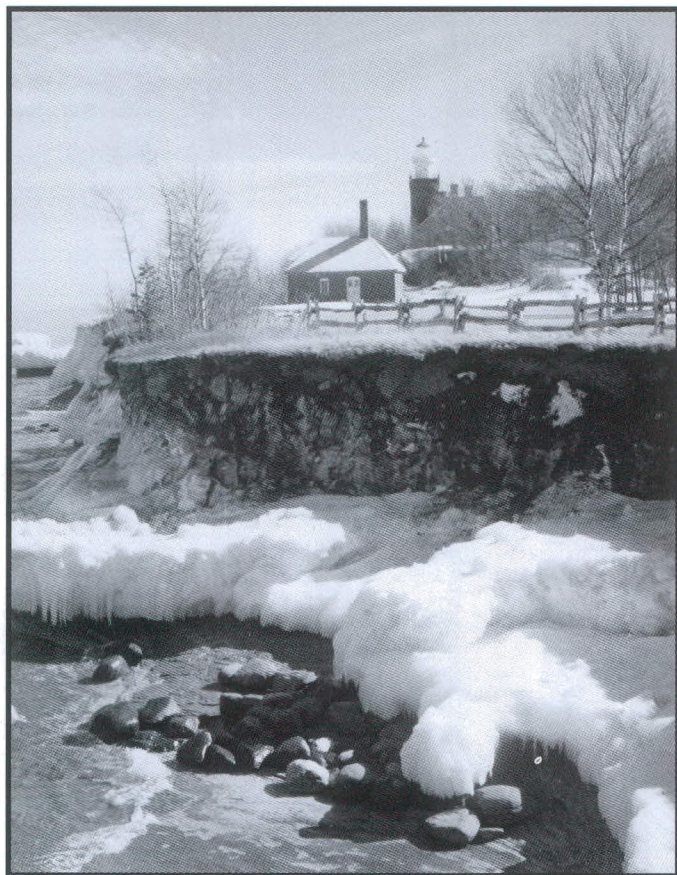


Pages from the Past

BIG BAY POINT, Lake Superior

William H. Prior, Keeper



Buck Gotschall photo



The year 1897—

Nov. 11—Keeper left station at 11 am to go to Marquette on foot being called by message to the deathbed of his only sister and remaining until after the funeral."

Nov. 18—Keeper returned from Marquette at 2 p.m. yesterday and kept watch last night, Fire banked in signal [fog signal building] to keep pipes from freezing. I cannot see that the Asst. [Ralph Heater] has done any work around the station since I left, he has not energy enough to carry him down the hill, and if I speak to him about it he makes no answer, but goes on just the same as if he did not hear me. He is so much under the control of his wife that he has not the heart do do anything. She has annoyed me during the season by hanging around him and hindering him from working, and she is altogether a person totally unfit to be in a place like this, as she is discontented and jealous, and has succeeded in making life miserable for everyone at the station.

Dec. 4—Calm, lake freezing over. Closed station for the Winter. Very cold.

Dec. 10—Went to Marquette with the assistant.

Dec. 13—Returned to station, assistant going ahead yesterday and leaving me to get home along knowing I had the river to cross. I got to the river at 9 o'clock am but could not cross as the horse refused to go in. There being quick sand at the ford and the ice not being strong enough to carry him. If I had assistance I could have crossed alright as one could have lead him into the water...while the other handled the sleigh. After carrying the things I had in the sleigh across by hand I attempted crossing with the sleigh, but got capsized into the river, the thermometer being 10 degrees above zero at the time, breaking the sleigh and hurting my hand getting the horse and sleigh out. After waiting one and one half hours a passing teamster helped me pull my horse and sleigh through the river. After going about three miles and being 12 miles from home I was forced to abandon a part of the sleigh it being in such condition that I could go no further. So I took some poles and made a rack and managed to get within three miles of home after stopping at a camp...to warm myself and feed my horse. At the last breakdown I had to leave a box and some other things belonging to Mr. Heater and another man, having only one bob on the sleigh left...I reached home about 8 pm nearly frozen. Mr. Heater...did not come out to see how I got along. I called him and when he came out I asked him why he did not wait and come home with me as I expected him to. He said he was not under my orders and if I could not drive to town alone I had better hire someone to go with me. As I have done a great deal of work for him with the horse and saved him much expense, I consider that he is wrong and will find out if he is under my orders or not.

Dec. 27—As my assistant objects to working during the closed season, I have written to the inspector to get his opinion on the matter and find out if I have the right to...get him to work if I deem it necessary or if he is to do as he pleases about it.

Jan. 1, 1898—My assistant claims now that he is unable to work as he has a lame back. He has been complaining of that lame back ever since he came into the service, at Stannard Rock, saying a log rolled over him and hurt him when he was a young man.

Jan. 12—Mr. Heater has gone to Marquette on foot.

Jan. 14—Started for Marquette myself. Met Mr. Heater on his way back still complaining.

Jan. 18—Returned to station and found Mr. Heater taking things easy as usual.

Feb. 1—I told Mr. Heater today that I was going to Marquette and as I was taking my wife along, I wanted him to remain at the station until my return. He said he did not want to go as he felt very bad and did not think he could bear the journey...

