

# LOG

**T H E K E E P E R ' S**

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It was 1972 and the young Coast Guardsmen at the Harbor of Refuge Lighthouse in Delaware Bay were all dressed up in their finest, anticipating the momentary arrival of the inspecting officer. Although everything looked ship-shape, as a last minute touch the men put a little extra furniture polish on the wood floor and buffed it up quickly. The inspector arrived, exchanged salutes with the crew, took one step, and went flat on his backside. No one laughed—well not much anyway. The embarrassed inspector made a hasty review of the lighthouse and left quickly.

The frequent visits to the light stations by the district inspector were exciting and momentous events in the life of the keeper and his family. From the 1840s, still in the days of Stephen Pleasonton's autocratic oversight of the Light-House Establishment, a system of periodic visits by inspecting officers was established. This became a much more formal process when the Light-House Board took over supervision of the Establishment in 1852. Regular and formal inspections continued as a hallmark of the Bureau of Lighthouses from the early days of the 1900s and continued into the Coast Guard era. The keepers themselves undoubtedly anticipated the inspections with trepidation, even when they felt strongly that all about the station was in good order. They

rightfully feared for their jobs if they knew it was otherwise.

There are many tales of the reputation enjoyed by the inspector, especially in the eyes of the keepers' children. As told in his book, *Lighthouse in My Life*, Philmore Wass, who grew up a keeper's son in the 1920s on Maine's Libby Island, considered the inspector the equal of God. "We always knew the name of the lighthouse inspector, because my parents often referred to him. The earliest one I remember was Inspector Luther. To me he was an all-powerful figure who had a great deal to do with Father's state of mind, which in turn affected Mother's state of mind and the happiness of the whole family. There was a time during my early years when these two all powerful forces—God and Luther—became confused in my mind. I thought they were the same, the only difference being that Luther occasionally appeared in uniform."

In a similar vein, Joe St. Andre, a light-

house child on the Great Lakes, when interviewed years later, likened the inspector's visit as nothing less than "the second coming of the Lord." Grant Kirkendall, another keeper's son who grew up at several Great Lakes stations recalled, "When the inspectors came around it was a rather traumatic experience. Some of them would wear white gloves and run their hands over the top of the door frames and windows looking for dust."

Another remembrance of a lighthouse child, Maxine DeShong Chamberlain, who grew up



U.S. Lighthouse Service flag, once flown aboard the tender *Amaranth*, now on display at the New Dungeness Lighthouse in Washington. USLHS archive photo.

on Maine's Seguin Island, sums it up even better. "Sometime during the summer the Lighthouse Tender would come out and bring the inspector. They were all dressed up in their uniform and white gloves. When mom would see one coming she'd say, 'Get the dust cloth.' I'd reply, 'A speck of dust wouldn't dare come in this house. It wouldn't!!!!' You had to be there to see just how clean it was. After they inspected the homes, their gloves had to be as white as they were when they came in. We always passed with flying colors."

The "utmost neatness of vessels, reservations, their equipment, appurtenances, and all other property of the Lighthouse Service is demanded," states the *Instructions to Light Keepers*, 1911.

A keeper's pay, or his reputation, could be adversely affected by a less than stellar inspection report. Major flaws such as a discrepancy in tool or supply inventories on hand could and did lead to transfer/demotion or even termination. No nook nor cranny, including the keeper's house, was beyond the reach of the eye and that white glove of the inspector. Less serious deficiencies were also known to adversely affect a keeper's pay and status. Accurate documentation of fuels usage was particularly critical, and a separate and distinct *Daily Expenditure of Oils, Wicks, and Chimneys* log book was yet another record-keeping requirement of the keeper during the Light-House Establishment years. Oil was inventoried by the fraction of a "gill," a four-ounce unit of measure; wicks were inventoried by the inch.

Male light keepers were uniformed beginning in 1884 (there was never an official uniform for the many women who served as keepers). Regulations stated that the uniform be worn at all times when the keeper was on duty at his station. The dress uniform was expected to be worn by the keeper and his assistants when the inspector arrived, and family members would likely have either worn their Sunday best or kept out of sight. At most other times the less formal work uniform was permitted, as the nature of much of the keeper's work was recognized. Since all keepers hired after the original 1884 uniform allocation had to purchase them from their own pocket, they too wanted to keep the dress uniform for special occasions only. The earliest uniform regulations stated, "Keepers and assistant keepers of light stations will wear the prescribed uniform at all times . . . the prescribed brown working-suit will be worn when at ordinary out-door



The lighthouse tender *Amaranth* alongside the Detour Reef Lighthouse in 1932. The first mast displays the U.S. Lighthouse Service flag, the second mast has the lighthouse inspector flag showing that there is an inspector onboard. U.S. Coast Guard photo.

work." The 1911 *Uniform Regulations* stated, "Working uniforms . . . may be worn when engaged in dirty work." Even in his fatigue work uniform, the keeper had to look sharp. "Untidiness in dress and uncleanness of person will be a subject for disciplinary measures."

