Marshall Point Light Station in Maine

A home to the Skinner family for 45 years

By Grethe J. Godwin



Marshall Point Light Station is located in Port Clyde at the tip of the St. George peninsula. Situated on a rocky ledge at the mouth of the St. George river, it has a commanding view of Muscongus and Penobscot Bays and their nearby spruce covered islands.

The earliest light tower and keeper's house were built at Marshall Point in 1832. Both structures were made of rubble stone and were probably connected. In 1858 the tower was rebuilt at the tide line, away from the house, but connected by a covered bridge. A Fresnel lens replaced the previous seven lamps.

Pictures from 1859 show an austere-looking Keeper's house on a barren rocky shore, away from any other habitation. Inside the House the Keeper's wife must have done her cooking over an open fireplace, until iron stoves were introduced a decade or two later.



Charles Skinner, Keeper of the Marshall Point Lighthouse for 45 years (September 1, 1874-May 7, 1919), the longest tenure of a keeper at the same lighthouse in the history of the U.S. Lighthouse Service. Photo courtesy of the Marshall Point Lighthouse Museum.

Above–Marshall Point Station prior to 1893. From left–rubble stone keeper's house, privy, fuel house and covered walkway to tower. The Skinner family can be seen by the dwelling. Photo courtesy of the Marshall Point Museum.

In 1874 Charles Clement Skinner took over as Keeper at Marshall Point, where he stayed until 1919, the longest tenure of any keeper in the U.S. Lighthouse Service at one place. He was born in 1842 in Appleton, Maine, about 30 miles northwest of Port Clyde. At age 21, in 1864, he was mustered into military service and served as a private in the 6th Battery Maine Light Artillery. He was wounded in action at Cold Harbor, and received injuries in the side and wrist. After the Civil War was over he returned to Maine and soon found himself a bride, Amanda Colby. The couple had two daughters, Nellie and Hattie. Hattie died in infancy, and within a short time Amanda died of consumption, leaving her husband with little Nellie. However, Charles did what was customary at the time, he married Amanda's sister Arvilla, who was 14 years younger than he was.

The marriage must have taken place about the time that Charles was appointed Keeper at Marshall Point Light (1874). The following year their first child, Herbert was born. (Herbert's small boots were saved by his sister Eula and are presently preserved at the Lighthouse Museum.) Four more children followed: Myrtle, George, Eula and Marion. George died as a child. Marion was the only child who was born in the new Keeper's house; the others were born in the old house.

Marion and Eula lived the longest of the children and have made valuable contributions to the history of Marshall Point Light. Marion (Mrs. Charles O. Dalrymple) died in June 1992, age 96. She and Eula (Mrs. William Kelley), both widows, lived together in Warren, Maine during the last decades of their lives. Marion always summered at a cottage near the Lighthouse. Eula died this past year at age 101, in the same cottage near her place of birth. Fortunately, videotapes were made of the two, telling about life in the lighthouse.

Their father was described as a man ahead of his time, keeping daily newspapers and taking photographs around the lighthouse which he developed in his darkroom. They remembered well the barn that stood next to the summer kitchen and the pleasant sounds of farm animals which came from there. A cow, a horse and several chickens were usually kept by the family and added to their food and welfare. Horse and buggy were the chief means of transportation.

When the girls reached high school age they traveled to nearby Tenants Harbor. Marion remembered traveling by herself and holding on to the reins of the horse for dear life when the animal got frisky. Was she ever happy when she arrived at school safe and sound!

Berries grew in great abundance on the 5.6 acres that surrounded the lighthouse. Eula told about getting sick on one of her berrypicking outings, and she hurried back to the house. It soon became apparent that it was no ordinary tummy ache, but something more serious. When the doctor finally arrived her appendix had ruptured, and she had to have it removed on an upstairs table, which served as an operating table.

