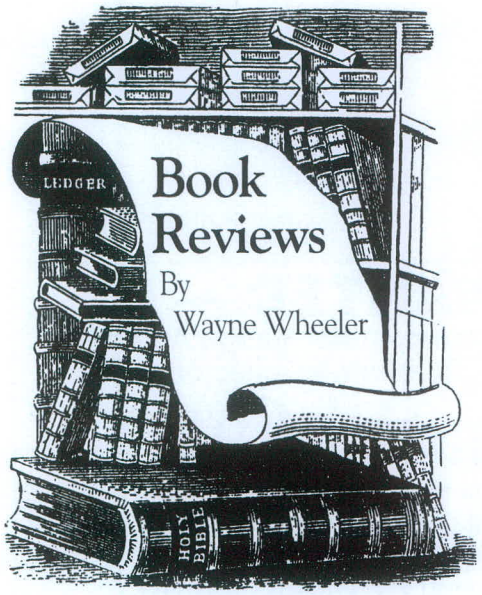

The Lightkeeper's Daughter

By Iain Lawrence

This very well written book involves the daughter of a lighthouse keeper who returns to her parent's small island station after being away for years. Her father never left the island after he assumed the role as keeper. Even his future wife arrives by kayak and their chance meeting leads to her staying and becoming his wife.

The daughter's return is a bittersweet reunion with flashes of the past — of her growing up, her adventures with her brother who tragically drowned at 14 (she was 13). The daughter, nicknamed "Squid," arrives with her three-year-old daughter that her parents have never seen.

The Lightkeeper's Daughter is a haunting work, which explores the personalities of a family who, for all purposes, were as isolated on the tiny island station as the Swiss Family Robinsons were on theirs. The keeper is a private man, but one with a deep interest in nature, always studying the creatures of the sea. He's a perfectionist with his work and unfortunately treats his children much the same and somewhat remotely.

The coming and going of whales is woven throughout the tale in a mystical way. The young son who drowned thought he could communicate with them. The conversations between the returning daughter and her parents are point and counter-point, and sometimes the points are echoed with past events. Memories of one often differ from those of others.

The author paints a vivid and accurate picture of life on a small Canadian station in British Columbia, modeled after the Lucy Island Light Station on Chatham Strait. He acquired background information from two former Canadian keepers, but strangely did not learn the proper names for the elements of the station; i.e., terming the lens a lantern and the lantern room a cupola.

The Lightkeeper's Daughter is a very tight and almost psychological work – a good, solid read.

Lighthouses of the Apostle Islands

By Dave Strzok & Nancy Trapp

The Apostle Islands in Lake Superior is a unique archipelago supporting six light stations. Each station is different, both in design and history. Some of the stations were established to mark turning points for ships with upbound or downbound Lake Superior cargo, others were established to guide mariners through the twenty-two islands to the ports of Ashland, Washburn and nearby Bayfield, WI.

Authors Dave Strzok and Nancy Trapp live in the area and have amassed information on the light stations, along with contemporary and historic photos. However, their book leaves a lot to be desired. From the cover of the work to the inside layout, their design seems ill conceived. Much of the book appears slapped together and relies on clip art for some illustrations.

The book is divided into six basic chapters, one for each station. Each station's chapter has a few pages of the building plans reproduced, but the quality is not good. Each chapter also has a sprinkling of historic and contemporary photographs. Strangely, at the end of each chapter are 2 or 3 bank pages for notes

The book begins with a short (very short) history of the Lighthouse Service and a reason why so many light stations were constructed in such a concentrated area. It also includes a cartoon map of the islands and stations.

The book ends with a short section on the Fresnel lens and in particular, the Fresnel lenses of the Apostle Islands stations as well as a couple of blank pages for notes.

The 76-page book has 21 blank pages devoted to notes. Having over a quarter of the pages blank seems excessive. Along with the poor quality of the reproduced drawings and some photos, it indicates a hastily contrived book, or rather booklet.

Strangely, there is no information in the book about the press that printed the book, or the cost. Soft cover 8 1/2 by 11 inches, numerous color and sepia photos and drawings and too many blank pages.

North Atlantic Lighthouses

By Keith Trethewey with
photos by Jean Guichard

We present, yet, another large coffee table tome of lighthouses. At the rate these volumes are spinning off the press the coffee tables of America will be collapsing under the weight.

This beautiful book is more about the photographs of Jean Guichard of 'keeper on lighthouse deck about to be inundated by huge wave fame' than prose. Most of the text is in the Forward and the outstanding 14-page Guide to the Lighthouses at the end of the book. There are short blurbs accompanying most of the photographs.

The photographs, however, are just breathtaking. Many are large format, filling one 10" by 12" page, or even splashed across two pages. Name the type of lighthouse photo you would like to see – sunrises, sunsets, inundated by waves, dramatic aerials – you name it, they're all there.

The countries included are the United States, Canada, Iceland, Scotland, England & Wales, Ireland, and France. Hard cover, 10" by 12", 200 full-color pages, dust jacket. $34.95. Available at most bookstores nationwide: Borders, Barnes & Noble, etc.