

# A HISTORY OF SEGUIN ISLAND LIGHT STATION

S is for the seagulls that glide so swiftly by.

E is for the evening it steals across the sky.

G is for the God above who watches every hour.

U is for the United States that great and mighty power.

I is for the I. O. V. up there in the tower.

N is for the Nightingale, let us now begin put them all together, we find we have "Seguin."

*Note: Bath Times, Sept. 24, 1925 by unknown author in a letter over 100 years old at the time.*

Seguin Island is located in the Town of Georgetown, Sagadahoc County, State of Maine, Latitude 43-42.5 N, Longitude 69-43.5 W. Seguin is about two nautical miles from Fort Popham at the mouth of the Kennebec River, the site of the first English colony in the New World.

## HOW SEGUIN WAS NAMED - TAKE YOUR CHOICE

In 1911 Charles E. Allen, at a meeting of the Maine Historical Society in Portland, gave his version of the derivation of the name Seguin. "As to the origin of the name Seguin, Sutquin, or Satquin. Seguin is French, but I know of no other locality in our country that has the same name, except a small town in Texas. Was the name originally French, or Indian, or about half and half, like the word Chicago? Or does it come from some fisherman, like the story where a white skipper is said to have asked an Indian the way into the Kennebec, and the red-man pointing said in pigeon English "See g'uin," meaning "See, go in." I think some early French fisherman may have named it."

In his book "**LIGHTHOUSES OF NEW ENGLAND 1716-1973**", Edward Rowe Snow states "In William Stracey's 1612 account of George Popham's voyage, the island is called "Sutquin" possibly a corruption of satquin, the unpleasant Abernaki Indian name meaning to make an liquid oral emission. In John Smith's writings we find that he refers to the Sagadahoc river and then mentions the isle of Satquin. When Champlain sailed down the coast in what yachtsman-author

Alfred E. Loomis believes was a two-masted pinnacle, the Frenchman decided that Seguin Island looked more like a turtle or tortoise than anything else. Many times while flying over Seguin, I have been struck by the resemblance the island bears to that well-known member of the reptile family."

Whatever the derivation of Seguin, the island has been prominent in maritime history since before the American colonies were settled. On August 15, 1607, it is reported that George Popham and Raleigh Gilbert anchored under Seguin Island before moving into the Kennebec River to Popham where the first English colony was established in the New World.

## QUEST FOR A LIGHT AT SEGUIN ISLAND

William Avery Baker in his book "A MARITIME HISTORY OF BATH, MAINE AND THE KENNEBEC RIVER REGION" comments:

"To the mariners of the Kennebec region and points to the westward an obvious location for a light station was Seguin Island, about two miles off the mouth of the Kennebec River. The name of William Litgow of Georgetown headed the list of 55 signers of a petition presented to the General Court of Massachusetts in June 1786 asking for a lighthouse on Seguin. The petition noted that:

The Island Seguin seems to be designated by Nature for this purpose, being situated at the mouth of the great River Kennebec, and being an excellent direction not only for that Harbour, but likewise for the Harbour of Falmouth, Booth-Bay, Wiscasset-Point, New Meadows, and Harpswell. This island is well known to Foreigners being pointed out in the sea Charts & Maps - Your Petitioners think that if there was a Light upon this Island many Vessels would be saved from Shipwreck, and many Persons preserved from immature Deaths...

Nearly a decade was to pass before a lighthouse was built on Seguin."

February 19, 1794 the Commonwealth of Massachusetts passed an act of cessation of ten acres of Seguin Island to the United States, while at the same time retaining concurrent jurisdiction over all civil and criminal processes issued under the authority of the Commonwealth. On March 8, 1797 (after the commissioning of Seguin Light) the Commonwealth released the remainder of Seguin Island to the United States. Each act only covered 10 acres as they thought the entire island was only 20 acres, while in fact the island is about 64 acres. The U. S. Coast Guard claimed ownership of Seguin Island by virtue of two deeds from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts filed in the real estate records of the Office of the Commandant, First Coast Guard District, Boston, Massachusetts.

