

Cape Elizabeth Light Station

By Wayne Wheeler

Cape Elizabeth is a critical geological point on the Maine coast. South of the Cape the coast has long sandy beaches amongst rocky spits and headlands. To the north

of the Cape the coast line is almost devoid of sandy beaches and becomes laced with rocky cliffs and islands. Early Spanish explorers called the area *cabo de muchas islas* or “cape of many islands.”

In 1604, Samuel de Champlain visited the area, met with an Indian tribe and labeled the area *Isle de Bacchus* due to the abundance of the numerous native grapes. Three years later Captain Raleigh Gilbert sailed on a voyage of discovery, sailed by “. . . many gallant islands. . .” and anchored in the vicinity of them where he found, “. . . the land to be most fertill, the trees growinge thear doeth exceed for goodnesse & Length being the most part of them ocke and walnut. . .”

From Gilbert's description it appears he sailed past Casco Bay and encountered Cape Elizabeth, probably near where the Portland Head Lighthouse is now situated. Seven years later Captain John Smith sailed to the area and noted the prominent Cape on his chart, although he did not venture ashore. When he returned to England he presented his charts to King Charles and the 1614 chart, for the first time, shows the prominent headland as ‘Cape Elizabeth.’ We don't know if Captain Smith or, perhaps, King Charles applied the name.

The first grant to refer to the town of Cape Elizabeth was issued in 1622 by the Plymouth Council. Until March 1820, the present State of Maine was part of Massachusetts. On March 16, 1820 it was admitted as an independent state.

The entrance to Portland Harbor is guarded by numerous islands, reefs and rocky outcroppings. Many of the dangers to early sailing vessels are located off Cape Elizabeth, south of Portland Head. Strong winds from the northeast, especially nor'easters, tend to set vessels approaching Portland southwest on a lee shore. Blunt's *American Coast Pilot*,



Above – Original rubble-stone octagonal Cape Elizabeth west tower. Note the Fresnel lens, keeper on the gallery and the other people (keepers' families?) gathered around the base of the tower. Photo courtesy of American Lighthouse Foundation.

Below – A later view with the 1873 cast iron west tower in the foreground, east tower beyond. Image from an old post card.

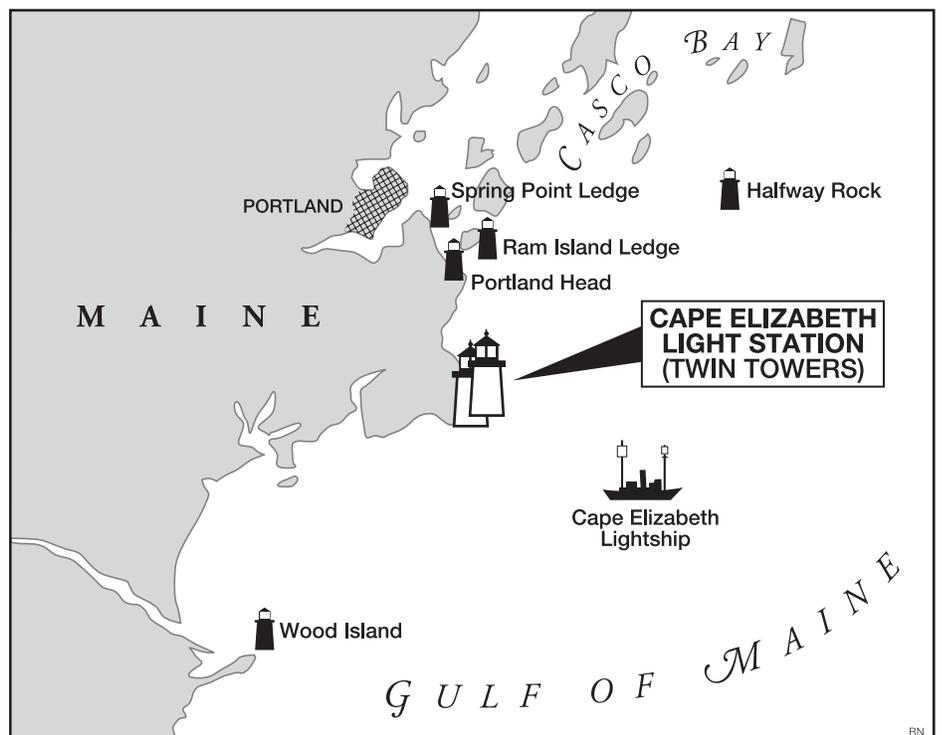




A 1953 aerial view of the entire Cape Elizabeth headland. At left center the square fog signal building. Just to the right, radio towers and the Cape Elizabeth Life Saving Station. Building with porch is a Coast Guard billet. At right on hill is the east tower and keeper's dwelling, the next house is the third keeper's dwelling, in the center background is the west tower without lantern. At top left, the circular "silo" is a World War II observation tower for Battery 201 which was located along the shore at upper left. U. S. Coast Guard photo.

1807, provides advice when attempting to enter Portland Harbor, "When you come from the south-westward, and intend to go into Portland, give Cape Elizabeth a berth of half a mile, and steer NNE until you bring Portland Lighthouse to bear NNW, when you must haul up NNW if the wind will permit..." Blunt also noted that there were two buoys in the approach to Portland, but that at times one or both might be missing. Even after the Cape Elizabeth Light Station was established in 1822, entering Portland Harbor, especially from the south was a dangerous proposition.