### Here Comes the Inspector

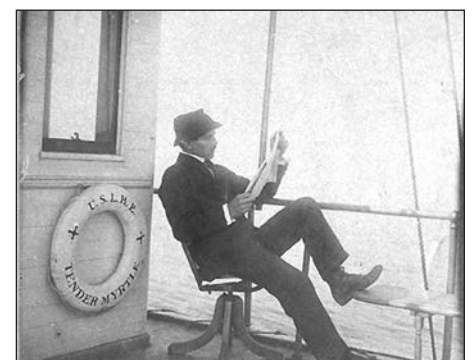
Visits to the station were to be unannounced, but keepers developed many ways to spread the word to the next station down the line, giving at least a bit of advance notice. This was especially true after telephones arrived at light stations, when the keeper of the just-inspected station would alert the next locale. Radio communication later on greatly reduced the chance of an inspector surprising a keeper. In almost all cases, at least in the early days, the inspector arrived at the station by boat, on board the district lighthouse tender. A special flag, a white flag with a blue border and blue lighthouse on it, was to be flown from the top mast. This announced that the inspector was aboard. Keepers, and their families too, could recognize a tender almost from its first appearance on the horizon, and a good glass would confirm the inspector's flag. The sharper eyes of the children were very helpful; the child who first spotted the inspector's flag on the tender could expect a 25-cent reward. All these methods at least gave the keeper time to get into his dress uniform, for the expected official greeting of the inspector, if not for some last minute touch-ups to be completed.

This helped a bit, but a station that was not "kept" in good order all the time surely could not be put into such in this brief interval. Interestingly, a 1914 *Lighthouse Service Bulletin* notes that the inspector's flag was to be flown "at his discretion."

There were times, however, when the inspector did arrive with little advance notice. An inspector on Lake Superior was noted for arriving just after

dawn, approaching from the east. The tender captain would keep his craft right on the reflected beam of the rising sun. Anyone looking that way would be blinded by the sun and unable to observe the approaching ship.

When this happened even last minute jobs could sometimes not be done. A classic tale from Split Rock Lighthouse tells of the keeper's wife whose sink was full of unwashed dishes. Not having time to do them, she hid them all in the oven. The aroma of bread that had been baked earlier permeated the kitchen, and the arriving inspector, anticipating a treat along with the cup of coffee offered, peeked in the oven to see the treat. He, of course, found



An unknown inspector relaxes aboard the lighthouse tender *Myrtle* in the 2nd District, circa 1900. Power cables were being laid in Boston Harbor to power the lighthouses there. Photo courtesy of Kenrick A. Clafin & Son Nautical Antiques, [lighthouseantiques.net](http://lighthouseantiques.net).

the dirty dishes instead. The station inspection report reflected this totally unacceptable practice of course but doesn't reflect whether or not the inspector enjoyed the fresh bread.

In an unusual instance of a keeper having a little extra time to make those last-minute preparations, Dale Congdon, tells of the July 1924 arrival of the tender *Amaranth* at the Two Harbors, Minnesota, Lighthouse, with the inspector on board. The tender arrived about 6 o'clock in the evening, yet the inspector never came to commence his inspection until 6:30 a.m. the next morning. The inspection took only about an hour. The keeper and his assistant were probably up all night putting on final touches.

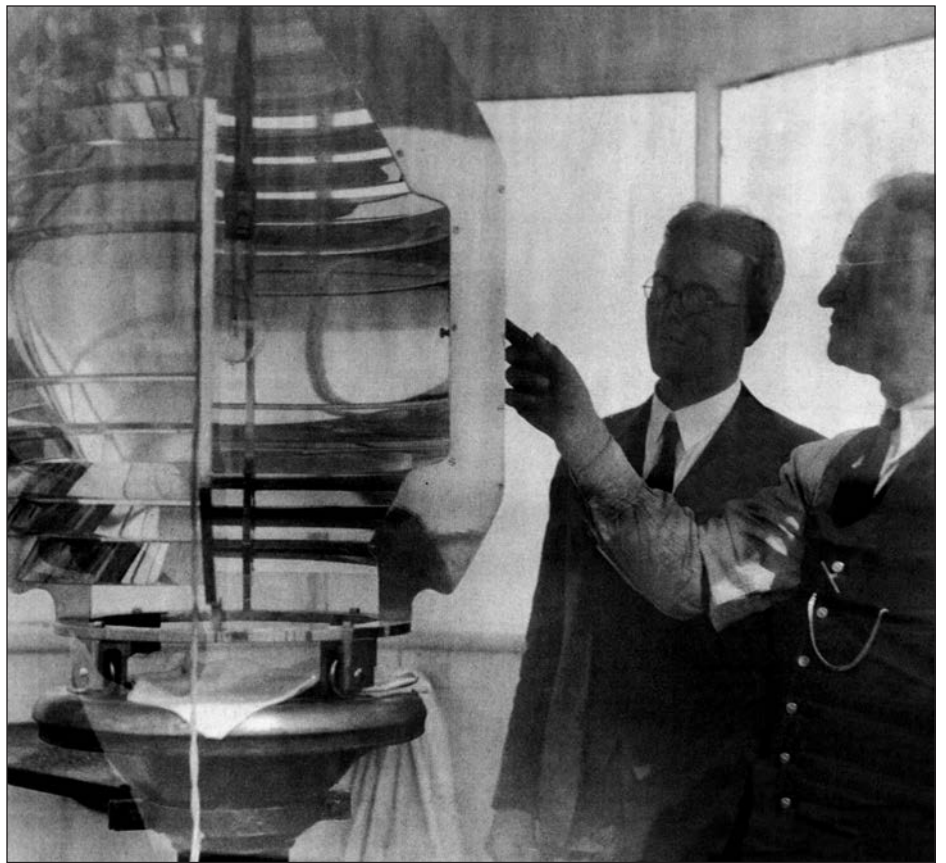
As noted, it was not only the tower, lens and lamp, and other buildings and equipment that carried out the lighthouse purpose that were the focus of the inspector. The living quarters, and even the appearance of keepers and families were included too. Several editions of the official *Instructions to Light Keepers* stated, "The utmost neatness of buildings and premises is demanded. Bedrooms, as well as other parts of the dwelling, must be neatly kept. Untidiness will be strongly reprehended, and its continuance will subject a keeper to dismissal." Contents of drawers were not beyond the inspector's gaze, and laundry was expected to be folded and kept "just so." Yet another anecdote tells of the keeper's wife who was observed folding her laundry on the floor, rather than on the table as required, and such a transgression was noted in the report.