1. Dated February 19, 1794 and recorded in **Lighthouse Book A**, Page 165: "Ten acres of land, in the property of this Commonwealth, therein most convenient for a lighthouse, part of the Island of Seguin, situated near the mouth of the River Kennebec in this Commonwealth for the purpose of erecting a lighthouse on the same ten acres, which quantity of land shall be laid out at the time of erecting said lighthouse, and a description thereof in writing entered into the Registry in the County where same shall be situated."

2. Dated March 8, 1797 and recorded in **Lighthouse Book A**, Page 188: "The remaining part of the said island of Seguin in the commonwealth of Massachusetts, containing about ten acres."

No records of these or any other transactions affecting Seguin Island were found in the Registry of Deeds in either Lincoln or Sagadahoc County.

The **Maine Historical Recorder** says "Portland, March 4th 1794 a lighthouse is to be erected on Seguin Island in the district of Maine." The Act providing for the erection of a lighthouse was approved May 19, 1794. In June 1795 the *Columbian Centinel*, a Boston paper, advertised for proposals to build a tower of wood upon a stone foundation, also a dwelling for the keeper. Response to the advertisement was not overwhelming and costs were inflationary, even in those days, as the following letter indicates.

"August 31, 1795

To - Benj. Lincoln (Collector of Customs, Boston)

Sir, You will find under this cover a duplicate of a letter No. 1 to General Dearborn informing him of the acceptance of his offer to build Seguin Light House, and an original letter No. 2, both to be transmitted after perusal to him informing him of the execution by him and of the security.

You will also find inclosed two copies of the contract completed and executed by me, and you will be pleased to procure his execution of the same. A bond is also inclosed, which is to be signed by him and some one or more persons, who (exclusive of him) shall be deemed sufficient to secure the United States in the sum of twelve thousand six hundred dollars. It is possible General Dearborn may be in Boston. If not you will be pleased to take the necessary steps in Maine.

You will perceive that the Light House is much higher than your estimate of 1794. Boards were then rated at eight dollars and other things in proportion. The price of the Iron work has risen 20 to 30 points. Bricks, stone, and lime 100 points and building timber nearly as much. Besides these points you will observe that there is to be a costly and firm stone foundation, if necessary a stone cellar to the house, a capacious and secure oil vault. The Light House is to be wider and higher, of course stouter and the lantern to be first rate. It is to be observed too, that no other proposals were made by any other person except one (to construct) the building for compensation.

Signed,

*Teach Coxe*

Secretary of Treasury"

## SEGUIN ISLAND LIGHT TOWER

The first tower was built in 1795 at a cost of \$6,000; it was 165 feet above sea level. This structure was built of wood on a foundation of rubble stone and stood some 50 feet a little south of west of the present lighthouse. Apparently the first lights used for illumination on Seguin were oil lamps with no chimneys, sixteen in number, with crude reflectors placed in a circle on a wooden bench. The lantern was a fixed white light with the power of the light sent in the ocean direction, with the land side being dark.

In 1817 Winslow Lewis installed a new lantern, but reported the original wood tower had gone to pieces so badly he wasn't sure it would stay in place. Congress acted, authorizing \$2,500 for a stone tower that was erected two years later at a cost of \$2,248.

In 1842, the light consisted of 15 Argand lamps with parabolic reflectors, 21 inches in diameter. J. P. Lewis, Inspector, recommended the addition of 9 lamps which would make it capable of being seen 19 or 20 miles in clear weather. It, again, was a fixed white light and remains so to this day. The Argand system of lighting was devised by Aime Argand of Geneva about 1782 and was a forced draft central system.

Extreme weather conditions led to the demolition of the "new" light. In 1853, the Lighthouse Board reported that the station needed to be improved and, as it was a very important station on the coast due to the shipping on the Kennebec and Sheepscot Rivers, it was recognized that Seguin should be a First Order Station. In 1855, a \$35,000 appropriation was asked for improvements, and in 1857 a new larger tower, 53 feet in height, was built of cut stone and provided with a First Order Fresnel Lens and a new keepers quarters was erected of brick. Both structures stand today.

