

LOG

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Seguin Light Station, Maine

By Jeremy D'Entremont

For more than two centuries, this lighthouse has been an important guide for mariners traveling along the Maine coast as well as for those entering the Kennebec River toward Bath and other ports. Even earlier, high Seguin Island, rising more than 100 feet above the sea, was a prominent landmark. In August 1607, the English founders of the Popham colony anchored at the island before landing on the mainland.

When the explorer Samuel de Champlain sailed past the mouth of the Kennebec River in 1605, he aptly observed that the island looked like a giant tortoise. The island has only scrubby flora today, but Rev. Joseph Bailey described it in the 1700s as “a small, lofty island . . . covered with trees, and difficult of access.”

The name “Seguin” (pronounced suh-GWINN) is said by some to be a corruption of an Indian word (*sutquin* or *satquin*) that means, roughly, “place where the sea vomits.” Others claim that it originates from an Indian word for *hump*. Either way, it's entirely appropriate.

Fifty-five local merchants petitioned the General Court of Massachusetts for a lighthouse on Seguin in June 1786. The petition noted that the “island Seguin seems to be designated by Nature for this purpose,” and it stated the opinion that “if there was a Light upon this Island many Vessels would be saved from Shipwreck, and many Persons preserved from immature Deaths.” At that time, there were only three light stations on the coast north of Boston: at Thacher Island off Cape Ann, at Portsmouth Harbor in New Hampshire, and at Portland Head in Maine.

Seven years passed before the establishment of a light station was approved by President George Washington in May 1793. Ten acres of land on the island was ceded in February 1794 to the federal government by the state of Massachusetts, as Maine was part of Massachusetts at the time.

In June 1794, Commissioner of the Revenue Tench Coxe sent word to General Benjamin Lincoln, the customs collector and local lighthouse superintendent in Boston, that he should examine Seguin Island to select the most advantageous position for the lighthouse.

Later that month, Lincoln gave notice in the local newspapers that he would visit Seguin Island for three days in July and that “all such Collectors, Merchants, and others” who were “interested in the affair of this business” were invited to help him in the work.

By April 1795, the site had been chosen and a request was posted in local newspapers for proposals to build an octagonal wooden lighthouse tower on a stone foundation and a one-story, wood-frame dwelling. The tower was to be 26 feet in diameter at the base and 40 feet tall to the base of the lantern, where the diameter would be 15 feet. A 10-foot-high octagonal iron lantern was to be installed atop the tower, with a fixed white light 165 feet above mean high water.

A newspaper notice in late October 1796 announced that the buildings had been completed under the supervision of Henry Dearborn, who would later become the customs collector in Boston. Dearborn was a physician and an officer in the American Revolution, and he served in Congress and as secretary of war under President Jefferson.

He is also remembered in lighthouse history as the builder of the first lighthouse at Cape Hatteras, North Carolina, in 1803.

Seguin's first keeper, appointed in March 1796 at \$200 per year, was Major John Polereczky, a Hungarian Hussar and count who fought with French troops during the American Revolution. The Polereczky family had been Hungarian nobility as far back as 1613.

Polereczky settled in Dresden, Maine, after he resigned his commission, and he served for 25 years as town clerk, before and after his time on Seguin. In October 1795, Polereczky wrote



Seguin Light Station circa 1913. Author's collection.

to Lincoln to express his desire for the keeper position “for the better support” of his family. “I am willing to sacrifice the pleasures of society,” he wrote, “to the fulfillment of the Duties of that office.”

Polereczky obtained the keeper's position as a reward for his war service, Dearborn having served as his champion. The light wasn't put into service until the autumn of 1796, but Polereczky was hired in March to give him time to prepare the land for cultivation.

Initially, Polereczky was paid an extra \$150 to clear at least nine acres of trees and bushes from the island. In May 1796, he wrote to Lincoln to request a raise in pay.

You know my dear General all the difficulties and expenses a light at Seguin is attended to and I dont want to have extravagant wagers [sic], but should like to save myself. The first three years will cost me money out of my pocket which I can make you sensible of. . . . I must purchase a good boat, which cost me at list 100 dolar. I must purchase every individual necessity for my family. . . . I hope you will take it into consideration I must request the favour of you to assist an old soldier.

Revenue Commissioner Coxe, in charge of lighthouses, replied to Lincoln regarding the keeper's request:

The house, the fuel, the land and the salary with the opportunities for fish would attract numbers of perfectly competent persons; tho perhaps few as respectable and of as much public merit as himself. But the fund assigned by law has been predicated upon strict ideas of what a keeper would merit, and could be engaged for, without difficulty. With these sentiments I do not at present propose to apply to the President to increase this salary.

In November 1796, Polereczky again requested a raise in his salary to \$300. “I have but one Cow here for my family,” he wrote, “and one tun of haye I purchased for her, delivered to the house. Cost me 20 dollars and so it is with all the necessities of life till I Cann Raise them.”