Mazie Anderson, another child of a keeper, recollected, "How the keepers' wives dreaded the arrival, spring and fall, of the inspectors. On the day they were due, everyone rushed over the island making sure all was immaculate and in order—even our living quarters got a good going over."

Some inspectors were known to be less fond of children than others, and in these cases the sons and daughters of the keepers were sent off to play well out of sight. There are many tales of the kids taking these opportunities to visit the tender at dockside or even rowing out to a tender moored offshore, where they were often greeted much more hospitably by the captain and crew.

### Official Inspection Reports

Actual *Description of Light Station* inspection reports found in lighthouse records (Record Group 26) at the National Archives were transcribed and compiled into a database



Keeper George V. Codding (far right) with 10th District Inspector Roscoe House in the lantern of the Charlotte-Genessee Lighthouse. Photo courtesy of Thomas A. Tag.

for the U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office by volunteers of the U.S. Lighthouse Society's Chesapeake Chapter. Although the specific format undoubtedly changed over the years, the reports transcribed included the following sections: "Premises," "Lanterns and Fixtures," "Ventilators and Watchroom," "Illuminating Apparatus," "Closets and Storerooms," and "Dwelling." Each section in turn included many subheadings. Had each section and subheading been commented upon, the overall inspection would have been extremely thorough. In reviewing individual reports, I found that more of the headings than not had no comments at all by the inspecting officer, and that in those that did the comments were surprisingly scant. To me they seem to indicate that the inspections were brief and cursory rather than the "dreaded" experience of lighthouse lore. These reports can be viewed on the Society's website.

### Who Did the Inspections?

From the earliest years of the Light-House Establishment, when Stephen Pleasonton

was the autocratic general superintendent of lights, a system of inspections was in place, at least on paper. By a congressional act in July 1838, eight lighthouse districts were created, and a Navy officer was detailed to each. He was to inspect all aids to navigation and report on their conditions. One of the earliest inspections of which reference has been found is the November 16, 1838, report by Lieutenant Thomas J. Manning, "lighthouse inspector," in regard to the Monhegan Island, Maine, Lighthouse. He noted that all was "In good order. Oil complained of in winter." By 1850 the collectors of customs, also Treasury Department officials who were found in all major port cities, served as the local superintendents of lights, and these officials were expected to visit each lighthouse in their districts yearly and to report back to Pleasonton.

With the creation of the Light-House Board by congressional act in August 1852, a more rigid and regular system of inspection of light stations compared to those carried out earlier was instituted. Inspections were to be done on a quarterly schedule. The board, which oversaw all aspects of the Light-House Establishment for

the next 58 years, was comprised of officers of the Army and Navy and civilian scientists with engineering backgrounds. Each of the 12 districts that the new law required to be established had an engineer, an officer of the Army Corps of Engineers or of the Corps of Topographical Engineers, and an inspector. The *Organization and Duties of the Light-house Board*, published in 1864, stated, "Inspectors assigned from the army or navy are charged with the general and special care of lighthouses, beacons, ..."

This publication went on to state, "Inspectors provided with light-house and buoy tenders are required to visit the lights once each quarter, if practicable, provided it can be done without detriment to other and more important duties ..." One wonders what more important duties than visiting the lighthouses under his charge an inspector might have. "Inspectors are required to make special reports of all cases in which light-keepers do not conform to the instructions and directions of the light-house service, in the care and management of the lights entrusted to them." It was further stated that superintendents, engineers, and inspectors were "authorized and required to discharge promptly any light-keeper found in a state of intoxication." Much was expected of those who kept the lights.

Deficiencies would be noted and acted upon, but good work was also acknowledged and rewarded, at least during the Bureau of Lighthouses years. If not by a pay increase or transfer to a more favored station, keepers who "were commended for efficiency at each quarterly inspection for a fiscal year shall be entitled to wear the inspector's efficiency star for the succeeding fiscal year." Those who earned the inspector's star for three successive years were awarded the more coveted commissioner's efficiency star. Additionally, the station in each district that received the highest mark for general efficiency would also be entitled to fly the efficiency pennant, according to *Instructions to Light Keepers*, 1911. This was the red and white triangular flag with the blue lighthouse on it, the official flag of the Bureau of Lighthouses. Typically flown from the mast of lightships and lighthouse tenders, it was not normally flown at light stations.

Arnold Burges Johnson, then the chief clerk of the Light-House Board, authored *The Modern Light-House Service* in 1889. By then, some 36 years after the creation of the board, inspectors were apparently all from the Navy. In regard to inspectors, Johnson states:

The lighthouse inspector is an officer of the Navy, the detail being changed, as a rule, every three years. It is now considered that the time an officer spends on light-house duty goes to make up his education and to contribute to his efficiency. Hence this duty is sought in times of peace by ambitious young officers of judgment, tact, and habits of study who can do the Light-House Establishment good service. The sixteen inspectors now on duty [there were at that time sixteen lighthouse districts] are all officers of the Navy; one a captain, nine are commanders, four are lieutenant-commanders, and two are lieutenants. They serve without any other than their naval shore-duty pay. It is the duty of the inspector to attend, under the directions of the Board, to supplying the lights of their respective districts; to keep up the discipline of the light-keepers; to inspect the light-stations, light-ships, and light-tenders, and all the light-house people and property in his district each quarter.