The Fresnel lens was devised by Augustin Fresnel, a French physicist who experimented with diffraction and polarization from 1788 to 1827. The lens was probably devised around 1822 and was first used in the United States in 1841.

When the Fresnel lens was installed on Seguin in 1857, the Argand lamps were replaced by a single lamp. It consisted of a round brass reservoir holding ten gallons of kerosene oil. On top was a large brass reservoir 5 and 1/16th inches in diameter with 5 circular wicks, one to five inches in diameter. A heavy disk inside the reservoir, which was wound up to the top of the oil at sunset, forced the oil from the bottom through a tube on the outside and across to the wicks in the burner. On a level with the bottom of the wicks, which were about four inches in length, and placed in the supply tubes, was an automatic cup that filled with oil, so that when filled, created a pressure that forced a float against the opening of the exit tube to the wicks, and prevented overflowing. As the wicks exhausted the oil, the float settled down and let the cup again fill with oil.

A large glass chimney with a brass strap around the bottom fitted into the burner, the top entering a funnel above, that went out through the dome of the lantern. In the funnel, just at the top of the chimney was a damper that controlled the height of the blaze and carried off the smoke and fumes.

It burned about 4 1/2 gallons of oil in the shortest nights and 7 1/2 gallons in the longest or about 2 gallons per hour. After 1907 it was changed so that it vaporized the oil and a mantle was used

instead of wicks. When the wicks were used the output was 500 candlepower. With the mantle the candlepower was increased somewhat.

The **American Sentinel** reported May 10, 1881, "Seguin can be plainly seen from the top of the Elm Street belfry." ..." From the hill west of the Curtis house on High Street, one of the finest views in the city can be obtained; the land is the highest of any in Bath according to the coast survey, and Seguin Island, Camden Hills, and the White Mountains can be clearly seen on a clear day."

The **Bath Tribune**, July 29, 1925, said in part, "The City of Bangor left her dock at Boston at the usual time on Wednesday evening, July 1, bound for Bath. The night was clear and very beautiful and commander, crew and passengers enjoyed the trip. Pilot Gilpatrick was in the pilot house of the Bangor at 10:35 and the steamer was off Boon Light with the lights of Thatcher's and Cape Elizabeth both clearly seen when another light was sighted in the direction of Seguin. Bearings were taken at once and it was determined that Seguin was exactly in the direction of the light. The light did not disappear. Pilot Gilpatrick was nonplussed to say the least. Here they were apparently seeing Seguin Light from where Seguin Light had never been seen before. The distance figured at 47 3/4 nautical miles and the average distance that the light usually showed was from 22 to 23 miles, seldom more, often less."

## SEGUIN ISLAND FOG SIGNAL

Information on Seguin Island's fog signals is sketchy. Although the date is not known, the first fog signal used on Seguin was a fog bell. The bell was rung by hand. Whenever a ship passing nearby in the fog would signal, the keeper would signal back. Many complaints were received that the bell could not be heard when a sea was running, crashing against the island and surrounding ledges. It is most likely the size of the fog bell was increased from the time the initial bell was installed until 1872 when the bell was replaced with a steam fog whistle. Bells ranged from small hand bells to those up to 4,000 pounds in weight.

A Bath paper, the **American Sentinel**, on September 5, 1872 stated "The Lighthouse Board gives notice that the steam fog whistle has been established on Seguin Island, off the mouth of the Kennebec River. During thick or foggy weather the signal will be sounded at intervals of fifty-two seconds, the length of each blast being eight seconds. The machinery is placed in a small wooden building about eight yards to the southward of the lighthouse and 149 feet above sea level."

The **American Sentinel**, January 21, 1875 stated, "The fog whistle on Seguin was heard distinctly here on last Saturday evening, and one could hardly recognize the fact as the points are distant 18 or 20 miles in a direct line. Only a peculiar state of the atmosphere could transmit the sound of the fog whistle so great a distance. -**Brunswick Telegraph**. The "state of the atmosphere" most favorable to hearing the whistle, we think, must be a thick snow storm. At any rate it is such times that it is heard most distinctly in this city, even when an adverse wind is blowing heavily."