The matter was again referred to Coxe, who replied that Polereczky had “the advantages of plenty of fuel, without expense, upon the public land, the opportunity to fish for his family use, or even for sale. . . . there is land for tillage and grass, and for a plentiful garden.” Coxe did agree to provide Polereczky with a boat “to fish in . . . [and] for passing to the main.”

In a 1799 letter to Lincoln, Polereczky complained that he had to carry out makeshift repairs to the leaky lantern. In another letter that year, the keeper indicated that he had been wrongly accused of allowing the light to go out at night.

There has been a report made that the lights were out; if the General will be so obliging as to promis a Reward, when ever any body See the light to be out, to land upon Seguin, to call upon me, and to convince me of it, I am willing to forfeit one hundred dolars, out of my Salary, to the one that calls on me. I am Ready if necessary to procure a certificat signed by every mann who lives a long the shore that never the lights been out ones.

Polereczky hired Christopher Pochard, the brother of his wife,

Nancy, to serve as an assistant. A daughter born to Pochard and his wife was probably the first child born on the island.

According to a 1907 article by Charles E. Allen, Pochard rowed to the mainland on occasion in a boat that Polereczky considered so unsafe that he eventually destroyed it. The resourceful Pochard built his own raft and succeeded in taking it to the mainland. Pochard once found a barrel of rum that had washed onto the island, and he secreted it away for his own use. According to Allen, Polereczky remained ignorant of the source of Pochard's frequent imbibing.

Polereczky served about eight years as keeper. His successor, Jonathan Delano, was appointed in October 1804. Like Polereczky, Delano often complained of the conditions on Seguin. In an 1809 letter, he wrote that the dwelling was very leaky and in great need of repair. When new lamps were installed in the lighthouse in 1812, Delano complained in a letter to the local superintendent that the lamps were defective.

In May 1818, Delano wrote the following rambling letter to Henry A. S. Dearborn, collector of customs and local lighthouse superintendent and the son of the earlier customs collector, Henry Dearborn. Delano's spelling has been retained.

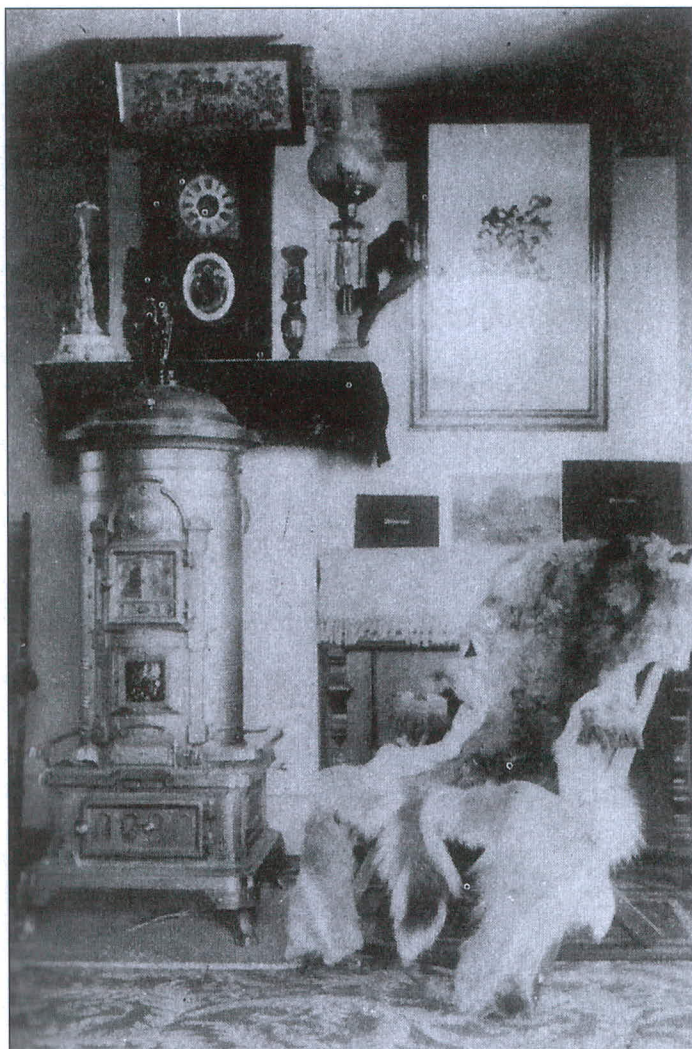
The 13th day of last month I met with the misfortune of... having my boat badly stove so that I was unable to get to

land without the assistance of my neighbours coming to Relieve me with a signal flying from monday till the next friday and vessels passing ... without taking any notice of me. Neither have you taken any notice it appears of my

letter I sent you stating particularly the misfortune I have met with but I find that if there is any complaint comes to you about the light and fals reports two they are soon taken notice of and now I wish you to answer this Letter as soon as you Receive it that I may no what to do. . . . you no your self that my Salry is but two hundred dollars which will not support any family under our circumstances. It is true that I have had many promises but this will not due promises with preformances a man perhaps may live by but promises without preformances are good for nothing or like a Leaky house that has been repaired so many times that the old foundation is ready to tumble from under it or putting a new peice of cloth into an old garment and the new taketh from the old. . . . and this is our situation though I have not represented it not more than half so bad as what it Really is for we are obliged in an ENE wind to let open our doors and windows to prevent our being devoured with smoke this I think may suffice at this time.

