

OCEAN UNDERMINING BILLINGSGATE LIGHT

Storms Dashing Surf on Shores
Have Washed Much of
Island Away.

HEAVY JETTIES REQUIRED.

Life Savers Along Cape Cod Have
Had Unusually Hard
Winter.

WELFLEET, Mass., Jan. 9. — The heavy northeasters that sweep across Cape Cod Bay, rolling up seas mountains high and dashing on the shores of the Island of Billingsgate, have gradually washed the island away until at the present time only twelve acres of shifting sand dunes mark the spot of a hundred-acre island of a few years ago. The Billingsgate Lighthouse is being undermined by the sea.

Billingsgate Island is situated on the west side of the cape, about half-way between Orleans and Provincetown, four and one-half miles from the mouth of Welfleet harbor. On the island is a stone lighthouse that is known to the seafaring men as the Billingsgate light, and it is the only lighthouse between Barnstable and Provincetown.

Capt. G. W. Bailey, keeper of the lighthouse that stands on the shifting sands of the bay, comes from one of the oldest light-keeping families on the cape. Capt. Bailey's grandfather was the first keeper of the Eastern Point light, where his father is keeper at the present time. In speaking about the danger of his lighthouse being washed away, Capt. Bailey said:

"The island is being washed away very fast. The last storm we had the waves came clear up to the steps of the house and washed around on the north side, undermining the foundation some. Of course, I don't know how far the foundation goes down in the sand, but I will tell you that I would not care to be in the light in a storm like the one the Portland went down in, as I think that the light would go down, too.

"I went down as keeper of the light in 1902, and at that time the shore line was 300 yards below the steps that were washed the last storm. A few years ago the Government placed a few stones on the north side to protect the light, but in the first storm they were all washed away and buried under the sands. Once in a while now I see some of them sticking out of a sand pile at low water.

"The first year I went down I built a small house near the light, where I keep wood and other small truck, and one night last winter I had to go out and place an anchor on one end and make the other fast to the lighthouse, as it was being washed down the harbor, and it was not blowing very hard either."

Mr. Bailey thinks the Government will build some heavy jetties around the light so that it will be safe and secure for the light as well as the keeper.

Not for a number of years have the patrolmen of the life-saving stations along the outer side of Cape Cod had such a hard time to cover their beats as this winter. In years gone by this time in the winter they have had frozen beaches to walk on in covering their long beats on the back side. But the southeast gales of the fall have washed the beach away so much that at the present time there is no beach to walk on and the patrolman has to take to the soft sand of the dunes that are so dry that they never freeze.

Capt. Tobbin of the Cahoon Hollow station said that in the last six months the beach line near his station had been washed away over fifty feet and where the men used to walk in covering their beats there is over four feet of water at half tide.

"Why," Mr. Tobbin said, "if I should have a vessel ashore it would be impossible for me to work any of the gear from the beach. I should have to do all my work from the sand hills and, of course, that would handicap us to a large extent. It also would be impossible to launch the surf boat from any part of the beach except right in front of the station, and that would be the same as the rest if I did not have them dig it out after every storm, as the sand shifts so that the runway fills up whenever it blows to any extent.

"Even the clay pound, the ruggedest point on the back of the cape, has washed away so that it is impossible for one of the patrolmen to walk around the point. He has to climb the sand dunes and take to the top of the ridge to continue his beat."