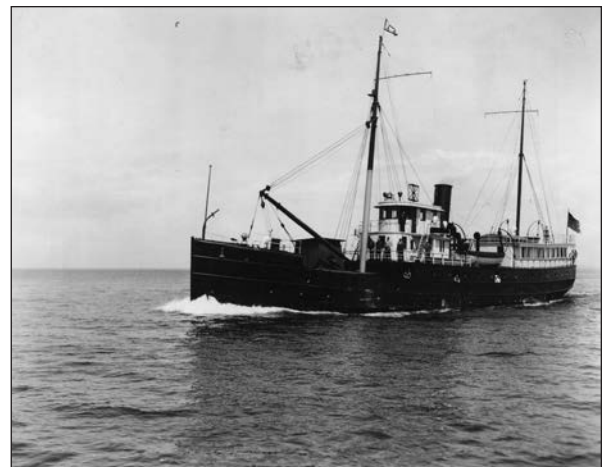
Johnson's comments are conflicted however by the actual lighthouse inspection reports, referenced above, that have been transcribed by the U.S. Lighthouse Society volunteers. I reviewed dozens of randomly selected actual lighthouse inspection reports from this collection, seeking definitive information regarding the persons who conducted the inspections. In only two instances in all the reports that I reviewed was a Navy officer noted as the inspector. "Commodore Dornin, Inspector, 5th LH District" was the noted inspecting officer at several Virginia lighthouses in 1870. Commander C. P. Eaton, identified as "USN Retired" was noted as the inspector at several mid-Atlantic stations in 1911, after the era of the Light-House Board. Perhaps had my random selection of reports been different, other naval inspectors may have been noted.

The earliest reports recorded have dates in 1858, and there are many from this year, but not a single one of them gives the name or title of the inspecting officer. The vast majority of the reports indicate that the inspector was either an Army engineering officer (Light-House Board era), or the superintendent or assistant of the district in which the particular lighthouse was located (Bureau of Lighthouses era). Other individual titles are found less frequently.

Specific examples from reports during the Light-House Board era (1852-1910) follow. The names and titles are quoted verbatim from the reports.

- J.M. Berrien, Inspector, 5th LH District; no military rank or other title noted (1867)
- Genl J.C. Duane, Engineer 3rd District (1880)
- G. L. Gillespie, Maj. of Engineers (1881)
- Chas. Davis, Capt. Of Engineers 10th LH District (1885)
- Lieut. John Millis, Engr 3rd District (1887)
- Major S. M. Mansfield, Corps of Engineers (1888)
- Major W. H. Hever, Corps of Engineers USA (1889)
- Edward Woodruff, Asst Civil Engineer (1889)
- John Murdoch, Asst. Engineer (1889)
- Maj. James Post, Corps of Engineers USA (1895)
- Capt. W. L. Fisk, Corps of Engineers USA (1896)
- Major Edw Burr, USA Engineer (1908)
- Maj. W. E. Craighill C of E USA (1909)
- Maj. J. F. McIndoe, Corps of Engineers USA (1910)

The Bureau of Lighthouses, an agency first of the Department of Commerce and Labor, and later of the Department of Commerce, succeeded the Light-House Board in 1910 as the administrative body that oversaw U.S. navigational aids. Military staff were soon replaced by civilian engineers. Thus from 1910 until 1939, when the bureau was in turn succeeded by the Coast Guard, almost all inspecting officers noted in the reports are identified



The lighthouse tender *Marigold* in Lake Huron, circa 1932. USLHS archive photo.

as staff from the various district offices. Specific examples follow. No name is noted in several of them.

Oliver G. Brown, Civil Engineer (1910)

Milo Hoadley, Supt. (1910)

Frank C. Arthur, Supt. (1911)

Tom Gregg, Supt. (1912)

F. P. Dillion, Asst. Supt. (1914)

Irving Gill, Asst Supt (1914)

Comdr C. P. Eaton, USN Retired (1911)

Superintendent (1927)  
Asst. Lighthouse Engineer (1927)

Asst. Supt. & Radio Electrician (1929)

Thomas Sampson, Asst. Supt (1935)

A great number of the reports note only the inspector's name, but make no mention of his job title. There are a few instances of inspectors that are identified neither as military officers nor as engineers. Francis J. Otter is noted as the inspector at several Michigan stations on reports dated 1910 and 1911 with the title of "Draftsman." By 1915 his title is noted as "Assistant Superintendent." W.F. Lynch was inspecting Virginia stations in 1927; he is noted on the reports as "Foreman." Howard Cox, "Master Mechanic" was doing inspections in California in 1910.

It is interesting to note that the inspection reports as transcribed from the originals in the National Archives do not note the date the inspection was performed, but rather a "Date of Report," apparently the date the inspector(s) finally sat down, presumably with notes from the actual inspection, and wrote up the report. There are many instances of the same inspectors' names being found with the same report date for many lighthouses over a great geographic distance. In one example, the names of "Charles Bartlett, Chief Clerk," and "Norris M. Works, Supt." are noted on over 20 reports for Lake Erie light stations, all with the date of February 1, 1909. These reports include Lake Erie stations in New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Michigan. In a similar situation, Thomas Sampson, identified as the "Assistant District Superintendent," is noted as the inspector on reports

from over 20 light stations in Maine and New Hampshire, all of which are dated May 1, 1935.