In Dearborn's reply, he informed Delano that a new boat had been requested. Dearborn added that a bill that would have raised the keeper's salary had not passed “in consequence of the press of business.” Dearborn expressed his dismay over the tone of Delano's complaints, calling it “contemptible and disgraceful . . . even in an old man.” Delano's reply is nearly illegible, but it included the statement “I am not a shamed that they [complaints] should be seen neither the badness of the writing nor the [illegible] of the words.”

Part of a 1795 letter from Major John Polereczky, Seguin's first lightkeeper. Courtesy of the National Archives.



The living room in the keeper's house, 1898. Courtesy of Friends of Seguin Island.

Delano was still keeper in 1825, when the local superintendent, Isaac Ilsley, accused him of improper practices. Too much oil had been used at Seguin in comparison with the similar light at Portland Head, and it appeared that Delano must have "wasted or improperly disposed of" much of the oil at Seguin. In addition, Delano and his wife and son had been trading lamp wicks intended for the lighthouse in exchange for tin. Considering his earlier complaints, it's reasonable to imagine that Delano felt entitled to some unofficial repayment from the government. In any case, Delano was dismissed in March 1825, and John Salter was appointed to replace him.

The original tower had deteriorated and had to be rebuilt in 1819, this time of stone. The new lighthouse was much smaller than its predecessor; the specifications called for it to be 20 feet tall to the base of the lantern, 16 feet in diameter at the base, and 13 feet in diameter at the top. The old lantern was to be thoroughly repaired and placed on the new tower, "well glazed with the best double glass from the Boston manufactory."

A fog bell was added to the station in 1837. Salter was paid an extra \$100 per year to ring the bell by hand in times of fog, in response to signals from passing vessels.

In his 1843 report to Congress, the engineer I. W. P. Lewis described the stone tower as 21 feet high and in "bad order": inferior

mortar, cracked walls, and leaky and decaying woodwork. The octagonal iron lantern, almost nine feet high, was glazed with "impure" glass, and the 14 lamps and reflectors were poorly aligned. The keeper's house then in use, with three rooms on the first floor and three small rooms in the attic, was leaky, and the east end of the house was cracked. Lewis noted that the old 1795 house was "in very good preservation" and was used for storage and as a "lodging-house."

Recognizing the importance of the location, Lewis recommended an upgrade to 24 lamps and reflectors. The 3,639-pound fog bell, he reported, was installed in such a way that its full sound couldn't be utilized, rendering it "entirely useless."

Nathaniel Springer Todd, who had been keeper since 1839, provided a statement for Lewis's report. Todd was paid \$400 yearly, plus \$100 to tend the fog bell. When he took over from the previous keeper, Salter, he had to pay Salter \$540 for buildings he had added to the station during his 14 years there. Todd had a small garden, and he managed to cut an average of six tons of hay yearly. He provided his own boat, for which there was no landing place except a small cove. There was no cistern and the well was dry during much of the summer, so Todd had to bring freshwater from the mainland.

The tower was leaky, rickety, and "very much out of repair," according to Todd. There was no door at the lantern level, so he had to use a ladder to clean or repair the glass. This was a risky proposition in "blowzy weather." The dwelling leaked badly in its eastern end. One of the chimneys had twice blown over, doing great damage to the roof. The cellar had no floor and was wet and muddy. Todd concurred with Lewis's statements regarding the bell. "Vessels can seldom hear it above the surf in ordinary weather," he wrote, "and if blowing fresh, cannot hear it at all."

An inspection report by the local superintendent in 1843 praised the "perfectly clean" condition of the lighting apparatus, but noted the need for many repairs to the tower and dwelling.

Improvements came quickly after the formation of the federal Lighthouse Board in 1852. A new fog bell with automatic striking machinery was installed in 1854, and the Lighthouse Board announced in 1855, "Seguin light-house needs rebuilding, and should be fitted with a first-order lens." After an appropriation of \$35,000, a new 53-foot stone tower was built in 1857. Because of the heavy maritime traffic in the area, a first-order Fresnel lens, Maine's most powerful light, was installed in the lantern. The nine-foot-high lens



Working on the tramway, 1898. Courtesy of Friends of Seguin Island.

was large enough for the keepers to go completely inside it to light the lamp. A duplex keepers' dwelling was also built in 1857.