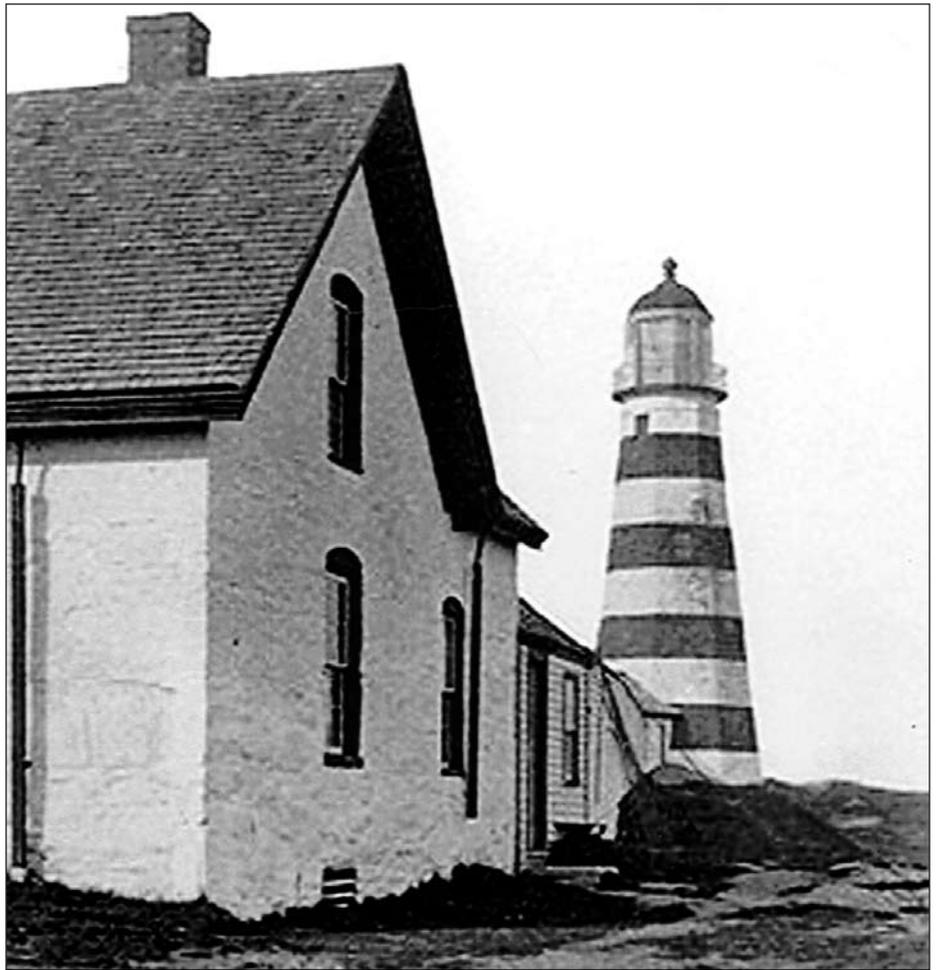
The first lighthouse constructed in the Maine part of Massachusetts was Portland Head. It was the second light station authorized by the 1st Congress in 1790, the Cape Henry Lighthouse having been authorized two months earlier. At that time our country had twelve lighthouses, which had been authorized for transfer from the new states to the federal government in 1789.



However, the Portland Head Lighthouse, two unlighted buoys and, perhaps, a few shore markers were woefully inadequate for the needs of safe navigation in the area. Responding to complaints by the mariner, steps were taken to erect a stone column to denote Cape Elizabeth. This marker would define the southeastern point of the Cape. In 1811, Henry Dearborn surveyed the area and drew up plans for the aid to navigation. A contract to construct the day beacon was awarded to Edward Robinson and John Bartlett The Dyer brothers, who had sold the government the land for the beacon, furnished “undressed rocks of good quality”, as well as sand and water for the mortar. Work began in August and was completed at the end of November when the three foot diameter cap stone was hoisted into place. The finished, rubble stone column was an octagonal pyramid standing 50 feet high. The lower half of the monument was painted white, the upper half black. It was located on the present site of eastern tower of the Cape Elizabeth light station.

Vessel traffic continued to increase as the area around Portland grew. Fisheries were very active and lumber and granite were shipped out of the area. On July 14, 1825, the local newspaper stated that it was possible to see “with the naked eye forty-two sail vessels off our harbor, bound out” and with a telescope from the top of the observatory upwards of 100 sails could be seen. There was a definite need for additional aids to navigation and Congress was petitioned for a light station at Cape Elizabeth. In January, 1827 in the U.S. Senate, “Mr. Holmes presented a petition of the Portland Marine Society in the State of Maine, praying that two light-houses may be established on Cape Elizabeth.” It was referred to the Committee on Commerce and \$4,250 for the station was authorized that spring. It was the first twin tower light station constructed in Maine. Later the two tower Matinicus Rock Light Station, off the Maine coast, was established. America eventually had seven multi-tower stations: Massachusetts had four and New Jersey one.

Stephen Pleasonton, 5th Auditor of the Treasury and in charge of the nation’s aids to navigation system, wrote to Isaac Ilsley, local Collector of Customs and in charge of local lighthouses “...Why two Light Houses are to be placed upon this Cape, and so small a sum allowed for building them, I am informed. I must request you however to make an exami-



Original rubble-stone east tower and dwelling built in 1828. The wide red bands were painted in 1865, but remained for only a few years. Photo courtesy of American Lighthouse Foundation.



