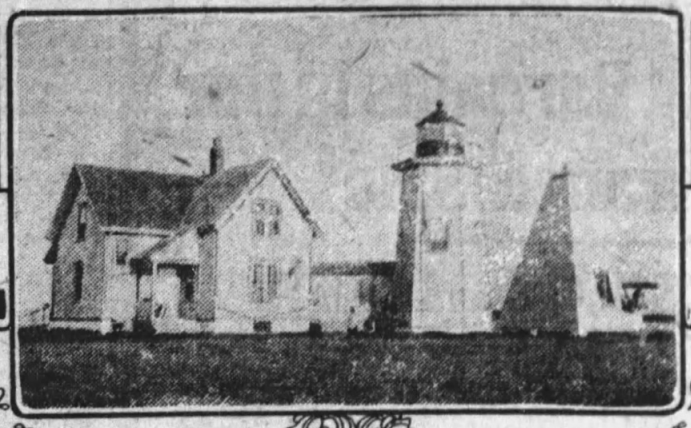
SNUG PORT AFTER STORMY LIFE AT SEA

Capt B. Whitford Joy, Watchman at Wings Neck Light at Buzzards Bay Entrance to Cape Cod Canal, the Last of the Nantucket Men Who Sailed Square-Rigged Ships to All the Ports of the World—Stories of Shipwreck.



KEEPER WALLACE ELDRIDGE



WING'S NECK LIGHT



CAPT B. W. JOY
WATCHMAN.

By SINON J. NEVINS.

By train to Pocasset, and then a three-mile ride through a beautiful stretch of wood, and one finds himself at Wings Neck, on the southeasterly side of Buzzards Bay, at the entrance to the Cape Cod Canal.

There is a lighthouse at this point, taking its name from the location. Up to 1913 Wings Neck light was almost unknown. Occasionally a small schooner bound in or out of Wareham might need it, but its usefulness practically ended there.

Since the completion of the Cape Cod Canal, however, it is one of the busiest spots on the Cape coast. It is the range by day or night for ships coming from the direction of Long Island Sound until the outer lines of red and white flashing canal buoys are reached. Going in the opposite direction, all ships drop their pilots off the light.

The tower, house, etc, occupy the extreme end of a six-acre inclosure held by the Government. Last Spring the canal company was allowed to erect a temporary building on the property, which is occupied by the night watchman, who sits alone for 12 hours gazing in the direction of Long Island Sound, in quest of anything that may be heading his way, bound through the canal to Massachusetts Bay. Once seen, word is telephoned to the superintendent at the draw at the Buzzards Bay station, and the company's tug and pilot put forth to meet the newcomer.

Both Born in Nantucket

As soon as the New York boat leaves Boston each afternoon all traffic to the westward through the ditch is stopped. A red flag by day or a red lantern by night is the signal for all ships bound for Boston and beyond to drop another until a white light or flag is shown. Once the New York boat is safely through, there is a rush of all ships at anchor or "laying to" for the entrace to the canal.

While the watchman sleeps by day, the lightkeeper remains on the lookout, and if the latter in turn is occupied his wife attends to the duties fully as well as her husband or the watchman, who is her brother. She can sit at the kitchen widow, near the cooking range, and, with telescope, "pick up" a three-master, a tug and tow, or a steamer, fully five miles distant.

Keeper Wallace Eldredge and his wife were both born in Nantucket, the son of a whaling shipmaster, who spent the latter part of his life on his Polpis farm, and the daughter of a master mariner in the merchant service.

The keeper is a veteran, having been "lighthousing," as he puts it, for about 30 years. His first position with the Government was at Sankaty Head on Nantucket, his next at Cape Poge on the Vineyard and finally his present charge.

By the Hawsepipe Route

The keeper's wife is fully as popular as her husband—one of those women who never tire. The polished floors and walls and the immaculate ceilings assure the visitor that the man of the house should share with his better half in the credit for this model of tidiness.

Capt B. Whitford Joy, the night watchman, was also born on Nantucket. He made his first voyage at the age of 20, going "board ship" by the "hawspipe" route, and passing through grade after grade to the position of master of some of the finest clippers sailing out of New York in the China and San Francisco trade.