**George W. Coffin was an inspector for the 12th Lighthouse District. Photo courtesy of *Lighthouse Digest*.**

It appears that sometimes a "celebrity" inspector came to visit. One such situation is documented in the May 1912 report for the Tybee Island, Georgia, station. The inspecting officer is noted as H. D. King (Harold D. King) who would soon be the assistant commissioner of then still new Bureau of Lighthouses.

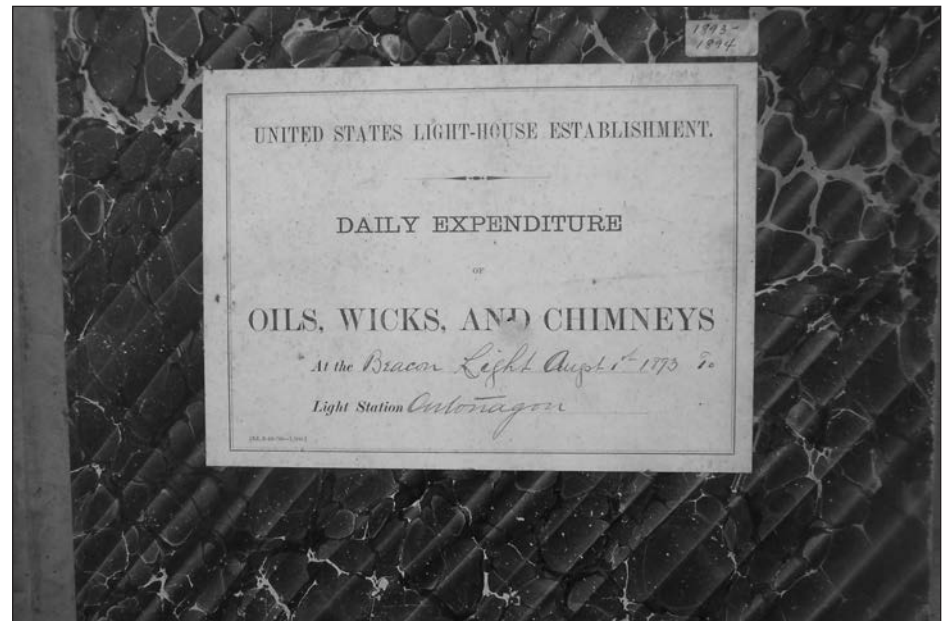
In August 1893, retired General Orlando Poe accompanied 11th District Engineer Major Adams on an inspection of the Ontonagon, Michigan, station. Poe had once been the 11th District Engineer himself and went on to be a member of the Light-House Board.

In addition to the more formal inspections by a district staffer, many of the reports note that they were performed by the "Keeper." *Instructions to Light Keepers* as early as 1902 required that monthly reports on the "condition of station" be submitted to both the inspector and to the engineer. By 1911, similar *Instructions to Light Keepers of the United States Lighthouse Service* Bureau of Lighthouses, Department of Commerce and Labor, required head keepers to make a weekly inspection of their stations.

"Weekly Inspection—Keepers will make a personal weekly inspection of the station, including quarters of all assistants and laborers. This inspection of quarters will be made in the presence of the subordinate concerned at a reasonable hour, and records made of condition in the journal." I would bet he didn't use his white gloves in his wife's kitchen as the "district man" would have done. This requirement influenced the social interaction of the families at multi-keeper stations. Although the children usually all got along well, the wives of the assistants were less likely to be willing to gather for morning coffee with the head keeper's wife when they knew the impact her husband's inspections of their quarters could have on their own husbands' service and career. These "self-inspections" augmented, but did not replace, the periodic more formal visit of a district inspector. Confusingly, the instructions state the keeper's weekly inspection is to be recorded in the station journal; thus, I am unsure why more formal report documents found their way to the Record Group 26 archives. How early the self-inspection requirement was implemented is unknown.

### How Often Did They Come?

Exerpts from various official documents noted above consistently mention quarterly visits by the inspectors, but it appears this generally happened less frequently. Mazie Anderson, (also quoted earlier) in her memoirs published as "Return to Petit Manan Light



**One of the many records required of the keeper that the inspector would be checking on. Courtesy of Ontonagon County Michigan Historical Society.**

Station” in *The Keeper's Log*, Summer 1995, stated, “All the buildings on the island were kept a pristine white by the keepers. The station had to be maintained in excellent condition to meet the scrutiny of the twice yearly government inspections.” The thorough journals of James Corgan at the Ontonagon Light Station in Michigan, referenced in much detail below, indicate that inspections were generally an annual or twice yearly event at best. The actual frequency probably varied from district to district and year to year given the number of stations and the relative difficulty of getting to them. As the inspectors and resident keepers got to know each other better, the inspector most likely determined which locations needed his motivating presence more often.

### Case Study - Inspector Visits to Split Rock, Minnesota, Light Station

The Split Rock station went into service in 1910. Journal entries in the station archives for the years 1910 to 1920 are very sparse but do note some visits by inspectors, thus documenting the frequency of official inspections at this location in this era.

July 1, 1911: Tender *Marigold*; Commander McCormick inspected station.

June 29, 1912: *Marigold* delivered supplies and the inspector.

July 2, 1913: *Marigold* delivered supplies and inspector Woodruff.

July 8, 1913: *Marigold* delivered gasoline and inspector Trott.

Sept. 19, 1913: *Amaranth* brought inspector Tinkham (Ralph Russell Tinkham, who designed the Split Rock lighthouse) then the assistant district superintendent.

June 23, 1914: *Amaranth* delivered supplies and inspector Woodruff.

Oct. 24, 1914: *Marigold* brought Inspector Park (the district superintendent).