The 1873 cast iron east tower which is still in use today. Note the covered passage between the tower and dwelling. The power line pole indicates that the lamp is electrified. The Second Order Fresnel lens is shrouded in a linen cover. Photo Courtesy of Robert J. Lewis.



Cape Elizabeth Light Station with the west tower in foreground, east tower beyond. Note the curving white line between towers which is the fence mentioned in the text. Date unknown. Photo courtesy U. S. Coast Guard.

nation, or cause it to be made, and inform me whether two Light Houses are necessary, and for what sum suitable buildings can be erected. You will also ascertain whether the sites can be obtained, and for what price..."

In 1828, twelve acres of land on Cape Elizabeth was purchased by the State of Maine for fifty dollars and transferred to the federal government. In May, 1828, a contract was let to Jeremiah Berry to construct the two rubble stone towers for \$4,250. As part of the contract he was to demolish the old rubble stone day mark, materials from which he no doubt used in the new towers.

During the construction of the station Isaac Ilsley, visited the site to check on progress and ensure the station was being built to specifications. He later included a payment to himself for superintending the project. At the time all Collectors of Customs received two and one half percent of all government funds expended on aids to navigation in their district. Pleasonton took exception to this additional expense stating that the fee of two and one half percent was sufficient. He wrote, "You will therefore strike out of the account of Cape Elizabeth light houses the charge for superintendence of the workman."

In October, 1828, the station was completed and ready to begin operation. President John Quincy Adams appointed Elisha Jordan to be the first keeper at a salary of \$450 a year. He had been chosen from a slate of 18 candidates. He was instructed to reside at the station and make it a habit to be home. His assistant was his wife.

The two completed rubble stone towers

stood 65 feet high and 129 feet above sea level. They were situated roughly on an east – west axis and 300 yards apart. On October 28, 1828 the lamps were lit for the first time. The eastern tower displayed a fixed white light from 15 lamps backed by 15 inch reflectors, while the western tower displayed an equal interval characteristic (45 seconds of light, 45 seconds of darkness) from 14 lamps with 15 inch reflectors.

It's interesting to note that a flashing characteristic was employed in this era in this country. Other countries had been using mechanical means to produce a flashing characteristic since the late 18th century as well as employing Fresnel lenses since that system was invented in 1822. But, our aids to navigation system was woefully behind the times. With a few exceptions (test purposes) Fresnel



Above – Cape Elizabeth Life Saving Station in natural or dark finish with white trim.

Below – Cape Elizabeth Light Station after 1924. Life Saving Station, painted white, at left with radio towers, east tower at right and west tower, without lantern in middle background. Note that east tower still has covered walkway between dwelling and tower and lacks electric power. Both views from old post cards.



lenses were not installed in our lighthouses until the 1850s. Additionally, the rationale for constructing multiple towers was to allow one light station to be distinguished from another. The first lighthouse on Cape Cod was the Cape Cod station at Truro. When a second station was deemed necessary to the west, two towers were employed at Chatham, and when the service decided that another station was necessary between those two light stations, three towers were erected at Nauset. The other reason for two towers would be the establishment of range lights (the rear tower

higher than the front) to show the center line of a channel or entrance into a harbor. The Cape Elizabeth station was not a range light station, yet the rationale was that two towers were necessary to distinguish it from nearby Portland Head. One tower displaying the equal interval characteristic employed in the west tower would have been, it seems, adequate.

Keeper Jordan's reign at Cape Elizabeth ended in September 1834 when he fell victim to the spoils system. His successor, Charles Staples, an active Democrat, only lasted a

year, succumbing to cancer the following June. During his very brief stint, the station received its first fog signal, a bell. A small building was erected in May, 1835 to house the automatic striking machinery. The bell was mounted on the roof of the structure.

Mariners who had sailed to Europe were aware of the better quality of aids in those countries. The Fresnel lens system produced a far superior light and mariners returning from overseas expressed their disgruntlement to their representatives. The charge was led by the Blunt brothers, publishers of the *American Coast Pilot*.

The upshot was two congressional investigations in the 1830s and one in 1843. The 5th Auditor, and his power behind the throne Winslow Lewis, always managed to counter the charges that our system was defective. At one point (after tests were conducted) he acknowledged that the Fresnel system was somewhat better than our reflector system, but too costly.

In 1842/43 Navy Lt. I. W. P. Lewis, a nephew and no fan of Winslow Lewis, inspected many New England light stations. His report of Cape Elizabeth stated, in part—

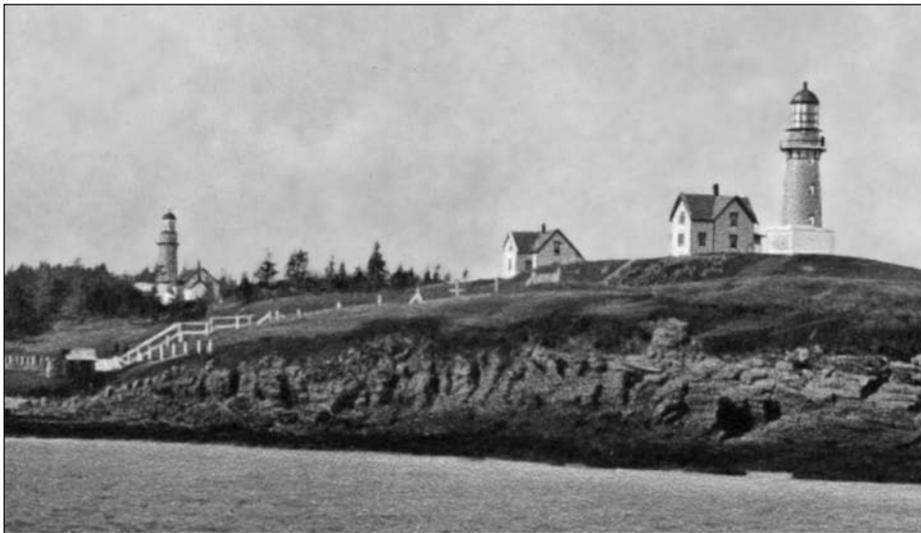
“East Tower of rubble masonry, 48 feet high, laid up in bad mortar, base resting on surface of rock. . . masonry in defective state; mortar soft, and pointing scaled off; walls leaky; wooden staircase rotted considerably; also window frames, which leak in storms; roof leaky.

