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Pages from the Past

HURRICANE OF 1893



A devastating hurricane (termed a cyclone in that era) swept up the southeast coast on August 27, & 28, 1893. Among the damaged units of the Sixth Lighthouse District were: range light stations at Fort Jackson; Bloody Point and Hilton Head; light stations at Venus Point, Fort Sumter, Sullivans Island, Bulls Bay and Morris Island; the Castle Pinckney Depot and the Rattlesnake Light Vessel (LV 34).

The personnel assigned to those units lost a great deal of personal property and relief for their losses was requested from the District. The Inspector of the 6th District forwarded the claims to Washington for disposition.

On November 9, 1893, Acting Secretary of the Treasury, W.E. Curtis, sent a letter to the Congressional Committee on Claims recommending the keepers be reimbursed for their losses.

"Sir: I have the honor to transmit herewith statements of the personal losses sustained during the cyclone of August 27-28, 1893, in the Sixth Light House District by keepers and assistant keepers of light stations, the keeper, and the seamen of the Rattlesnake Shoal light-ship and the keeper of the Castle Pinckney Buoy Depot.

During this destructive cyclone many of these keepers displayed much devotion to the service and incurred great personal danger.

While these faithful public servants cannot be rewarded for their devotion or compensated for their hardships, they can be reimbursed for their losses, as was done by Congress [on several other occasions].

I have, therefore, the honor to recommend that in the case of personal losses specified in the enclosed statements provision be made by Congress for the reimbursement of the several persons therein named.

W.E. Curtis
Acting Secretary

The requests for reimbursement ranged from a few items to what seems to be everything in a household. One particular list is worth noting:

Bulls Bay Light Station

List of actual losses at this station

1 sewing machine	$ 60.00
Children's clothing	10.00
1 Cow, giving milk for children	25.00

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The assistant keeper's trunk and 2 dresses	20.00
Light-house keeper's hat	1.50
1 boy's suit of black clothing	10.00
1 boat for this station for going to Charleston for rations and quarterly returns; the boat has been found but no sail or rigging; the cost for sail, ropes, block and anchor	6.00
1 horse at this station for hauling wood and rations, as the boat has to land two miles from the light-house; 1 horse	125.00
Cart	25.00
1 set of cart harness	12.25
(corn, oats hay and stable. The stable was swept from its frame; the roof is back in the woods.)	
oats, hay, and corn	8.00

Respectfully,
W.H. Douglas

In the case of this claim, keeper Douglas was a bit too creative as we see in Acting Secretaty Curtis's letter to Congress dated November, 20, 1893:

Sir: On November 9, 1893, I had the honor to transmit twenty statement of the losses sustained by light-keepers and their employees of the Light-House Establishment during the cyclone of August 27-28, 1893.

Among those transmitted was that of Mr. W.H. Douglas, keep of the Bulls Bay, South Carolina, light-station.

Among the items included in his statement was one of $125 for a horse which he alleged was lost.

The inspector of the Sixth Light-House District reports, under date of November 15, 1893, that the horse referred to by Mr. Douglas in his statement of losses was not at the station during the cyclone, and had not been there for years.

In view of this fraudulent claim, I have the honor to withdraw the statement of Mr. Douglas, and to recommend that no part of his claim for losses be considered.

Respectfully yours,
W.E. Curtis

The keeper of the Hilton Head Range Station was also creative with his claim when he wrote:

My Dear Sir: The following account is a list of my losses and their several values in the late cyclone of August 27-28:

List of Losses	
1 Baby Carraige	$ 5.00
Furniture	10.00
Crockery	6.00
Cooking Utensils	5.00
Myself and family clothing	10.00
39 head of poultry	8.00
4 acres, including garden, corn, sweet potatoes and sugar cane for family use	25.00
Groceries, just purchased	17.10
(find receipt attached to verify last item)	

W.H. Blanding
Assistant Keeper

Relief in the sum of $61.10 respectfully recommended. Relief for item, 'destruction of garden', is not recommended.

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The Castle Pinckney Buoy Depot in Charleston Harbor was, in the words of the District Inspector," ...wrecked by the cyclone on August 26-27, 1893, and most of its contents were destroyed.

"The effect of the storm upon the depot was, in brief, to undermine the foundations of the storehouse, tear off its weather boarding, lay open its contents to the action of the winds and sea, and to scatter its stores in every direction and for long distances. On the wharf, 60 by 200 feet, a great part of the decking was torn loose from the joists, and in some measure the joists were broken, and in places even the caps were parted from the piles, with the result of dropping into the water below sinkers, anchors, and buoys. Boats stored on land in rear of the fort, high above the ground, were washed away and lost, and even the keepers dwelling, which was built several feet above the general level of the site, was in serious danger from the waves.

"...The lesson taught by all this is, that our depots should be so built as to resist the greatest storms, and so located as to permit the construction of solid buildings on firm foundations...structures can not be built at Castle Pinckney without so great an expenditure for foundations as would make them cost much more than similar buildings on a proper site with the cost of the site added to them, because the land upon which Castle Pinckney stands is nothing but a mud flat and was used by the Light-House Establishment only because, while an urgent necessity existed for the depot, no funds were available for the purchase of a proper site., and the War Deparment permitted the occupation of the Castle Pinckney reservation, without charge."

The effect of the cyclone caused considerable damage and destroyed much of the keeper's personal property. He wrote:

October 4, 1893

"Sir; The following is a list of personal property lost by me on the 27th and 28th of August, 1893, during the most severe cyclone ever known on this coast:

Winter clothing for 6 boys $10 each	$60.00
3 child's underclothing, average $8.50 each	25.50
3 dresses and one cloak of Mrs. Whiteley's	25.00
2 dresses and 1 cloak of Miss Maud King's, a stepdaughter of mine	28.00
Winter suit and overcoat, my own	30.00
Damage on furniture	30.00
Matting for three rooms	30.00
Furniture in outhouse (ed. pretty fancy outhouse)	20.00
a piano given to Miss Maud King, the granddaughter of Capt. Henry Brown, master of tender Wistaria, which cost $400, and damaged to the amount of $200	200.00
Total	$458.00

J.W. Whiteley
Keeper of Depot

Ed. Note the cost of the clothing as compared to that claimed by the keeper of the Hilton Head Range Lights, $10 for the entire family.

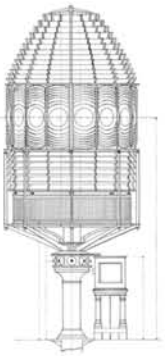
Relief in the sum of $458.50 respectfully recommended.

The item of damage to the piano being an unusual one, I would explain that the worthy master of the light-house tender of this district presented this piano to his granddaughter, it being paid for from money well earned in the light-house service.

From the many calls upon him, it must have been hard to make the necessary saving, and I respectfully recommend this item to the Board.

M.R.S. Mackenzie
LCDR,U.S.N., Inspector Sixth District

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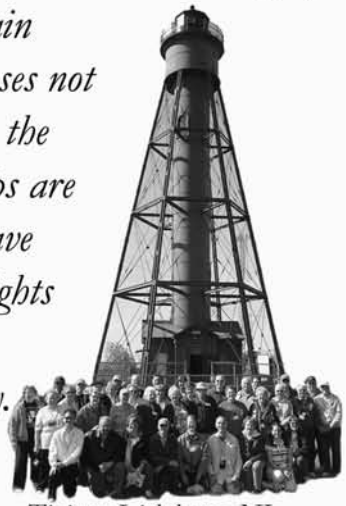
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