Over a period of 31 years, the station was foggy 15 percent of the time. In 1907 the island set an all-time Maine mark for foggi-ness—2,374 hours, or about 31 percent of the year. The Lighthouse Board announced in 1870 that preparations had begun for the establishment of a new steam-driven fog signal to replace the bell. A new well was dug to provide the necessary water for the engines. A 10-inch steam whistle was installed by 1873, sounding one eight-second blast every minute.

A new wood-frame building, 31 by 32 feet, was erected in 1876 to serve as quarters for an assistant keeper and to house duplicate fog signal equipment. A small fuel house for the fog signal, 15 by 18 feet, was completed in the following year.

In 1889 the fog signal equipment was removed from the 1876 building and the vacated room was converted into living space, and a new brick fog signal house, 32 feet square, was erected. There wasn't enough fresh water available from the well for the fog signal, so a rain shed with a large reservoir was built in 1890. The fog signal system was upgraded several times in the ensuing years. A small brick oil house for the storage of kerosene for the light was completed in 1892.

Because of the steep quarter-mile climb up to the lighthouse, a tramway system was installed in 1895, its tracks leading from the boathouse up to the keepers' house. Supplies were loaded into a car that was brought up more than 1,000 feet on the tracks by means of a hoisting engine.

A 1904 *Boston Globe* article profiled Herbert Spinney, who had been an assistant keeper beginning in 1893 and was principal keeper from 1903 to 1907. Spinney, who was a native of nearby Georgetown, Maine, also served as president of the Maine Ornithological Society. He had collected and mounted birds since boyhood, and he also collected birds' eggs, butterflies, minerals, and corals. He always carried a camera, and he developed and printed his own photos.

Spinney's collection filled much of the dwelling's wall space from floor to ceiling. This makeshift museum drew increasing numbers of visitors to the island, and eventually the keeper began charging an admission fee of a dime to keep the crowds more manageable. Included in the collection was a stuffed monkey, and a visitor once asked the keeper if he had shot the monkey on the island. "No madam," replied Spinney, "I didn't, but I've seen little monkeys on this island that I should like to shoot."

Many of the birds Spinney collected were found dead after flying into the lantern glass of the tower. On one memorable morning, Spinney found 275 birds dead around the lighthouse. Spinney kept a journal of his observations; here's the entry for September 3, 1899:

Midnight, wind northwest, very dark, not a star to be seen; the air so impregnated with smoke as to make my throat smart in breathing; at this hour I came on duty, the birds were flying around the light; on going into the lantern I found about 75 birds on the outside; pine warblers, black and white yellow throats, oven birds, two hermit thrushes and one yellow-bellied flycatcher; all seemed to alight on the glass as fast as they appeared; very few seen flying around the light.

At 3 a.m. came a light shower, which seemed to check the flight. Those on the lantern remained until morning. All the mortality occurred with the yellow throats, 10 of this species being found dead. This seems odd, as I could hear many birds strike the dome of the lantern, the concussion when they struck sounding like a body of several hundred pounds weight.



Keeper Herbert Spinney. Courtesy of Friends of Seguin Island.

Elson Small, previously at Lubec Channel Light and Avery Rock, was keeper from 1926 to 1930. His wife, Connie, later wrote the book *The Lighthouse Keeper's Wife*, in which she painted a vivid portrait of life on Seguin. She especially enjoyed being in the lantern room when it was time to light up, as she wrote: "I loved being in the tower at sunset. When I took that lens cover off . . . I could begin counting from Portland to Pemaquid Point as almost simultaneously the lights came on—thirteen of them. It was like saying, 'hello,' 'hello,' 'hello,' 'hello,' all down the coast. I felt that spiritually we visited with the people in all of those lights, we knew they were trying to do the same thing we were, protecting navigation."

In her book, Connie Small also recalled spirited sing-alongs and wrestling matches between the keepers and visiting work crews. Elson Small played banjo, accordion, guitar, and harmonica, and Connie Small played the piano. A visiting crew sent to work on the island's tramway included Howard Colbath, a carpenter who played the fiddle. At the same time, the fog signal engines were being repaired by Fred Morong, a machinist with a fine baritone singing voice. As the band played, the three daughters of assistant keeper Frank Bracey danced the Charleston.

Summer visitors were common, and Connie Small was amazed that they seemed to think they had the right to go anywhere they pleased. "I'd be making my beds," she wrote, "when I'd hear a noise and turning, find a group of people at the bedroom door." One



Undated photo of boaters in front of the tramway on Seguin Island. Author's collection.

day, Connie was picking blueberries with the visiting family of the keeper from Perkins Island Light when she was shocked by the sight of a monkey running straight into her box of blueberries. A man soon approached and laughed at the sight of his pet monkey sitting in the blueberries, but Connie wasn't amused. She had planned to can the berries for the winter.