“West tower of rubble masonry, 49 feet high, laid up in bad lime mortar. . . in precisely similar condition to the east tower, Towers 895 feet apart.

“Dwelling house of rubble masonry, laid up in lime mortar of bad quality; roof shingles; two rooms on first floor, and kitchen back; two chambers in attic, house leaky about eaves, roof and windows; chimney smoky; plastering injured by leaks; no well of fresh water.

“Lantern of east tower. Fixed light, octagonal wrought iron frame, dome coppered. . . fifteen lamps with 16-inch reflectors attached to ten circular iron frames, thirty-five inches in diameter – eight in the lower series, seven in the upper, reflectors stand from three to five inches apart, and fourteen out of perpendicular from one forth to one inch. . . six lamps face inland to no purpose, one facing lantern door.

“Lantern of the west tower, revolving light; same construction and dimensions as the east one above described, five panes of



Above – The two towers of Cape Elizabeth Light Station prior to 1922 when both towers were in operation. The house in the middle is the third keeper's dwelling. Because of the fog signal, four keepers were required to operate the station. From an old post card.

Below – Post card view of both Cape Elizabeth keepers' dwellings; west tower duplex at left, east tower single house at right. Courtesy of the Shanklins.



glass broken...

"Machine of rotation weak, and liable to frequent stoppages..."

"Fog bell house. Framing 20 feet high, supporting a small belfry eight feet square; bell hung permanently, and struck by 14 pound hammer, whose blows are produced by a machine within the belfry. The machine is set in motion by a motive weight of 1,200 pounds, descending eighteen feet, and which requires to be wound up every six hours. The bell weighs 1,561 pounds, stands 1,600 feet from the shore, and 80 feet above mean high water. Its sound cannot be heard above the roar of the surf, except with an offshore wind or during a dead calm."

The difference between the earlier statement that the completed towers were 65 feet high and Lewis's inspection statement that they are 49 feet high is that he was measuring the top of the tower to the ground, and not from the top of the dome of the lantern. The lantern adds 16 feet to the entire structure. Early Light Lists measured the tower separate from the lantern. Late 19th and 20th century Light Lists measure the total structure as well as from the focal plane to mean high water.

Lt. I.W. P. Lewis often had the keeper either sign off on his inspection or make a statement. At Cape Elizabeth, George Fickett keeper of Cape Elizabeth double light and fog-bell made the following statement on August 5, 1842:

"I was appointed keeper of these lights in July, 1841, on a salary of five hundred dollars, fifty of which is for the fog-bell. There are eighteen acres of land here, partly under cultivation, say two acres.

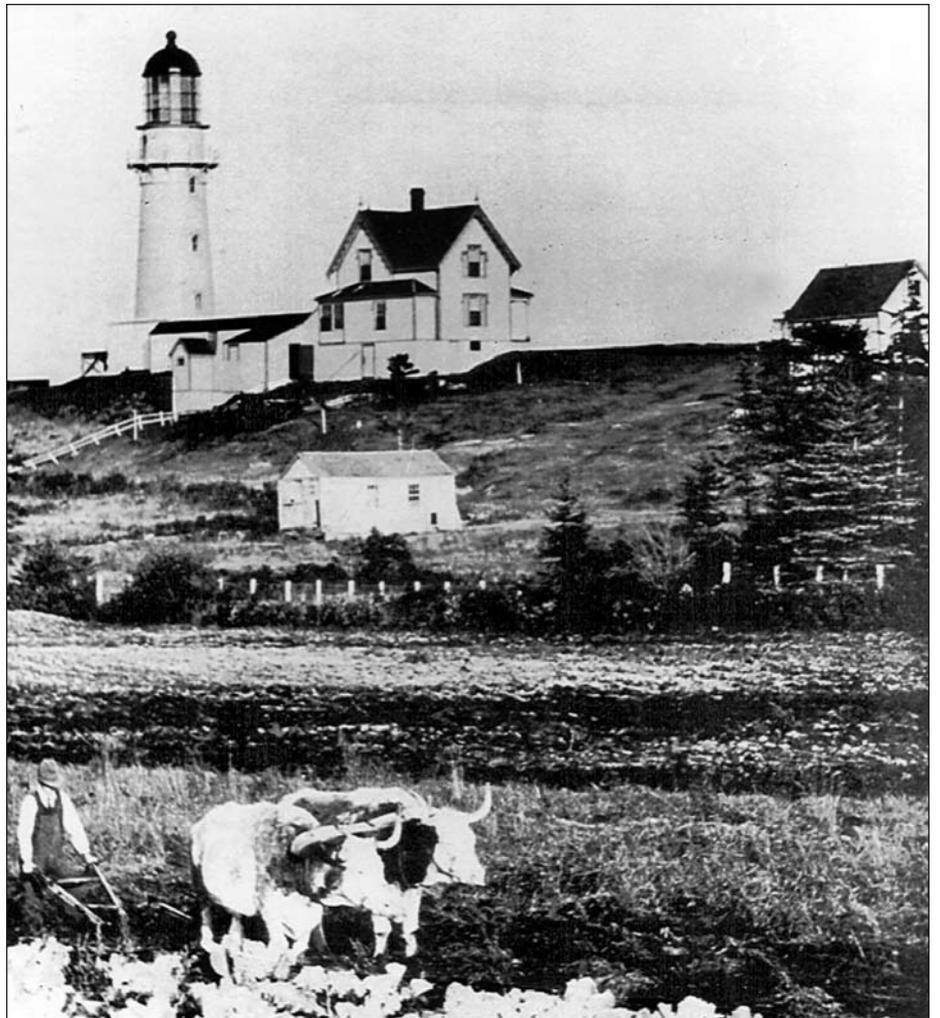
"Both lighthouses are very leaky about the walls and windows; water runs in about the deck of each, and the woodwork on both is consequently rotted. The reflectors in the fixed light are not well fitted to the lamps, and the glass chimneys are not big enough. The reflectors in the revolving light are worn out. The clock [clockworks machinery which rotated the reflectors] often stops during winter. I have never been told what time the revolutions should occupy; they are slow or fast as the clock may run. There are four lamps in the fixed light which face toward the land. The fog building is in very bad condition.