Feb. 7—Returned to the station and was surprised on reaching the boat house to find that during my absence Mr. Heater had been able to fit up a net and go fishing through the ice. I did not see him that day.

Feb. 8—Saw Mr. Heater did not say anything to him about work 'til he began to complain of his back as usual. When I told him if that was the case it was strange if he could fish through the ice as that is hard work chopping the holes. He said that he did not do the work himself, but I have heard since that if he did not do it all, he did the greater part of it. I don't know, but I can't altogether believe in this lame back business and begin to think there is something not right...

Feb. 14—Mr. Heater arrived from Marquette at 6 pm walked the entire distance 33 miles in 12 hours including two rest stops of over an hour each...pretty good gait for a lame man.

Feb. 21—it is a fine day and I will clean the well. I got ready and went to call Mr. Heater and I found him all doubled up with his back again and he said he is in bad shape as he always appears to be when there is anything hard to do...so I went with my son who acts as a general assistant...to clean out the well. After a little while he came down and emptied the pails after the boy pulled them up which was not necessary. And I am tired of having an assistant who is only good to look at me work and to do only light work. I shall have to make a complaint.

Feb. 22—Have written to Inspector Kennedy to inform him how it is with Mr. Heater as I shall never be able to get the station in proper condition unless I get efficient help.

Feb. 27—Clear and cold. Went to camp for mail. Mr. Heater gone across the Ice to the other side of Big Bay with his wife. It is Sunday so his back is not lame today.

Mar. 1—Went to work in the signal house making gaskets and rungs for ladders. Mr. Heater came down to work today, he said he was willing to do anything that he could. I told him that was not all that was required. That I was entitled to an able-bodied man for assistant and I expect a man to be able to work when he was wanted and not when he felt like it, and then I told him he could finish up the ladders, which he started to work on.

Mar. 5—...Left station for Marquette [three days ago]. Arrived station at 3:30 PM today and found that Mr. Heater had not finished the ladders, but had been fishing again.

Mar. 8—Received a letter from the Office informing me that my Asst. would be transferred to Granite Island. For which I have every reason to be thankful.

Mar. 21—Calm and Cloudy. Keeper at work clearing around the station. Asst. packing up getting ready to leave.

Mar. 24—Clear and fine. Washing paint work of lantern. Asst. still occupied packing his household goods.

Mar. 29—Assistant moving his furniture down to barn at landing. He left with his family at noon.

April 21—Str. *City of Marquette* arrived off the landing at 6:30 pm and landed Mr. Beamer [new asst. keeper] and family and household goods.

In May the Lighthouse Service stated that any keeper who wished to volunteer for the Armed Services would have his position held for 12 months. The new Assistant signed up leaving his wife, Jennie, to act as Assistant. In June the handwriting in the Log was considerably smaller and neater indicating that assistant Jennie was making entries.

Aug. 26—Assistant Keeper George H. Beamer returned to the station today having been mustered out of the Navy as the [Spanish American] war is over. He will resume his duties on the first day of September releasing his wife Jennie Beamer who is now acting as assistant.

Mr. Prior apparently had no problems whatsoever with Mrs. Beamer, however now that the husband is home, here we go again.

Sept. 10—Asst. Beamer does not take hold of his work as he should. He evidently expects me to work with him whenever he is at work and if I do not, which is impossible as I have duties of my own to perform, he leaves the work and does nothing until I go back to him.

Oct. 1—Making our reports and wheeling wood to fog signal station. At 7 pm, Asst. Geo. H. Beamer being on watch, I went out for the purpose of locking the boat house. On getting to the edge of the hill I looked up as is customary with me, and found that the light was out. I ran to Mr. Beamer's door and told him, then through my dwelling and up to the tower. Mr. Beamer reaching there before me and was trying to wind up the plunger, which was alright. I asked him if the faucet was open. He said yes and claimed there was oil in the float chamber when he got there. Now in that case the Light could not go out as the passage of oil was clear and there was no further trouble. As Mr. Beamer always objects to my questions and resents my interference, and I have passed over his dereliction before and not caring to be constantly making reports unfavorable to him I have written this for future reference when the Inspector arrives. He laughs at the idea of the Light to go out, asserting that he had seen the Fort Gratiot Light out often. I have never had it happen before and do not think lightly of it.

Oct. 6—Assistant shipped his house hold furniture and send his wife and child away to Detroit...

Oct. 7—...when shall I get an assistant who will fit the place properly.

Oct. 27—Asst. Beamer complains of being sick and talks of leaving the station to go home to Detroit. The Lake Superior weather has apparently disheartened him so that he is homesick. He is too high strung for a light keeper's asst., between himself and his wife this season I imagine that I am keeping a Home for the Helpless Poor instead of a U.S. Light House. I and my family having to do the greater part of the work while they receive the pay. It has taken Mr. Beamer the greater part of this time cutting wood for his own use. He is generally busy but it takes little work to keep him so.