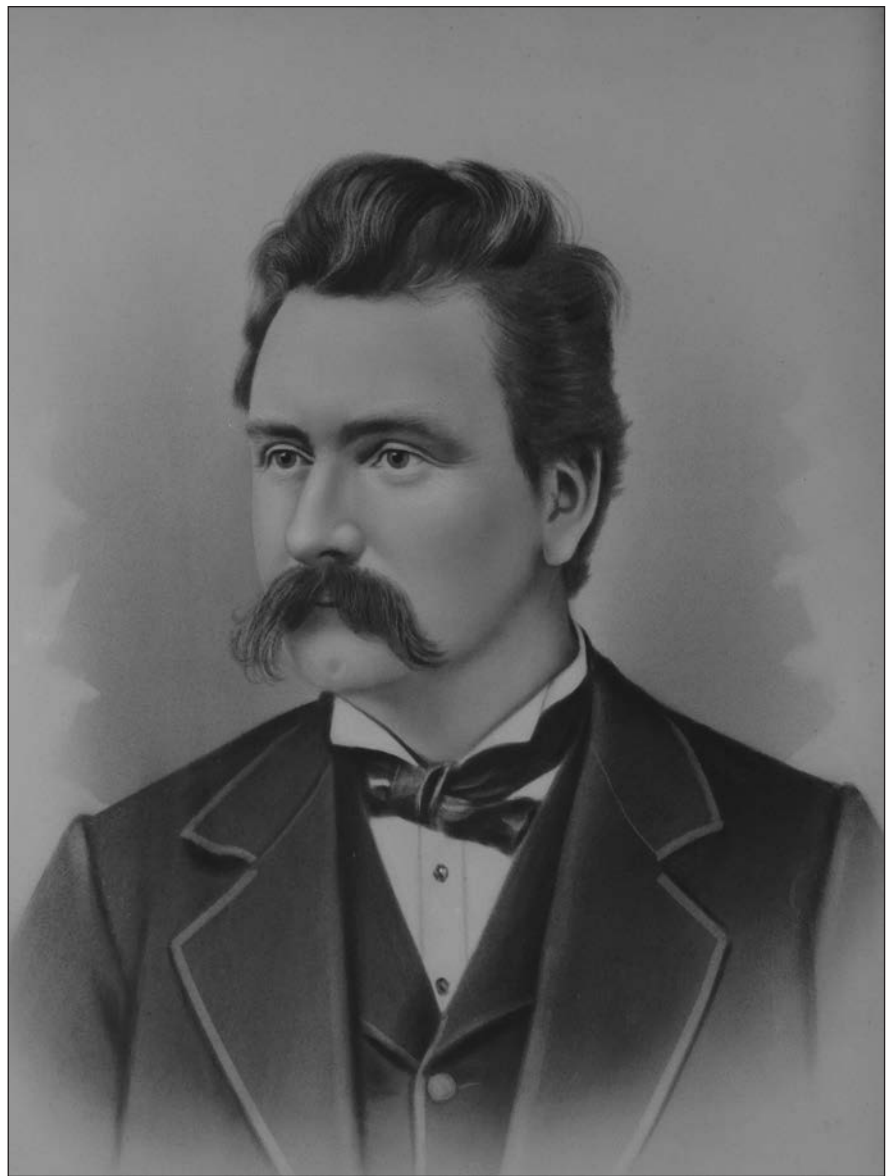
June 28, 1915: *Amaranth* brought supplies and inspector Woodruff.

Oct. 27, 1915: “Keeper inspected station (1st such of year)”.

July 6, 1916: “Inspector Woodruff signs” (station journal, but no mention of a tender arrival).

Oct. 5, 1916: *Amaranth* delivered coal and inspector L. Gill, assistant superintendent.

July 28, 1917: *Amaranth* brought inspector Woodruff.



Keeper James Corgan of Ontonagon. Photo courtesy of Ontonagon County Michigan Historical Society.

Oct. 20, 1917: *Marigold* delivered coal and gasoline and Charles A. Park (Park was still the 11th District superintendent); this may or may not have been a visit for the purpose of an official inspection.

Aug. 20, 1918: *Amaranth* delivered gasoline, coal, yearly supplies and inspector Woodruff.

June 27, 1919: *Amaranth* delivered supplies and inspector Woodruff.

July 21, 1920: *Amaranth* delivered supplies and inspector Woodruff.

This data indicates that Split Rock Light Station was typically inspected once each year by the regular inspector (Inspector Woodruff from 1912 through 1920). If a second inspection is noted in the same year, it was by the district superintendent or his assistant. One other

inspector is noted: Trott in July 1913. As his visit came only six days after the recorded visit of Inspector Woodruff, I speculate that he was perhaps a new man on a training visit.

### Case Study - Inspections of the Ontonagon, Michigan, Light Station

Thomas Stripe was appointed the keeper at Ontonagon in 1864. He had lost his right arm some years earlier in a tragic accident with the town's ceremonial cannon, and was often criticized by his superiors for poor and scant journal entries. Fiesty Irishman that he was, he was reputed to have explained this by responding that he wrote with his right hand, and “when

I lost my arm, my right hand went along with it." Many of the entries that do appear in Stripe's journals are thought to have been written by his wife. Some of those in what appear to be his own poor penmanship seemed to taunt those who criticized his journals with such inappropriate entries as "i lit up," "tommie shot two ducks," "the boys went fishing and caught twenty brook trout," and "a dog bite Mr. Penicks Cows tail." Despite this apparent flaunting, Stripe remained the keeper for 18 years, until the fall of 1883. The sporadic journal entries recovered by the Ontonagon Historical Society note only two inspections during Stripe's tenure. They are quoted here from his journal.