"The house leaks about the eaves and ends, injuring the plastering. I paid one hundred and fifty dollars for the betterment on this estate, owned by the late keeper, consisting of a barn and shed, small pigsty, etc. The lights stand



Above – The east tower circa 1975. U. S. Coast Guard photo.

Below – The east tower from the other (north) side. Note the attachments to the walkway. The farmer plowing with a yoke of oxen was a common sight in Maine up through World War II. Photo courtesy of American Lighthouse Foundation.





895 feet apart, with a deep valley between which is filled with snow during winter, and makes the labor of tending arduous. There is no well on the premises. I bring my water fifty rods; we have a rain water cistern. I am not allowed any boat, [and] vessels are sometimes in distress off here, or ashore on some of the reefs.”

George Fickett
Witness J.W. Adams
B.F. Isherwood.

After past inspections, and petitions of complaints, Stephen Pleasonton would sometimes counter charges by enlisting “friendly” mariners to sign a petition stating that our lights were perfect, could be seen at great distances when in fact the height of a particular light and the curvature of the earth made it impossible to be seen at those distances, to say nothing of the poor illuminating equipment.

In the case of Cape Elizabeth he must have “sweet talked” the keeper into rebutting his earlier statement, as the following might indicate –

Cape Elizabeth, November 3, 1843

“Having for the first time just read a printed statement of the condition of the light-houses at Cape Elizabeth, signed by myself, the keep of these lights, dated August 5, 1842, in Document No. 183, I find several important errors, and that, generally it gives the wrong impression as to the condition of these lights. There was a leak in the eastern light, but I discovered and effectively stopped it. The woodwork in both lights is in good order, except one window sill and about an inch and a half of one step and riser in the stairs of the eastern light. There are but two lamps that could safely be dispensed with, and so I told Mr. Lewis [I.W.P. Lewis] when he drew up the statement for me to sign; and I have strong doubts of the expediency of taking both of these off. All the leak in the dwelling house was over the east window, which I have stopped,

“The clock [works] did not run well at first; it was a new one, and went hard, but it now goes well. I have never been without a boat of my own, which I use to fish in when not otherwise engaged, and she is as large as I can manage. The reflectors may at time be out of exact plumb, when the lamps are set up to prevent overflowing. I have heard seamen speak of these lights as excellent ones. I never failed to trim them once in four hours. The reflectors of the revolving lights were much worn when Mr. Lewis visited them. Captain How-

**Above – East Tower showing the Second Order Fresnel in the lantern. This lens never had the top and bottom sections to complete the “beehive” shape. Photo courtesy of the Shanklins.
Below – The Cape Elizabeth east tower Second Order Fresnel lens on display in the Cape Elizabeth town hall. The original characteristic of this lens was six rapid flashes followed by an eclipse of 17 seconds. Photo courtesy of Rusty Nelson.**



land put in new reflectors this year. There is no broken glass in either light; a few panes are cracked at the corners, but do not let in any water. The glass is 13 by 12, and not 11 by 12 as stated by Mr. Lewis."

George Fickett, keeper of the cape lights at Cape Elizabeth

Witness W.T. Smith

"I further state, that Mr. Lewis recommended that the light-houses should be repointed with cement, which was done; and it scaled off, and did no good. The light-houses had not been repaired – not even whitewashed – for two years, when Mr. Lewis visited them; and the repairs were delayed that year, for Mr. Lewis to inspect them first, so that he could see them in their worst state, and all defects, if any, should be visible."

George Fickett

As an aside – the keepers of other stations also rebutted their initial negative statements. Perhaps Pleasonton, or his Collectors of Customs placed a little pressure on the keeper to recant their statement, do you think?