Bracey, who had been a crewman on the PORTLAND Lightship, was one of the keepers in the 1920s and 1930s. He claimed to have seen seagulls knocked from the air by the concussion of the foghorn, which on at least one occasion was heard as far away as Bath, 14 miles distant. Bracey also told the historian Edward Rowe Snow that he witnessed the fog signal extinguish an oil lantern on the ground eight feet below the horn.

The various fog signals at Seguin were a prominent part of the environment for local residents. In his 1965 book, *The Woods and the Sea*, Dudley Cammett Lunt called the foghorn at Seguin a "somber, yet friendly note of warning." He wrote, "It gives me a feeling of kinship with the mariner at sea for whose guidance in intermittent periods it pours forth across the water."

As befits a remote lighthouse location, Seguin Island has ghost stories galore. Keepers spoke of furniture moving on its own and doors slamming themselves. A popular tale concerns a 19th-century keeper's wife who played the same tune over and over on her piano. The keeper was eventually driven insane and destroyed the piano with an axe, then killed his wife and himself—so they say. Legend has it that the piano tune can still be heard drifting from the island on calm nights. Some local people have attributed the story to nearby Pond Island.

The Maine writer William O. Thomson claims that Coast Guard keepers told him about the specter of a young girl they saw running and laughing in the house—the ghost, it's said, of a keeper's daughter who died on the island. Other keepers have reported doors opening and closing themselves and mysterious coughing not produced by any of the keepers.

In one of his newspaper columns, Snow related another ghost story that concerned a female spirit who "walks around the island

carrying her head under her arm." The ghost was said to have reached the island alive in a snowstorm after surviving a shipwreck that killed her family. She froze to death while trying to reach the lighthouse, and her ghost supposedly wanders in search of her family. Why she carried her head under her arm is anyone's guess.

There have also been many rumors of buried treasure on the island. In February 1936, the Bureau of Lighthouses granted Archie Lane of Northeast Harbor a license to "dig with hand tools" on the island. Finding nothing, Lane left after nine months.

The last civilian keeper on Seguin was Clarence Skolfield, a former merchant mariner who arrived as third assistant keeper in 1936 and left as the very popular principal keeper in 1946. He later became keeper at Perkins Island Lighthouse and Squirrel

Point Lighthouse, retiring in 1966.

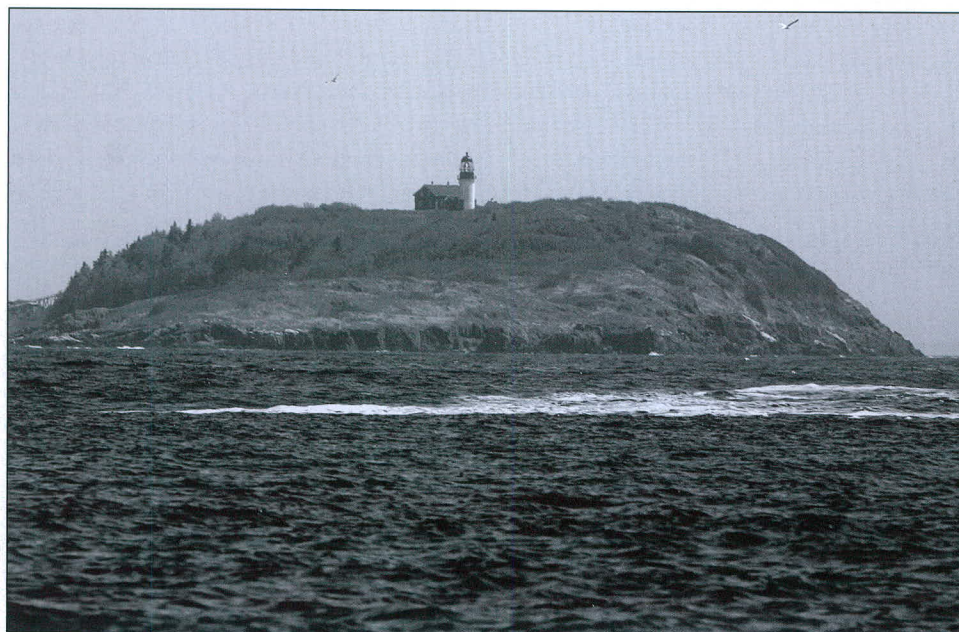
Skolfield's son, Tom, became a lobsterman in Cape Elizabeth. He remembered his days at Seguin fondly. "It was perfect there, like being Tom Sawyer or Huck Finn," he told *Down East* magazine. One of the keepers kept two cows and a bull on the island. The bull was allowed to run loose, and it sometimes charged at Tom Skolfield's sister. The Skolfields' complaints yielded no results, so the next time the bull came near their residence, Tom's father fired a shotgun into the air. The bull ran to a far corner of the island and never bothered them again. "The bull was scared of Dad," said Tom.