In 1907 the operation of the foghorn required 60 pounds of steam pressure, used 90 gallons of water and 150 pounds of hard coal per hour. In the latter part of the 1920's, the steam fog whistle was replaced by a compressed air diaphone horn. The diaphone fog signal is the old familiar "BEEE-OOOHHH"

In October 1931 **OIL POWER**, a publication of Standard Oil Company of New York, Inc., reported - "WHAT A FOGHORN!" In that article Seguin's foghorn, located in another building several hundred feet from the lighthouse, was described as having "two 28 horsepower semi-Diesel engines operating on fuel oil. They drive air compressors supplying compressed air for the diaphone horn which blasts a warning in fog or snow. Gasoline engines work up sufficient pressure to start one of the large engines. When it is necessary to blow the foghorn, one of these engines feeds air under forty pounds pressure to the ominous sounding diaphone.

In action, the foghorn blows three double blasts a minute. That is, it blows for a period of one and one-half seconds, is silent for a second, and then blows for another second and a half. The interval between the double blasts is sixteen seconds.

The horn's blast has been likened to that of an enraged bull of Bashan. In fact, according to Mr. Bracey (Keeper on Seguin), the concussion has put out an oil lantern set on the ground eight feet below the horn. Gulls flying in front of the horn have been knocked down by the force of the concussion - not the air blast.

Perhaps that indicates why the Seguin fog signal has been heard anywhere from seven to ten miles, depending on weather conditions. By a peculiar freak of nature, it has been heard from Bath fourteen miles north of the light but only during a snowstorm blowing out of the northeast. The snow acts as a sound carrier."

## **THE TRAMWAY**

The tramway, a 1006 foot long railway built on trestles, was a valuable asset used to haul coal, furniture, heavy equipment, food, supplies and people between the top and bottom of the steep island. Little is known of the early history of the tramway. It may well have been powered by oxen or mules. During the period when Elson Small was keeper (1926 to 1930), the tramway was condemned as unsafe and a new one was built. At that time it was powered by a mechanical engine. The tramway continues to operate today powered by an old "Buddha" diesel engine with four large levers that control the direction and speed of the wire cable attached to the tramcar.

While extremely useful, the tramway is also dangerous. As the result of an accident in 1949 when the cable broke loose and the wife of one of the keepers was seriously injured, the Coast Guard prohibited tramway use for passengers.

## **FAMILY LIFE ON SEGUIN**

Being stationed at the Seguin Island Light required significant self-sufficiency, especially if there was a family accompanying the Keeper. When Major (Count) Polreczky arrived on Seguin it was heavily wooded and had a significant amount of tillable land. His \$300 annual salary was figured with the assumption that Seguin Island had the capability of providing self-sufficiency. During his

first year there, the Count requested and received an additional \$150 from Congress with which to clear the brush and trees from the island and fit it for a garden. The assumption was not realistic and living off the land and surrounding sea proved to cause the Count considerable hardship.

Future keepers continued to use the natural resources of the island as a necessary supplement to the with fresh supplies their income provided. Most ran small farms, with cows, chickens, and family gardens as well as utilizing the plentiful bounties of the sea and the birds flying overhead. However, Seguin Island in its exposed location is a poor place to a supplemental living by farming and fishing.

The first family on Seguin was Mr. & Mrs. Christopher Pushard and daughter Jane, the first known child born on Seguin. Christopher, the Major's brother-in-law served on Seguin as an assistant, we believe, from 1796 - 1802. There is no record of Mrs. Polereczky living on Seguin, but with nine children she probably preferred more comfort than Seguin could provide.

Seguin had three women assistant keepers during the mid 1800's. The first was Rachel Spinney who served from 1865 to 1866 when she resigned. The second recorded female lighthouse keeper was Mrs. Jane Morrill who served from 1867 until 1869 when she was removed from her position. The third woman was Mrs. Louisa N. Lane who served from 1871 to 1872 when she resigned her position.