Pleasonton again escaped this latest assault on his empire. However, in 1851 an ad hoc committee, the Lighthouse Board, conducted a detailed inspection of our aids to navigation system and sent representative to other countries to discern the state of the art. This time the 5th auditor did not survive and the ad hoc committee became the U.S. Lighthouse Board. The Board brought vast changes to our system. Rules, regulations and equipment all played a part in the modernization of America's light stations. By the outbreak of the Civil War almost all lighthouse were equipped with Fresnel lenses and most had new lantern rooms installed.

One of the stations the ad hoc committee inspected was Cape Elizabeth.

"July 4, 1851 – Sea-coast light: east light nearest point fixed, west light revolving. William Johnson, principle and only keeper, took charge July 12, 1849. No previous instruction in the management of lights. Had the man who had previously been keeper show him. Tower built (east light) of undressed hard slate, in 1828-29, laid in very inferior lime mortar; pointing cement very good, windows and towers leak badly; frame of lantern around glass leaks badly; tower damp inside, walls discolored and cracked; want painting badly; conductor (lightning) not carried far enough off, and lying on the ground.

"Thirteen parabolic reflectors; plating very thin, and in some of them off in spots...

common scissors for trimming, lanterns too small; plate-glass, 26 by 18. Lights up at sunset – puts out at sunrise. Bad ventilators; can only be used with difficulty... has been no painting, whitewashing or pointing for two years, except lantern painted red inside last year, and new vane put up; has had no lime for two years, burners not very clean. Fog bell 1,560 pounds; struck by machinery once in ten seconds; machinery out of order: stops occasionally; reported to the collector, but not repaired. Building for bell in very bad order... bell heard in calm weather two or three miles; with light wind it cannot be heard further than the beach, about 100 yards. Has no spare glass for the lantern; has had generally very bad oil, but still compelled to burn it. Receives supplies only once a year, in July or August... dwelling in pretty good order; leaks in heavy rains."

"West Light – Fourteen 21-inch parabolic reflectors; lighted July 4, 1850; Lamps and reflectors on two faces, three broken panes of plate glass, one very badly broken; plate glass 20 by 32 inches; lantern painted red inside... reflectors thinly plated, one of them bruised; lantern entirely too small; not very clean; clock-work movement; revolves once in four minutes, dark from thirty to forty five seconds. No journal kept on account of oil consumed per night; makes quantity agree with quantity on hand. Tower wants looking after; towers of these two lights pretty well built, but greatly neglected.

"The keeper of these two lights and fog bell seems desirous of keeping good lights, but is wanting in proper instruction; burners not clean, wicks not well trimmed... there should be not less than two keepers to these lights, and one of them constantly on watch during the entire night."

Late in 1854, 3rd order Fresnel lenses replaced the old reflector system in both towers. The lanterns were replaced prior to this improvement. The next year the Lighthouse Board announced that the western (inner) light would be discontinued and the eastern light would display an equal interval characteristic. The change took place on August 1, 1855. This caused a great hue and cry from mariners. The Board explained that the change was instituted to avoid confusion. They said that the revolving light was always seen by mariners some time before the fixed light was visible. Thus, the mariner might confuse the Wood Island Light, to the south, with Cape Elizabeth and this could cause a vessel to ground..

But maritime interests persisted, demanding that the western tower be re-lighted. The Board acquiesced and the western tower was relighted in the spring of 1856. A few years later one of the stations lights must have been extinguished as the owner of the Brig *Plumas* petitioned Congress "praying remuneration for losses occasioned by the loss of said brig, in consequence of the discontinuance of one of the lights at Cape Elizabeth without public notice." It was referred to committee.

In 1865, the east tower was painted with four wide red horizontal bands and the west tower received a very wide, vertical, red stripe.

In 1867, the *Lighthouse Board Annual Report* mentioned that the plastering of the western dwelling was repaired and painted. Also, "The fog bell tower repaired and strengthened by putting up eight hackmatack knees, five new braces, and one new beam, and refastening the bell-hammers, revolving machinery, and clock [works] cleaned..." Which seemed to be an unnecessary effort as just two years later the bell was replaced by a 10" steam (locomotive) whistle. The first two steam whistles were at West Quoddy head and Cape Elizabeth. The Board wrote, "A steam fog signal has been established, lamps and burners repaired, curtains furnished [for the lantern rooms], revolving machinery cleaned, six windows supplied, and lantern stoves provided. The western tower is an old rubble stone structure, lined with wood and having a wooden stairway. The tower should be rebuilt, and a permanent building erected for the fog signal, but it is not probable that any detriment to the service will arise from a little delay, and therefore no estimate is now submitted for an appropriation to make these improvements." The following year the Board noted, "The westerly tower of the two, at this light station, was built in 1828 of rubble stone, and is now in such a state as to render it necessary to rebuild it in a better manner, for which an estimate has been submitted in the annual estimates. The station is one of the most important on the eastern coast, serving the double purpose of a sea-coast light station, and as a mark of the entrance into Casco Bay and to Portland Harbor. In 1872, the Board repeated the request for an appropriation of \$30,000 to make improvements which was approved.

The 1873 Report mentions that construction of the replacement tower was underway and the next year the Board stated that the appropriation was so generous that they were

able to replace both towers. 1875 –“With the amount of this appropriation both west and east towers have been rebuilt of cast iron, lined with bricks, and the old rubble stone towers taken down.” A house with a covered walkway was attached to each tower, a third dwelling was located between the two. While the bases remained white, the towers were painted brown, later back to white, then brown again and since 1903 have been white. The east light produced a fixed white light from a 1st order lens, the west tower displayed a flashing white light every 60 second from the old 2nd order lens.