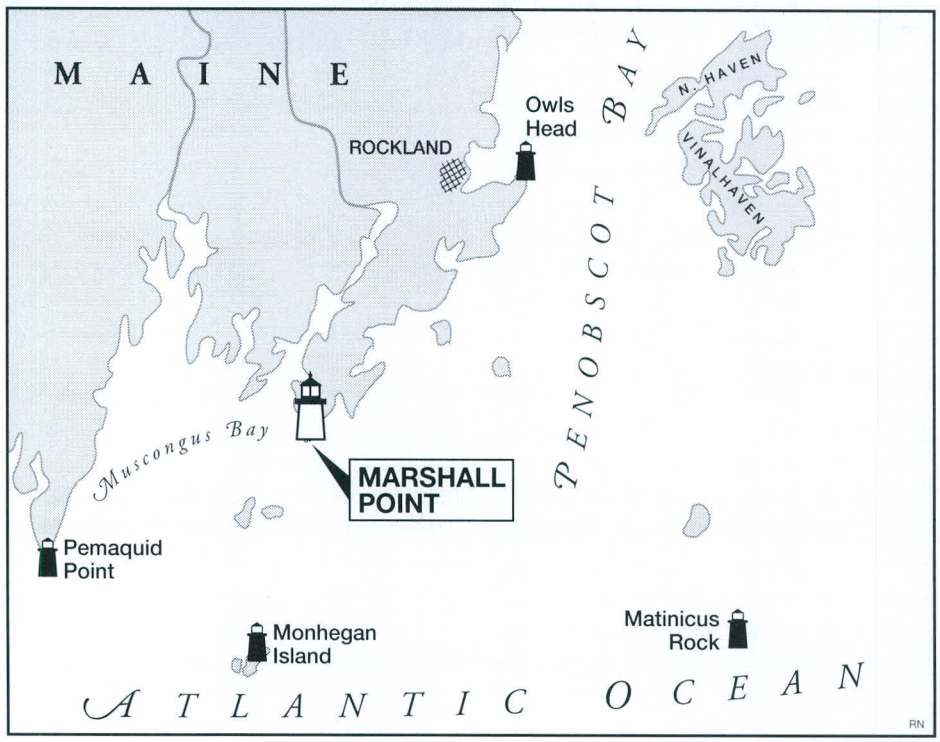
The two ladies remembered many happy times ice-skating on nearby ponds



Eula & Marion Skinner, circa 1898 – Eula was born in the old keeper's house in 1891, and Marion in the present house in 1895. Photo courtesy Marshall Pt. Museum.

In 1894 the Keeper's house was destroyed by lightning, and Mr. Skinner moved his family into his workshop which he moved from water's edge to a location near the entrance of the grounds. By 1895 the new and present structure was finished, built of wood in Colonial Revival style with a gambrel roof. It was an elegant house for its time, with three rooms downstairs and upstairs.

Mr. Skinner was to oversee a complete updating of the Light Station during his 45-year stay. In addition to the new Keeper's house, this included construction of a surfboat house, a fog bell tower, a new fireproof fuel storage building, and several other buildings and site improvements.



and having tea parties for their dolls in the attic. Events that especially came to mind were visits from the lighthouse inspection boats, when all the brass was expected to shine and the children had to be on their best behavior. The Skinners never knew when the visits would occur, so they were always prepared.

Mrs. Skinner was an excellent seamstress and made all the dresses for the girls. Marion said they were always better dressed than the other girls in the village, which caused some envy.

All four sisters graduated from Normal School in Farmington, Maine, and became school teachers. Herbert chose a different career. He became a house painter and lived with his wife in Framingham, Massachusetts. Charles C. Skinner retired to a farm in Warren in 1919, and died there in 1932. His wife died there a few years later.

Marion and Eula watched from their summer cottage when the Lightkeeper's house was made into a LORAN station in 1970. It was sad to see the lovely home being converted into an electronic laboratory.