His brother, William P. Joy, was master of an 1800-ton ship at the age of 28, and died in Hongkong four years later of Asiatic cholera, while his younger brother was his executive officer.

Capt Joy retired from the sea two years ago and went to California for a few months, with a view to settling there. But the climate was not to his liking, and he returned to his only surviving relative, Mrs Eldredge.

Only 13 Reached Shore

The captain's "cabin," situated about 50 feet from the lighthouse, is as comfortable and homelike as it is possible to have it. During his leisure hours he is writing the story of his 38 years at sea, full of hardships and disappointments, but interesting in the extreme.

He is a very quiet and modest man, and related to the writer many interesting stories, as they sat alone in the cabin until long after midnight recently. The talk finally turned to shipwreck, when the captain said:

"Yes, yes, my boy, I've been through it. I lost my first ship in a typhoon in the Pacific, on my second voyage, bound from Sydney N S W, to Manila. The mate and several sailors were drowned. Only 13 of the ship's crew reached shore, the most of us on the spanker boom and the rest clinging to gratings.

"'Twas the bark Richard Parsons of Bath, Me, one of the best-equipped ships afloat. She left her bones on a reef about a mile from Mindoro Island in the Philippines.

"But I went out again and again, until the square-riggers had about all been converted into barges. And then I went steamboating. And in this trade I had an experience that turned what dark hair I had left clear white in a few hours.

"I was master of the steamer Westover. We loaded rock at Tampa for New Orleans, and started around Florida Keys with a howling gale over our stern. A driving rain accompanied it and continued for many hours, with the weather so thick you couldn't see a ship's length, scarcely, ahead. When well along on the trip, while standing in the pilot house with the first officer and the quartermaster, the chief engineer called me outside.

"'What's the matter?' I yelled, above the roar of the gale.

"'She's leakin', sir,' he replied.

Mud Stopped the Leak

"'Have you located the leak?' I asked.

"'I think we have, sir. It's forward of the bulkhead, sir!'

"That meant that it was under hundreds of tons of stone, where we could not possibly get at it.

"'All right,' I replied. 'Start all your pumps and report to me in half an hour. I'll see if we can get any idea of our location by the log.'

"Then I crawled aft for the log, and found we were still about 60 miles from port. Here we were in an iron hull with metallic boats, and the hull constructed so that the boats would be crushed to atoms in that sea in case we attempted to lower them.

"In time the chief engineer reported that she was still taking water at the rate of eight inches an hour. Then I made up my mind that only good luck could save us.

"I would not attempt to cross the bars at the mouth of the river, anyway, in a waterlogged ship in a gale of wind, so kept a sharp lookout through the storm for a shelter somewhere to the east, and changed our course accordingly.

"Suddenly I made a small island through the rain and steered so as to get in under its lee. As we passed around the southerly point I made breakers dead ahead, and yelled for both anchors, at the same time giving the engine room the signal for reverse and full power astern.

"She brought up on the anchors with a jerk, but held, and the engineer informed me through the tube that the fires were out. She finally worked up to the wind herself, and held good and fast, although we knew she was bumping into the soft mud every time she went down between the seas.

"We manned the pumps, and an hour later were delighted to hear the report that we were gaining on the water, and felt sure that the mud had stopped the leak.

"Next morning we started for our destination and arrived in a few hours, just about the time the mud was working out."

Last of the Captains

"Do you think you'll ever try the sea again, captain?"

"If I do 'twill be in a square-rigger, if there's one afloat. But I don't know. All my friends are fast passing away, until tonight I find myself the last Nantucket skipper of square-rigged vessels. And it makes me lonely at times.

"My old friend and shipmate, Capt John P. Conway, who was first officer of the ship St Nicholas for several voyages while I was the second officer, has gone to his reward during the year. And Capt Jere Parks of the Magna Vera has just been given up for lost with all hands. And there's Capt Merrihew, another old shipmate, who went out in the tug Charles W. Morse and has never been heard from. So it isn't strange that I sometimes appear quiet.

"But I am contented here and that's a whole lot. There's no more getting out at night in bad weather, no clinging to ropes to keep from going over the side in a storm, no more dead reckoning in fogs coming on the coast. So I guess I'll linger for a while, anyway."