In 1876, the service constructed a brick fog signal building, 12 feet on a side. They also requested \$5,000 to establish a siren fog signal to replace the steam whistle.

Prior to the Lighthouse Board taking control, many of the light station dwellings were constructed of the same rubble stone as the towers. Like the towers, they leaked and were cold and dank. Although the new Board made



Both towers were painted brown shortly after being built in 1873. They were then repainted white, then to brown again. Since 1903 they have remained white. Above is the west tower and below the east tower. Both photos courtesy of American Lighthouse Foundation.



numerous improvements the Civil War intervened before the Board could complete all their desired changes and on the list of uncompleted projects were replacement dwellings. After the war the Board began the task of replacing the old rubble stone dwellings with new wooden frame structures. A great many were constructed in the 1870s. In 1878 the Annual report states, "A one and one half story dwelling, for the keeper, was erected and the old stone dwelling was repaired [for the assistant]. The next year two wooden dwellings are mentioned and repairs made to the stone dwelling.

In 1881, the *Annual Report* mentioned that the towers received two coats of white paint and the lantern painted black.

One of the most dramatic episodes at the Cape Elizabeth station occurred in January,

1885. The prior year Head Keeper Marcus Hanna (who began his lighthouse career at the Pemaquid Point, ME station in 1869) arrived and was the first keeper at the station to light the new mineral (kerosene) lamps which replaced the lard oil lamps which had been in use since the 1850s. On January 28, 1885 Keeper Hanna's wife sighted the masts of a schooner near the rocks of the shore. The weather had been rather mild until that evening when severe storm swept in from the northeast. Hanna, suffering from a bad cold, was in the fog signal building tending to the boilers to ensure the siren was sending out its appointed signal. Finally, he realized with the strengthening wind from off-shore and the heavy snow beginning to fall, that it was very unlikely that any vessel off-shore would hear the signal. However, he kept to his assigned

task through the night until relieved by Assistant Staples at 6 a.m. Hanna later stated that by this time, "...it was one of the coldest and most violent storms of snow, wind and vapor was raging, that I ever witnessed."

When he started toward his dwelling he encountered drifts of snow from three to five feet and in his weakened condition he had to crawl to the house where his wife admonished him for leaving the house in the first place. She put him to bed and said she would extinguish the light in the towers when it was time. Hanna drifted off to sleep and his wife dutifully extinguished the lamps at 7:12 a.m. As she was returning from the tower she saw the masts of a schooner on shore near the fog signal building. She rushed into the house and woke keeper Hanna. After hastily dressing the keeper strug-



The schooner *Australia* was by no means the only vessel to come to grief off Cape Elizabeth. In March of 1947, the steamer *Oakey Alexander* broke up in a raging storm as she approached Portland. Just off Cape Elizabeth the vessel lost her bow and started to sink. Loaded with coal, the captain decided to ground off the Cape, which he succeeded in doing. The Cape Elizabeth Life Saving crew were on the scene in short order and set up several lines to enable rescue by breeches buoy. All crew members were saved, but the vessel was a total loss when the waves finished pounding her.

gled through the snow drifts to the fog signal station, noticing the vessel aground about 200 years beyond the fog signal. His assistant hadn't noticed the wreck.

The vessel was the *Australia* bound from Boothbay Harbor to Boston. Captain J.W. Lewis, commanding with a crew of Irving Pierce and William Kellar. When the storm hit the vessel around midnight, Captain Lewis decided to run for Portland. But as visibility became very reduced his mate suggested that they stand off and heave to awaiting the storm to abate. However, the storm shredded the main-sail. They then began to tack using the reefed foresail. The temperature continued to drop and the vessel began to ice up. Then the crew was forced to jettison the deck cargo, but to no avail and *Australia* grounded on a ledge below the lighthouse. Shortly after they grounded a huge wave crashed onto the deck knocking the Captain down, followed by another that washed him overboard where he drowned. At about that time the crew saw Keeper Hanna and his assistant approaching. Hanna had fashioned a throwing line (rope) with a wrench for weight. He sent his assistant for help and he waded into

the sea and attempted to reach the vessel, all to no avail. Finally a large wave lifted the vessel and carried it over the ledge and onto the beach near the fog signal building. Now Hanna was able to reach the schooner, but the men were frozen to the rigging where they had lashed themselves. Finally, Pierce managed to break free of the rigging and reached the line that landed on deck. He tied it around his waist the leaped overboard into the churning sea. Hanna, sick and weak, somehow managed to pull the crewman in to the shore and over the rocks. Hanna later stated he didn't know where he got the strength, "...to push and pull the helpless frozen lump of humanity to a place out of reach of the surf. The expression on his face I shall not soon forget."

The ship was beginning to break up. Crewman Kellar had by now freed himself from the rigging. Keeper Hanna waded into the surf with very little strength left. He managed to get the line aboard the vessel after several tries where Kellar tied it around his waist. Although Hanna wasn't sure he had the strength to pull him ashore he shouted for him to jump. At that moment Assistant Staples and two neighbors

arrived to assist bringing the sailor ashore. The sailors were taken to the fog signal building where their frozen cloths were cut off and they were rubbed with cold water, provided warm flannel clothes and given 'stimulants.' Due to their condition and the severity of the storm, the men weren't moved to the keeper's house until the next morning. A few days later the body of the skipper washed ashore near the fog signal building.

