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from. Gov't records.

HISTORY OF STAGE HARBOR LIGHT, CHATHAM, MASSACHUSETTS

On March 3, 1879, Congress appropriated $10,000 "for a lighthouse at Stage Harbor, in the State of Massachusetts" and an iron tower and keeper's frame dwelling were erected during 1880 at a cost of $9,882.74.

The recommendation for this light had been made in the 1878 annual report of the Lighthouse Board. "The establishment of a light at this place," it read, "giving a good range with one of the Chatham lights, would serve as a guide into Old Stage Harbor, and would be of great value to vessels seeking refuge there at night and during bad weather." The recommendation was that the structure be erected on the beach and be equipped with a fifth or sixth order apparatus.

The station was first lighted July 15, 1880.

Over the years various improvements were added such as a chimney ventilator in 1882; a barbed wire fence around the lighthouse lot in 1885; a well to supply the station with fresh water in 1902; and an oilhouse, a rebuilt boundary fence and small outbuilding in 1905.

The first keeper was Enoch Eldridge who was appointed June 29, 1880, at a salary of $560 per year. He died March 27, 1884. George W. Folger of Fayal, Mass., succeeded him on April 14, 1884, and served until September 13, 1900, when he resigned. He was followed by Charles L. Ireland who served four years from September 13, 1900 to October 15, 1904. Joseph F. Woods took over the lighthouse on November 1, 1904, and served two years, being transferred on October 16, 1906.

Alfred A. Howard, who was appointed keeper October 16, 1906, served ten years until he was transferred on May 1, 1916. On October 30, 1912, he was commended "for the courtesy extended Mr. A. G. Chapin and party of four others, in towing their catboat into port, and transporting the party from anchorage to the shore, upon receipt of signals from the boat that fuel was exhausted." On November 5, 1912, he was again commended for guiding the yacht ARCTURUS into the anchorage, the owner being unfamiliar with the locality. On March 30, 1913, surfman Walter C. Harding of Monomoy Life Saving Station met with an accident when his dory capsized in a "fresh southerly breeze." "Had it not been for the prompt assistance of A. A. Howard, Keeper of Hardings Beach Light, it would have ended seriously" Harding reported "through the kindness of Keeper Howard, I was taken from the bottom of my dory and carried to the lighthouse where I was furnished with dry clothing and made as comfortable as possible." Howard was officially commended for his action.

On December 19, 1914, Captain Ephriam Smith of West Chatham, Mass., wrote the Lighthouse Inspector at Boston, Mass.: "I deem it my duty to report to you the valuable assistance rendered me by Alfred A. Howard, Keeper Stage Harbor Light Station, in saving my horse from drowning; also

supplying my man with rubber boots and dry stockings, etc. On the 18th inst. P. M. I sent my man after seaweed on Harding's Beach, who is quite elderly and his sight not very good. In driving the horse across the marshland, the horse got mired and went down in mud and water. My man couldn't do anything to save the horse, so he ran for Mr. Howard, the light keeper, at the station; who responded to the call readily and through some very hard work got the wagon and harness clear and then got the horse out of the quicksand and mud and water to hard land all right. And as he would not take money for his very kind service, I take these means to write you for your kind consideration towards commending him for his prompt and efficient aid towards saving my pet and valuable property." Keeper Howard was duly commended for this action by Secretary of Commerce Redfield. In 1914 Keeper Howard was one of seven keepers in his district to receive an "efficiency star." Moreover in 1915, his salary was raised $40 annually to $600.

On May 1, 1916, Mills Gunderson who had been keeper at Boston Light Station at $804 per year was appointed keeper at Stage Harbor Light at $600. He was commended in 1918 for the excellent condition of his station. He died on June 15, 1919.

He was succeeded on September 26, 1919, by his son Stanley M. Gunderson who had served as assistant keeper since June 23, 1919, after having been discharged from the army for physical incapacity after serving in 1917-18. His salary at the start was $780 per year. Mr. Gunderson served as keeper at Stage Harbor Light until June 30, 1933, and was the last keeper. He received numerous increases in salary until, at the time of his resignation his salary was $1380 per annum. During the 14 years of his stewardship, Gunderson received official annual commendations from 1920 on for the excellent condition of his station. In 1929 he reported that the auxiliary yawl GOLLIWAY ran aground on the flats about ¼ ssw of the station on October 12th "as it was very near high water I proceeded at once to their assistance with my own power boat, as if I had of attempted to summon other and the tide would have been ebbed too far to attempt to pull them off. With my boat I succeeded in pulling the bow around to deep water; with the aid of the GOLLIWAY's motor also helping and was slowing working her off the shoal when as the wind, which was already fresh had increased still more on the high water, caused more or less sea to break over the yawl which, when just on the verge of success, some water found its ways below and put his motor out of commission. So I ran anchors off shore to keep him from working further up on the beach, then took the occupants of yacht to my station and furnished them with food and dry clothing as soon as I got them ashore."

"I went to the mainland to the nearest telephone to notify the Coast Guard who at once sent a power surfboat to the scene to stand by until the next flood tide. The next A.M. on high water they succeeded in floating the yawl and towed her to safe anchorage in Stage Harbor." On October 23, 1929, Commissioner Putnam of the Lighthouse Service officially commended Gunderson for his "timely assistance in this instance."

On June 16, 1933, Stage Harbor Light was replaced by an unwatched light located 308 feet, 243° from the old tower. Keeper Gunderson, who had been furloughed July 1, 1933, had written a letter to the local press in which he had criticized the proposed action of reducing the candlepower and replacing the watched light with an unwatched light. "The present light is easily visible 18 miles (actually it was 12 miles) yet the lighthouse bureau decides it will be of great value to shipping by putting an unattended light of 260 candlepower (replacing 680 c.p) supposed to show 10 miles, but which after a storm or two which crusts the lens with an accumulation of salt from the spray, will easily show 3 or 4 miles at the most on a good, clear night." In this letter Mr. Gunderson went on to point out that unattended lights frequently got out of order and "are extinguished from a week to a month until a tender has an opportunity to come and relight it again. The tender with a large crew costs more to operate and one trip to this station would cost as much as it would to keep the present attended light for a period of six months, not counting the trips to put in new acetylene tanks once or twice a year. xxx Yet to save money they put in something that is far more expensive and less reliable and call that economy and put another employee on the unemployed list. Rather a poor way to reduce unemployment and surely no help toward better times." At this time, it might be added, the country was in the depth of the worst depression in its history.

Despite these protests from the keeper the change was effected. On March 26, 1934, however, Gunderson was appointed assistant keeper at Nantucket (Great Point) Light Station at a salary of $1320. Meanwhile he had been given temporary employment as a classified laborer at Woods Hole Lighthouse Depot from September 16, 1933 to March 15, 1934, a position whose tenure was limited by regulations to six months. He resigned from the service March 31, 1935.

Stage Harbor Light is listed in the 1949 Light List as an unattended light located on a white skeleton tower on the northeast side of Chatham Roads, 48 feet above water and visible 11 miles. The light is 300 candlepower, flashing white every 5 seconds, for one second, with a 300 millimeter electric light.