Near the end of World War II, eight-year-old Tom Skolfield watched from his yard as a German U-boat dove beneath the waves offshore. Around the same time, not that many miles from Seguin, an American Navy ship was sunk off Cape Elizabeth when it was struck by a torpedo fired from a U-boat.

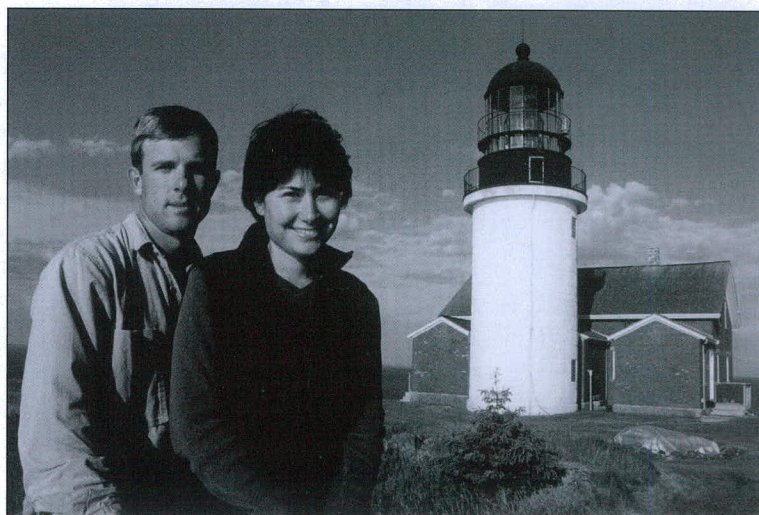
Harry L. Cressey was one of the Coast Guard keepers beginning in 1947, and he served as the officer in charge from 1951 to 1954. His wife wrote in a newspaper article that the Coast Guard Morale Fund provided the three families with two daily newspapers, several magazines, baseballs and gloves, radios, and a "beautiful new record player." Cressey built a fireplace outside on the rocks from old concrete blocks, and the families often picnicked there on Sundays. Cressey also made use of his spare time by building ship models. There was plenty of spare time to be had in the winter; Mrs. Cressey wrote that one winter they stayed on the island for 10 straight weeks due to rough seas.

The tramway built to help the keepers get supplies up the steep slope to the station was generally a great help, but it proved dangerous on at least one occasion. In September 1949, one of the keepers, Daniel Irvine, was riding the car uphill with his 22-year-old wife, Joyce, and their two children, 18-month-old Daniel, Jr. and two-month-old Millie. Something went wrong and the car reversed direction and began to hurtle back down the hill.

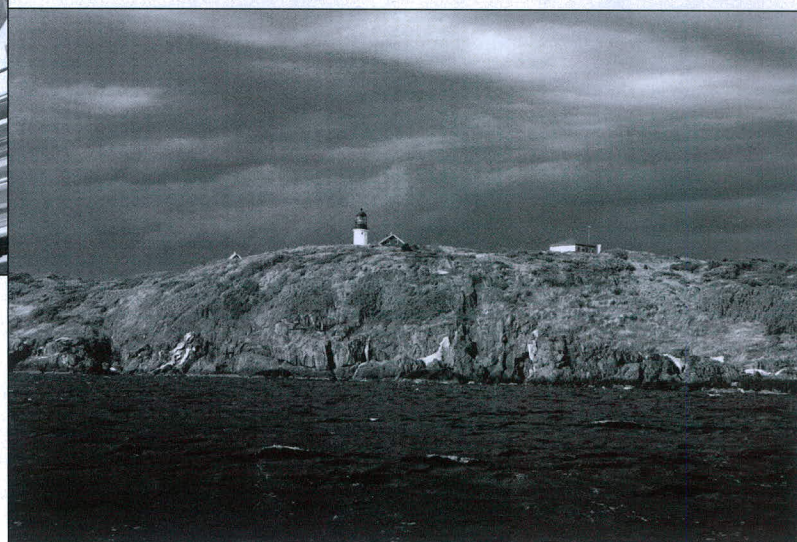
Irvine grabbed Millie and jumped out onto the grass, shouting for his wife to do the same with Daniel, Jr. She tossed the baby into high grass that cushioned his fall, but by the time she was ready to jump the car was moving too fast and was too high above the



Left: Seguin's light shines from 186 feet above the water. Photo by the author.
Below: Looking down the tramway, circa 1970s. U.S. Coast Guard photo.