In 1885, Keeper Marcus Hanna was awarded the Gold Life Saving medal by the government, "...for singular heroism involving great peril to his life." Ten years later, in 1895, Hanna was belatedly awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his heroism in the Civil War, thus becoming the only person to win both of these medals.

The Board reported in their 1887 Report that the old frame fog signal building was replaced by a new brick structure 32 feet by 32 feet, a water cistern was also installed and the old boiler was transferred from the frame building which was sold at auction. Two years later the *Annual Report* mentions repairs to the siren engine, construction of an oil house



USCG Cutter *Marcus Hanna*, named for the keeper at Cape Elizabeth. The vessel is a 175-foot "Keeper Class" buoy tender/ice breaker, based in South Portland, ME. Photo courtesy of U. S. Coast Guard.

(to house the volatile kerosene) and that the property was surveyed and boundaries properly marked and fenced. "This boundary (the board said) has long been disputed by the adjoining proprietor, who tore down a part of the fence. He is to be tried for trespass before the United States Court in Portland, ME, in August."

In 1890, the old stone dwelling, occupied by the 2nd assistant, was torn down and a framed dwelling 13 by 30 feet in plan, with an ell 12 by 20 feet was constructed on the old foundation. A temporary wooden house built for the workmen was removed and a call bell system was installed between the watch rooms and the dwellings.

1891 *Annual Report*: "Until the resignation of the principle keeper, about two years ago, his wife was an assistant keeper, so that there were but three families to be accommodated in the three single dwellings at this station. The arrangement is changed and there are now four separate families at the station, and two families are crowded into a dwelling adapted in size and arrangement to only one family. The towers are more than 900 feet apart: two of the dwellings are near the northeast and one near the southwest tower. A fourth dwelling is very urgently needed near the latter to properly and conveniently house in the severe winter weather of that climate the second of the two assistants who attends the light in it. ...an additional dwelling is imperatively needed in the best interests of the service. It is estimated that one can be built for \$3,300..." The request for an additional dwelling was repeated in 1892, 93, 94 and 95, but the estimated cost was dropped to \$2,000. However it wasn't approved and the Board continued to repeat the request annually raising the estimate to \$3,000 in 1899. Finally, the Board took other action and in the 1901 Report stated, "The west keeper's dwelling was enlarged and rearranged to provide two sets of quarters for the first and third assistants. The second assistants dwelling was repaired and improved. The covered way to the west tower was rebuilt: the old covered way was moved and converted into a fuel house..."

In 1915, the fuel for the Twin Lights was changed from kerosene to an I.O.V. (incandescent oil vapor) lamp which greatly increased the candlepower. In 1920, the Lighthouse Service announced that all multi-tower stations would be reduced to a single tower. As before, strong protests were voiced in some instances and Cape Elizabeth was no exception. In spite of the numerous letters to local, state and federal offi-

cial, the Service prevailed and all multi-tower stations were converted to single towers. Cape Elizabeth's western tower was extinguished in 1924. There really hasn't been a need for multi towers for years, and it's a wonder that they lasted so far into the 20th century.

The western tower was stripped of its lantern during World War II, and after the war it was abandoned and began to deteriorate. In 1959, much of the station was offered to the highest bidder. Except for the eastern tower, the entire property of 10.5 acres, western tower, four two-story buildings, eight one-story buildings, two garages, two antenna masts and even the flag pole went at auction. At that time, Gary Merrill and his wife, Bette Davis, were looking for property in the Portland area. The one Gary found, high on a promontory was too isolated for Davis. When they inquired about a vacant lot in Cape Elizabeth they were informed that the lighthouse property was available and they purchased the portion that included the western tower and a dwelling. When they divorced the following year Merrill kept the property. He lived in the dwelling and had plans to renovate the tower into a vertical residence. A reporter for *Yankee Magazine* interviewed him in 1974 and was told of Merrill's plans at that time, which apparently never came to fruition.

In 1994, the owner of the eastern dwelling, close by the eastern tower, offered it for sale through the realtor Landvest for \$465,000. It was listed as being built in 1864 (in fact it was constructed in 1873), a two and one-half story structure renovated in 1979. It had two bedrooms, one full and two half baths, living room, kitchen, fireplace, library and updated kitchen. The property sold and the new owner announced plans to remove modern additions, enlarge the house to contain six bedrooms, construct a garage alongside the dwelling and removed the garage under the house. A town hall meeting was held to discuss the changes. Some local residents complained the renovations would block their view of the lighthouse. Many lighthouse preservationists wanted little exterior changes as the dwelling and the eastern tower was the subject of an 1920 painting by Edward Hopper and pictured on a U. S. postage stamp. Although the house had been altered over the years it still displayed the basic silhouette of an 1864 wood frame house typical of those constructed by the Lighthouse Service. The gingerbread (scrollwork) remained.

Finally, residents learned there was no legal means of halting anything the new owner

wished to do with the dwelling. He initially stated that the exterior would remain about the same. Then it was announced that the structure would be razed, but the scrollwork on the eaves would be retained. In the end even that architectural detail was lost.

Today, the western tower displays a faux lantern room and is attached to a modern dwelling. The eastern tower is in excellent condition, but the 2nd order lens has been removed and is on display in the Cape Elizabeth Town Hall. A modern optic is in place in the lantern room sending out its fifteen second characteristic of .3 seconds flash followed by 2.2 second eclipse, repeated twice, then .3 seconds followed by a 7.2 second eclipse.

And, although the lighthouse is still known as "Twin Lights" and is located near Twin Lights State Park, it is no longer a Twin Light, that was many years ago.