Nov. 1—After putting out the Light this morning I went to try and sleep for awhile. At 7 am Mr. Beamer sent for me, that he wished to see me...he told me that he was unable to work and he thought that he had better go home [to Detroit] as he did not want to be sick here. I told him he could please himself as to that. but that I should have to apply for a laborer in his place...He will be alright when he gets home to his wife and I don't think he is very sick. I put him on board of the steamer at noon and hired by son George F. Prior as laborer in his place as I cannot get along this season and can't afford to let my sympathies interfere with my action in the future as I am getting poor myself from trying to help my assistants along and they generally manage to beat me out of something so I shall commence with the next one on business principles and leaving sympathy out of the question. This Beamer is the last straw on the camel's back. He is without exception the most ungrateful and the meanest man I ever met.

Apr. 23—Sunday, Mr. William B. Crisp arrived at the station at noon today.

Not a mention of Mr. Crisp for the next month so one might think that the RIGHT man had at last arrived...not so lucky.

Jun. 8—The assistant went to Marquette to remit money to his wife last Saturday at 9 am promising to return not later than Tuesday. It is now 6 days and 5 nights since he went. I wonder what he expects or how he thinks I can do all the work for so long, when he could do nothing but watch the light while I was gone and I only had 3 nights away...

Jun. 9—Cleaning brass in fog signal [building]. Assistant returned to station at 5 pm said he could not return before as his business delayed him.

Jul. 11—He [Mr. Crisp] has decided to resign and wished to leave at once and will go to Marquette the first opportunity if he has to walk down.

Jul. 14—George E. Prior acting as assistant.

Victory at last...Keeper Prior has his son as his official assistant.

Jan. 18, 1900—Got a letter for George E. Prior containing his appointment as Assistant keeper at this station. He subscribed Oath of office and entered duty on the 22nd...

Now here was a happy keeper at last. He has an assistant that he can rely on. How proud he must have been. The Log is filled with details of the father and son's work around the station.

Apr. 18, 1901—Had doctor examine asst. He will have to remain in hospital for treatment, having been hurt by falling on the steps to crib while going to examine [the] injector of [the] water supply. Not thinking he was hurt much he kept right on working after the fall. He went to Dr. Harkins in October and returned to the station the same day as the Dr. told him all he needed was rest as much as possible for a week or two which he did after closing the station...[because] he was always in good spirits and had a good appetite and said he had no pain, I supposed he was alright. But when he started into work, which he was very anxious to do, I noticed that he was not able to get around on his leg. So made up my mind that he would have to go to Marquette for examination again...and found he was more seriously ill than we supposed and liable to get worse if not treated at once. Placed him in St. Mary's hospital in care of Dr. Flynn for treatment.

Jun. 13—Cleaning signal house and tower. Weather calm. 1:30 pm Keeper was summounded to Marquette to bury his son who died this morning.

June. 16—Keeper returned to station.

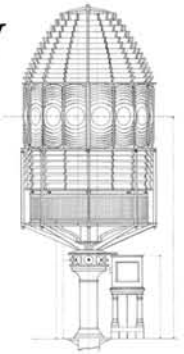
Apparently Keeper Prior resigned as the handwriting changes drastically on June 28, 1901...and two pages later it is signed James Bergan, Keeper. However, later entries show Mrs. Prior coming and going, then on October 22, 1901.. "Mrs. Prior and family left on launch at 4 pm with their household goods to live in Marquette."



Big Bay Point Lighthouse as seen from the air in early Winter. This station was constructed in 1896 and decommissioned in 1961. In recent years it became a successful Bed & Breakfast Inn, one of only three lighthouse Bed & Breakfasts in this country. Most of the original buildings remain. The fog signal building is at top left near the dock. The privies can be seen to the left of the main building. This past year the lens was returned to the station. Photo courtesy of Buck Gotschall.



Join the U.S. Lighthouse Society Today or Give the Gift of Membership!



Restoration & Preservation



Thomas Point Shoal Lighthouse, MD

The U.S. Lighthouse Society has donated to many lighthouse preservation projects throughout the U.S. Most recently we were honored by being presented with the Preserve America Stewardship Award from The White House for our restoration work at Thomas Point Shoal Lighthouse.

*To learn more visit
www.uslhs.org
or
call Headquarters at
415-362-7255*

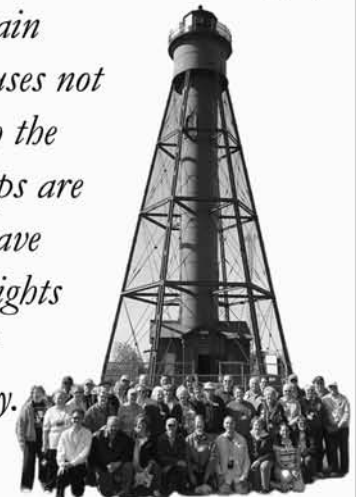
Help Support Our Important Mission!

Education



The Keeper's Log magazine is the only one of its kind and has been published quarterly since 1984. Receive this award-winning publication as a benefit of membership.

The Society organizes domestic and international lighthouse tours. Many of our excursions gain access to lighthouses not normally open to the public. These trips are a great way to have fun, see lots of lights and learn about lighthouse history.



Tincum Lighthouse, NJ