions for polishing the lenses, trimming wicks, and keeping the log were specific and left little room for negligent management of the lighthouses. Each morning, the keeper was mandated to clean and polish the lens, and refuel the lamp; work was to be completed by 10 a.m. The balance of the day was devoted to maintenance of the grounds, lighthouse, and outbuildings.

A U.S. Lighthouse Board inspector annually visited all lighthouses, most often arriving unannounced. Constant vigilance was essential, therefore, as the keeper's performance of duty would affect continued employment.



Eagle Bluff Lighthouse circa 1900.

It is through the keepers' log books that the history of Eagle Bluff comes to life. Most often the logs included not only daily duties and responsibilities, storms and shipwrecks, but also daily visits, the arrival of supplies, and the ordinary happenings within the maritime

and land-based communities of Door County. Fortunately for Eagle Bluff Lighthouse, one of "Capt." Duclon's log books has survived and is on display during the season.

Tower Facts

- Tower height: 43 feet.
- Foundation materials: Concrete.
- Tower walls: 13 inches thick. Three windows provide light during the day.
- Interior tower: Spiral cast-iron stairway of 55 steps from basement to lantern deck with landings at the first and second floors.
- Construction material: Milwaukee Cream City brick.
- Markings: Yellow with red roof.
- Original optic: Third-and-one-half-order Fresnel lens installed in 1868.
- Fresnel lens disposition: Fixed fifth-order lens installed in 1918—on display.
- Lantern: Ten panes of glass, 26¾ inches by 40 inches in size and 3/16 inches thick surround the lantern room. Two panes on the landward side are opaque so as to focus the light away from the forest behind the station.
- Present optic: 300 mm, solar powered, mounted on the gallery. Six light bulbs, each approximately five watts, are housed in the solar unit. The storage battery is 12 volts. The solar panel is 20 watts.
- Height of focal plane: 75 feet.
- Current use: Active aid to navigation and a museum.
- Architectural design: Norman Gothic. Readily adapted to local topography, the Norman Gothic would eventually become the most popular lighthouse design in the Great Lakes region. An unusual architectural feature of Eagle Bluff Lighthouse is that the tower was built diagonally into the northwest corner of the house. It is currently the only Norman Gothic style lighthouse incorporating this architectural element.

The Lamp is Lit

Originally fit with an Argand lamp and parabolic reflector system, the lighthouse lamp was literally revolutionized by the invention of the Fresnel lens (1822), which was available in seven sizes, called "orders." Although the implementation of the new design was delayed by reluctant bureaucrats, the depression of 1837, and impending civil war, the lens was gradually installed in American lighthouses.

Consisting of a central spherical lens surrounded by rings of glass prisms, both refracting and reflecting, the innovative Fresnel lens was capable of directing a light for miles in the desired direction. A wick oil lamp was the source of the light. The first Eagle Bluff Lighthouse lamp was equipped with a third-and-one-half-order Fresnel lens, which burned lard oil and required frequent replenishing throughout the night.

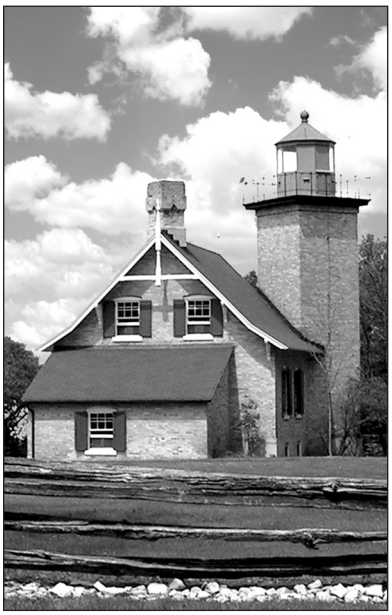
Sometime later, kerosene became the universal oil used in the lamp. Improvements to the mechanics and operation of the lamp were ongoing, and in 1917, an incandescent oil vapor lamp—which burned mineral oil—was installed. The new lamp provided a brighter, more intense light, and within a year's time the old lens was replaced with a smaller fifth-order Fresnel lens. On September 20, 1926, the light at Eagle Bluff was converted to acetylene gas. Today, a solar light, charged by the sun and battery-powered, provides guidance for commercial ships and pleasure boaters in the Strawberry Channel. Installed in the mid-1980s, the light is a coded signal: one second on, six seconds off.



The fifth-order Fresnel lens currently on display.

The Tradition Continues

In the years immediately following the Civil War, nearly 350 lighthouses would be built throughout the Great Lakes. Unfortunately, a majority of the original lighthouses have fallen into ruin or have been abandoned. But Eagle Bluff Lighthouse did not suffer that fate. Under an agreement with the state of Wisconsin and the U.S. Coast Guard, the Door County Historical Society (DCHS) lovingly restored the lighthouse to its past glory.



Eagle Bluff Lighthouse today. Photo by Dan Cook.

Today, thanks to the dedication of the DCHS, visitors from around the world knock at the door of the little lighthouse on the bluff. Knowledgeable docents share the personal stories of Eagle Bluff's keepers as they guide visitors through the period-furnished lighthouse. Reportedly the first lighthouse in the United States to be restored and opened to the public, Eagle Bluff Lighthouse Museum provides a glimpse into the past—the maritime history that is the peninsula's legacy.