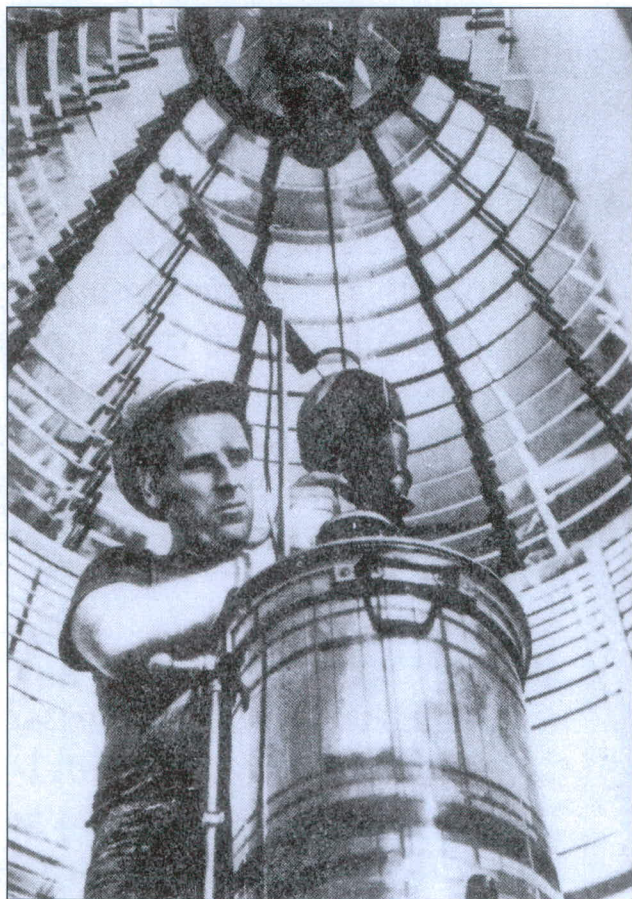


Above: Inside Seguin's first-order Fresnel lens.
Above right: Jim Woods and Kris Pescatore were the 2001 caretakers on Seguin Island.
Right: Approaching thunderstorm at Seguin. Photos by the author.



ground. The wheels left the tracks and the car continued at high speed down the hill, where it came to a violent stop that resulted in Joyce Irvine suffering a leg fracture. The family dog was killed in the unfortunate incident, and from that point, the Coast Guard didn't allow passengers on the tramway.

The "donkey engine" that powered the tramway system was the source of a dangerous grass fire in April 1950. The fire was quickly out of control due to high winds, and it took 18 men from the cutter *Laurel*, based at the Coast Guard station in South Portland, to get the blaze under control before it could endanger the keepers' houses.



Keeper Harry Cressey inside Seguin's first-order lens, 1953. Courtesy of Friends of Seguin Island.

Electric generators were installed in the mid-1950s, but the kerosene-fueled incandescent oil vapor lamp was kept on hand as a backup. At the time of an article in *Down East* magazine in 1956, the Coast Guard assigned a complement of three men to the island, and the families of the crewmen lived on the island with them. The families were allowed one shopping day each month, as well as three days' leave every three weeks. A 40-foot utility boat from the Coast Guard station at Popham Beach took supplies to the island every week.

Seguin became a males-only station in 1963. The last keeper whose family lived on the island was George F. Johns of Bath. There were two other crewmen and their families, with a total of five children living at the station. Mrs. Johns said she never dared let their

two little girls out of her sight because of the high precipices on the island. The family was the last to live in the 1876 assistant keeper's house, which was subsequently demolished.

After the families left, four Coast Guard keepers were assigned to the station; three were on the island and one was on shore leave at all times. Some took to island living more easily than others. Kenneth Estey, who spent two years on the island in the early 1980s, told a local newspaper, "Sometimes I don't know if I should eat—if I'm hungry or just bored." Estey said he passed his time by reading Mark Twain or science fiction. Another keeper at the time, Eric Thompson, enjoyed target shooting on the island. The Coast Guard supplied the men with five magazine subscriptions—including *Playboy*, which, the men complained, always mysteriously arrived six months late.

The light was automated in 1985 and the crew was reassigned. The last Coast Guard keeper was First Class Boatswain's Mate Edward T. Brown, who hated leaving Seguin. "I'd stand on my head to live on the island with my family," he said.

A ghostly story about the automation of Seguin Island Light Station, related by the lighthouse historian William O. Thomson, concerns the crew that arrived to take all the furniture from the keeper's house. They packed up most of the furniture and spent the night in the keeper's house, planning to leave in the morning. The officer in charge later claimed that he was rudely awakened by a figure standing at the foot of his bed pleading, "Don't take the furniture. Please leave my home alone!" The next day the crew went ahead and loaded the furniture into a boat. Suddenly the chain holding the boat broke, the engine stopped, and the boat sank with all the furniture.

After automation, the future of the station was uncertain. Concerned local citizens led by a real estate broker, Anne Webster, founded the Friends of Seguin Island in 1986. Three years later the Friends of Seguin Island received a 10-year lease on the property from the Coast Guard. In February 1998, under the Maine Lights Program, the property was transferred to the group.