July 25, 1872: "U.S. Lt. H. Tender Haye delivered annual supplies. Station Inspected by Commodore A. Murray U.S. Navy Light-house Inspector 11th Dist." This was likely an entry by Mrs. Stripe.

July 14, 1878: "the light house boat came to in spect the lighthouse" The Inspector was not named. This was most likely an entry by Thomas Stripe himself.

Thomas Stripe was succeeded as Ontonagon's keeper by James Corgan, who served as the keeper of this Lake Superior light station from October 1883 until his retirement in early 1919. Corgan had previous service at Gull Rock and at South Manitou Island (off-shore stations.) Unlike his predecessor, he kept extremely detailed journals, supposedly actually being reprimanded for writing too much irrelevant information. These journals noted, among many other events, the visits to Ontonagon by inspecting officers.

As referenced above, only a few of the random *Description of Light Station* reports that I reviewed noted an inspector who was a Navy officer. Corgan's journals almost always noted the rank of the inspector and show clearly that, at least on Lake Superior during the years he was the keeper, the inspector was indeed an officer of the Navy. The inspectors are almost always noted as captain, commander, or lieutenant commander, all Navy ranks. Other titles, such as "Major, Corps of Engineers" are found as well, but less often.

As is the case in so many aspects of researching lighthouse history, the lines between fact and lore are indistinct and wander greatly. Corgan's journal entries give much insight into the keeper/inspector relationship, yielding facts but contributing to the lore as well. In some of his years there, Corgan's journals note but a single visit by the inspector—July 1884, July

1885, July 1886, September 1887 for example—but there are many exceptions. Captain Horace Emlen inspected the Ontonagon station in June, August, and September of 1888; the journal notes two more visits in June and August of 1889. Commander O. F. Heyerman came twice in 1890 and twice more in 1891. Interestingly, the journal entries for August 1890 and June 1891 note that Heyerman's wife and family were also aboard the tender. How common such family cruises were among district staff officers is unclear. An even more interesting observation is that Corgan and his wife had a son named "Heyerman," born long prior to Corgan's assignment to Ontonagon.

Two inspections by two different inspectors are noted in 1892. Six inspections are noted for the 1893-1894 period, three of them by the district engineer, Army Major W. B. Adams, rather than the regular Navy officer inspector. In August of 1893, Adams was accompanied



Lighthouse tender *Amaranth*, 1937. USLHS archive photo.

by retired General Orlando Poe, a longtime lighthouse engineer, district superintendent, and member of the Light-House Board. This may well have been a social call, taking General Poe on one last tour of the lighthouses. The August 7, 1894, visit of Major Adams may also have been a social call rather than a formal inspection, as Corgan's journal notes he was accompanied by "Captain Price," identified as the current chairman of the Light-House Board, and by Mrs. Price. This was only four days before the regular inspector, Commander W.W. Mead, arrived on August 11 to conduct the routine inspection. Mead returned once again in 1895.

Inspecting officers apparently changed often. Commander W. M. Folger is noted as inspecting three times in 1896 (June, July, and October) and three more times in 1897 (July,

August, and October). With the 1897 inspections, Keeper Corgan begins to include comments reflecting the results of the visits. "Station in efficient condition," he notes after the July 1897 inspection. "Station in good order," per the August entry.

Commander Duncan Kennedy inspected in July 1898 and again in August 1899. In between these dates an inspection by "Lt. Commander Retired" T. A. Davenport is noted. Was Davenport pressed into service out of retirement, or was this trip a reward to retired naval officers? The August 1899 journal entry notes that Light-House Board Chairman Admiral Francis Higginson and his wife were also aboard the tender, but does not note if he participated in the station inspection.

Commander J. C. Wilson inspected three times in 1900 (June, August, and October). Corgan notes Wilson "expressed satisfaction at its condition" at the June visit. In July 1901, two Army engineering officers arrived at Ontonagon by train, not by the tender, and "inspected the piers and light. Inspected station p.m. Note in good order." Corgan's journal for 1901 notes two inspections in August; I believe these were his own self-inspections as he does not reference a tender nor an inspector's name/rank.

August 10: "Recently inspected station & note everything in good order."

August 24: "Inspected station p.m. and note all in good order."

On August 25, one day after Corgan's own inspection, Commander Wilson arrived at 5 a.m. on the tender *Marigold*. Wilson "inspected both lights and found everything satisfactory." (In addition to the main light, the Ontonagon station included a smaller pier head light.)

On June 24, 1902, the *Marigold* arrived again. "No inspector except Mr. Fred B. Sides acting as such," notes Corgan. "Mr. Sides inspected station and found everything in good order." One month later, the 11th District Engineer Lansing H. Beach "looked over beacon & main light with a view to repairs." This was not an inspection as such, but one of the regular checks by the engineers to determine necessary repairs. On August 1, a "Cap Gheen inspected both lights and expressed satisfaction at their condition." Perhaps another of the district engineering staff, Corgan notes Captain Gheen was accompanied by his daughter.

Commander Herbert Winslow inspected the station six times between October 1902 and October 1904. In an interesting





Harry W. Rhodes, inspector 18th Lighthouse District, 1912-1935. USLHS archive photo.

observation about the hazards of tender travel, Corgan's August 18, 1903, journal entry states, "USLH Stmr *Marigold* lay to anchor outside of pier all night. Quite a severe squall from SW x W caused her to roll and do considerable damage to furniture and dishes. Wind freshened & she came into port 10 a.m." Commander Winslow then inspected the station. The *Marigold* did not depart for the next station, 14 Mile Point, until the next day. The October 1904 visit gives some indication of the length of a typical inspection. The *Marigold* arrived at the station at 7:45 p.m.; Winslow's inspection commenced at 8 p.m., late in the day for October at this latitude.

