MINOTS LEDGE LIGHTSHIP

A few days after the first Minots Ledge Lighthouse went over into the sea on April 17, 1851, the Boston steam tugboat R. B. Forbes, named after the famous mariner, was fitted with a temporary illuminant and anchored half a mile north of the Outer Minot (where the light stood) in 15 fathoms of water to serve as a lightship. On April 20 another gale blew in and the tug was forced to sail to Boston Harbor. Later, another light was planned for to be installed later in the year.

By the first of May, 1851, the old Brandywine Shoal Lightship came to the Minots Ledge station. This lightship had been anchored off Brandywine Shoal at the entrance to Delaware Bay from 1823 to 1850. She was a small schooner of 110 tons displacement and of 130 tons burden (gross tonnage). There was no station name on the sides or a daymark on the masts; the only mark was a narrow white stripe along the bulwarks. The lantern was suspended on two tall spars and set amidships. The light shone fixed white and a bell was tolled in foul weather. Keeper John Bennet, of the lighthouse, became the master of the lightvessel and he had a crew of six men. Also aboard was a large black Newfoundland dog who would retrieve newspapers that were tossed from passing vessels to the lightship and had fallen short. An official investigation of the lightship was made on July 8, 1851 and it was found that she was unseaworthy.

However, it wasn't until 1854 when the lightship was replaced. The new lightship was launched at Boston in 1854 and soon took over the station. On each side of her wooden hull was lettered in black, MINOTS LEDGE and the twin wooden masts

were topped with hoop grating. Each mast also held a huge copper lantern. Inside, the illuminant consisted of eight oil lamps backed by 12 inch reflectors on a ring around the mast. In the daytime, the lanterns were kept in small deckhouses at the base of the masts which had hatches in the roofs. At dusk, these hatches were opened and the lantern was hoisted up the mast by means of winches on the deck turned by hand. Sails moved the lightship and jigger masts abaft the lantern masts were rigged for sails. The lightship was schooner rigged. Each lantern showed a fixed white light and a bell was rung in foul weather. A crew of four maintained the lightship on station.

During a blizzard on April 15, 1857, at the end of the severe 1856-1857 winter, the bark Nueces, of Galveston mistook the twin fixed white lights of the Minots Lightship for the Thachers Island (Cape Ann) Twin Lights and set his course accordingly for Boston Harbor (sou'east). Miraculously, the bark missed all the rocks in the way and it wasn't until the captain caught sight of the Black Rocks in a lull before he knew he was in any danger. Both anchors were let go but the vessel dragged and fetched up at Green Hill where all hands were saved.

The Minots Ledge Lightship station was discontinued on November 15, 1860 at the lighting of the new and present Minots Light.