In 1971 the last keeper left, when the light was automated. The LORAN station became obsolete by 1980, and the Keeper's house was deserted and boarded up. Vandals destroyed fences and some windows, but fortunately the structure remained intact. By the mid-eighties it became known that a hotel chain was interested in the keeper's house and grounds. A sense of apprehension went through the local population and the many summer people who visited the lovely site every year. They wanted the area saved for their enjoyment. A special meeting was held at the Town Hall, where it was decided to lease the lighthouse grounds for five years.



Above–From left–the "new" house shortly after construction in 1895, the old fuel house (at this point used as a summer kitchen) and the barn. Photo courtesy of the Marshall Pt. Museum.

Below–Marshall Point from the water showing the bell tower (between the bridge and keeper's house), summer kitchen, flag pole for storm warning flags and kerosene oil house. Old Post Card.



In 1986 the U.S. Coast Guard approached the Town to do something with the House. The Town in turn contacted the St. George Historical Society. A Lighthouse committee spearheaded a fundraising campaign to have the Keeper's house restored. In 1988 the Town of St. George and the Coast Guard signed a 30 year lease on the House and Grounds. Through the efforts of many people and several grants, the 1895 Keeper's house was restored to its original splendor. In 1990 the Marshall Point Lighthouse Museum was opened to the public on the first floor. The upstairs was leased as an apartment.

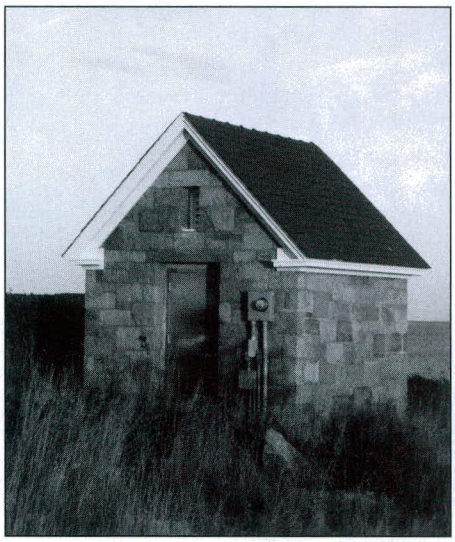
Over 7000 visitors came to the museum in 1991 and about 6000 in 1992. There are nearly always people on the Lighthouse grounds, even in the worst snowstorms. The museum is open weekends during May and October, and six days a week (closed Mondays) during July, August and September. Hours are 1 to 5 p.m. Future plans? The committee hopes to rebuild the summer kitchen sometime to expand museum space.

Descendants of the Skinners still live in a nearby house on Marshall Point. Eula, at age 101, is still there with a housekeeper. Marion's two sons, Drs. Paul and Eugene Dalrymple both keep up the connection with Marshall Point: Paul as a year-round and Eugene as a summer resident. Myrtle's daughter Alice Adams spends her summers at Turkey Cove, just a couple of miles from the lighthouse. Her daughter Sheila is actively putting together the pieces of the puzzle that makes up the history of the Skinner family.

Marshall Point Lightkeeper's House tenants, Lee Ann and Tom Szelog are busily recording present day events in words and pictures — tomorrow's history in the making.



Above–Display case in what was the dining room of the keeper's house. Photo by Thomas Szelog, a professional photographer who lives on the second floor of the keeper's house with his wife.



Right–Beautiful granite oil house constructed when the station switched from lard oil to kerosene. Photo by District Inspector Rete Williams in 1990.



Above–Eula and Marion Skinner on June 30, 1990 cutting the ribbon opening their former home as the Marshall Point Lighthouse Museum. Both ladies have since died. Photo courtesy of the Marshall Point Museum.



Right–Marshall Point during the annual Society Maine Tour in October 1993. Note the bridge is no longer covered and the Bay section of the keeper's house has a peaked roof in lieu of the original flat roof with railing. Photo by District Inspector Ainsley Dixon.