By 1905 Commander Charles E. Fox, "U.S.N." was the inspecting officer. He inspected the station in July, August, and October. Corgan makes particular note that on the August visit, the tender *Marigold* "arrived 6:15 a.m. from Grand Marais north shore." Typically the tender visits to Ontonagon followed the south shore from one station to the next. Was this an attempt to surprise the station? In addition to the inspector, Commander Fox, the journal tells us that Captain Cummings (tender master), clerk F. B. Sides, and an engineer all "spent a pleasant evening at L.H." This social interaction perhaps reaches a zenith at the October 1905 inspection. The tender had arrived at 6 a.m. By 9:30 a.m., after the inspection was done, Commander Fox, Captain Cummings, Mr. Sides, and Keeper Corgan were off hunt-

ing. "Had an enjoyable outing and returned 5 p.m. with several partridges." It was a short inspection followed by a long hunt. The tender didn't leave for 14 Mile Point until the following morning.

Commander Fox again inspected the station in June and August of 1906. Following the August inspection, Corgan notes that Fox went to Marquette to pick up registered mail, and that he took "Mrs. Fox & Mr. & Mrs. Burr guests on the *Marigold* out to the Victoria Mine to see the hydraulic water power that furnishes all power at the mine." We can add "tourist guide" to the duties of the light keeper.

By 1907 yet another officer, Commander James F. Smith, was doing the inspections. After his first visit, Corgan notes "Commndr Smith a genuine Inspector of the old school," which I interpret

to mean Smith was unusually thorough in his review of the station. Note by now that Corgan had been the principal keeper at Ontonagon for 23 years and likely needed little of the oversight that inspections were intended to provide. Smith inspected in June and October 1907 and again in June 1908. At the October visit, the tender arrived the night before. Corgan notes that he "Went aboard *Marigold* & remained to 10:15 p.m." At the June 1908 visit, the *Marigold* didn't arrive until 3:45 p.m. Smith was by now doing briefer inspections, as the tender "cleared bound up 5 p.m." An additional inspection by "Major Charles M. Keller L.H. Engineer" was made in August 1907. Keller is noted as inspecting the station again in July 1908.

Commander Casey B. Morgan also inspected in July 1908, and "expressed satisfaction with condition of station and apparatus." This was also a brief inspection, as the tender arrived at 8:45 p.m. and departed at 10 p.m. Surprisingly, Corgan's journals note no more inspections until July 1910, when Commander Morgan arrived again on the tender *Anemone*. Commander C. M. McCormack arrived on the tender *Marigold* in June 1911. "Comdr McCormacks first trip of inspection on Lake Superior," notes the journal.

In 1910, the military-oriented Lighthouse Board was abolished, and the Bureau of Lighthouses was created in the Department of Commerce and Labor (later the Department of Commerce). Navy officer inspectors were gradually replaced by civilian engineers. The

district superintendents and their assistants took over the inspection duties. In July 1912, Corgan notes an inspection by District Superintendent Charles A. Park (whose name was noted on Split Rock inspection references). In September 1912 and again in June 1913, "Edward L. Woodruff, Ins" is noted. Corgan states Woodruff "examined" the station. In June 1914, "E. L. Woodruff Inspetr" and Chief Clerk Fred B. Sides arrived on the tender *Amaranth* "on the annual inspection and supply trip." Corgan added that after the inspection, he "procured an automobile & took them to Victoria Mines to see the wonderful power plant there."

Although Corgan served as the Ontonagon keeper for another eight years, his journals strangely stop mentioning visits of inspectors. Surely the actual inspections didn't cease. His records from 1884 to 1914, however, do provide a fascinating picture of inspectors and inspections.

## Summary

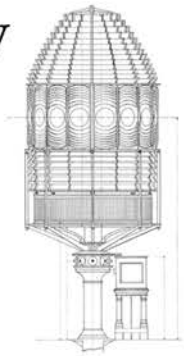
From the earliest years of the U.S. Lighthouse Establishment right up to the Coast Guard era of the mid-1900s, the "utmost neatness" of the equipment, buildings, apparatus, and appurtenances of the light stations under their charge, and of the keepers themselves, was expected, demanded even, of those who kept the lights. It was necessary that those in charge knew from the reports of the inspectors that the "station was in good order."

The keepers too took pride when all was found in "satisfactory condition," as positive feedback is always a good thing. In those cases where all was not in good order, appropriate steps were taken to make corrections, even if it meant the transfer or dismissal of station staff. The keepers awaited the inspector's visit with a mix of anticipation and dread, and no matter what the results, were undoubtedly much relieved when the tender on which he arrived departed the station dock.

Sometimes the lighthouse inspector was God Almighty, sometimes a genuine inspector of the old school, complete with white gloves, but sometimes he was just a hunting buddy.



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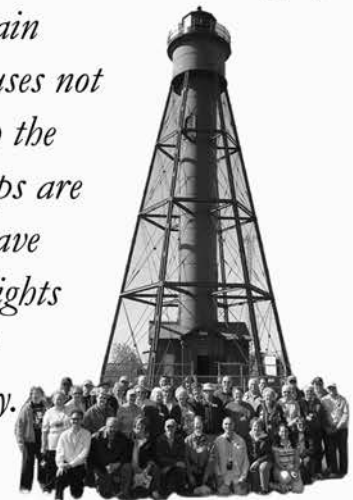
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