Grants and donations paid for the restoration of the keeper's house. Since 1990, caretakers have lived at Seguin in the summer. The 1991 caretaker, Susie Wren, told *Down East*, "I'm interested in just the pure power of being there on that big rock with all of nature going wild at your feet." During her stay on Seguin, Wren met a local lobsterman and they eventually married.

The caretakers in the summer of 1996 were Harry Denker, a carpenter and contractor from Ontario, his wife, Lawrence, a writer, and their two daughters, Rachel and Anna. Harry Denker explained his attraction to Seguin to the *Bath Times-Record*: "The lighthouse comes across to me as something stable, something the mariners can count on. It's a reassuring thing." Since the summer of 1996, the Denkers have returned almost every spring to help get things ready for the summer season.

Nick and Stasi Bottinelli of Denver, Colorado, were the caretakers for the summer of 1997. Stasi wrote in the logbook: "We are both so excited every time we open the door and go outside because the weather is always interesting and pleasant in one way or another. . . . The air is full of the smell of wild roses, green grass, sea mists, all the blooming and ripening things. The sounds of the catbirds and warblers bring such peaceful delight, especially near dusk on the main trail near the tramway."



Early 1900s postcard image. Author's collection.

In February 1998, the Coast Guard announced plans to replace Seguin's first-order Fresnel lens with a modern solar-powered plastic optic. Officials said that it was too expensive to maintain the 17,000-foot underwater cable necessary to run the light inside the large lens, so they would save taxpayers' dollars by replacing it.

The Friends of Seguin Island wanted the lens to remain in the lighthouse; it's the only operating first-order Fresnel lens in Maine. The Coast Guard offered an alternative: leave the inactive lens in place, and replace it by erecting a solar-powered light on a nearby mast. The Friends mounted a petition drive to convince the Coast Guard to leave the historic lens in operation. They collected more than 7,200 signatures.

In March 2000, Senator Olympia Snowe of Maine announced that the Coast Guard had agreed to leave the lens in operation. Captain Bob Papp, chief of congressional affairs for the Coast Guard, told the *Portland Press Herald*, "The Coast Guard is in the service of the taxpayer. We came up with the best plan we could, but it may not fit every situation. We made an exception in this case."

Jim Woodward, one of the nation's leading lampists, or lighthouse lens experts, went to the island in May 2005 to have a close look at the lens. It needed immediate attention, he concluded, because any expansion or contraction in the tower caused by temperature variations and high winds was being absorbed by the lens, a process that had caused significant damage over the years.

Later in 2005, three lens experts, Joe Cocking, Nick Johnston, and Jim Dunlop, went to Seguin to examine the lens. The Coast Guard awarded the contract for the restoration of the lens in June 2006 to Lighthouse Lamp Shop, owned by Cocking, a retired Coast Guard chief warrant officer.

The restoration project began in July 2006. Cocking and Nick Johnston repaired and reinstalled two damaged central prisms. The lens's frame and the lens itself were cleaned, and corrosive contaminants were removed. Cracks were repaired and the lens was polished, and the restoration of the 150-year-old lens was completed in June 2007.



Lens expert Jim "Woody" Woodward took a close look at Seguin's lens from the inside in May 2005. Photo by the author.

The buildings sustained some damage in the nor'easter of April 16, 2007, but extensive repairs were carried out thanks to grant money and dedicated volunteers. Friends of Seguin Island continues to be one of the most active lighthouse preservation groups on the Maine coast.

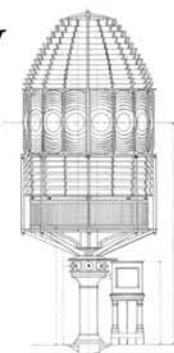
You can drive to Popham Beach for distant views of Seguin Light Station—be sure to bring your binoculars. Better yet, you can visit Seguin Light Station by boat. For lovers of lighthouses teeming with legends and lore, this is a must. The still-active light is Maine's highest, at 186 feet above sea level. From the top of the tower on a clear day, you can see all the way to New Hampshire's White Mountains.

For more information or to donate to the maintenance of the property, and for information on how to get to the island, visit Friends of Seguin Island online at www.seguinisoland.org.

This article is adapted by the author from a chapter in the book The Lighthouses of Maine with permission of Applewood Books.



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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
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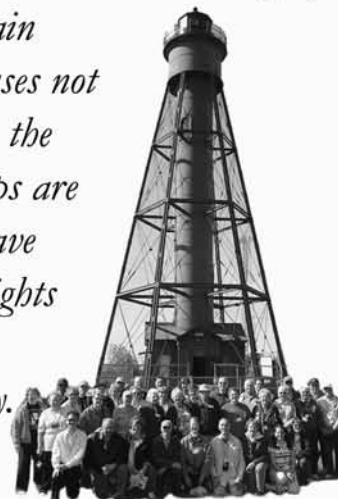
Education



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.



Tinicum Lighthouse, NJ