Schooling of children was problematic on Seguin. In the best of times, there was a teacher who would travel among the lighthouses. The teacher would spend a fortnight on the island and leave the mother with "homework", to return three or so months later for another tutoring session.

Edward Rowe Snow in his book **"THE LIGHTHOUSES OF NEW ENGLAND"** writes, "Various attempts have been made through the years to provide a school for the children of the lighthouse keepers at Seguin Island; these efforts were not successful for a very long period of time. Whenever the school was not operating, the resourceful wives of the keepers who could afford to do so left the island to have their children educated at nearby Bath. E. V. Mitchell in his book **"ANCHOR TO WINDWARD"** tells us that when the school building was closed for the last time, it was utilized for the island cow." Also many keepers had families in the nearby area and would board their children with their families during the school year.

## **SEGUIN UNDER COAST GUARD OPERATIONS**

The Coast Guard took over operation of the Light Station in 1939, but still maintained it as a "family light" until January of 1963. Initially there were few changes for families on Seguin. The keepers tended to the navigational aids, buildings, and grounds as well as adding to the family larder by hunting and fishing. The keepers wives kept the quarters white glove clean always aware of the possibility of surprise inspection, gardens and livestock tended, the lens cover washed and ironed, food prepared, laundry done, and children cared for. Children had their chores reflective of their ages and capabilities.

During the 24 year period of Coast Guard family life on Seguin, there were many changes as technology made advances. The most significant advance was the arrival of electric generators in 1953. Now irons didn't need to be heated on the stove; oil lamps were replaced with electric ones; hot water was easily available; radio and later television provided constant glimpses of the world on the mainland; and, most importantly, the aids to navigation did not require the constant daily manual attention.

The last families to live on Seguin Island were Mr. & Mrs. James R. Wilson and a daughter, Mr. & Mrs. Kenneth J Dukes and two daughters, and Mr. & Mrs. George F. Johns and two daughters.

In 1963, Seguin Light Station became a "stag light" with William P. O'Neill as the new keeper. He was happy with his new post and said, "We're warm and comfortable here." George Johns remained on Seguin as an assistant after his family settled ashore.

The normal complement of men on Seguin after 1963 was four, with one man on shore leave and three on the island. Their time there was still spent mainly attending to the navigational aids, the grounds, and buildings. But now, of course, there were meals to prepare, dishes to wash, laundry to do and quarters to clean. Spare time was spent in various activities, including playing pool in the fog sound signal building.

However, things had changed. Family life had provided a lively diversity not present any longer on Seguin. Contact with surrounding communities diminished as these men's families often lived elsewhere.

On November 15, 1985, the Coast Guard de-manned and decommissioned the light and brought the four men stationed there ashore. The last officer-in-charge was Edward T. Brown.

## **FRIENDS OF SEGUIN ISLAND**

Despite serious efforts by the Coast Guard to find a group to be responsible for the care and upkeep of Seguin Island, no one had stepped forward by 1985. In the spring of 1986, Anne Webster, assisted by her father, Sewall Webster, and friend, Pat Moffatt decided to see if there was local interest to maintain and preserve Seguin Island. The response was overwhelming!

Incorporating in 1986, the much expanded group received a 10 year lease for Seguin from the U. S. Coast Guard on April 11, 1989. A special meeting of the Board was called on April 24, 1989 where Anne Webster, President of Friends of Seguin Island, Inc., signed the lease. This historic event occurred on the 200th anniversary of the Lighthouse Service; Board members present were Nat Chandler, Vice-President; Sewall Webster, Secretary; Barbara Paiement, Treasurer; Hannah Batchelder, Fred Greene, and Jane Stevens.



The minutes of the Board of Directors Meeting of April 10, 1989 stated "Coast Guard License should be in the mail this week, according to Captain Underwood. Friends will proceed as though we have license." Approved in that meeting were matters pertaining to restorations plans, transportation, sewage disposal, capital fund raising, car stickers, and exploration of participation in the Lighthouse Service Bicentennial.

In actuality Friends of Seguin Island had been proceeding as if we had the license for some time. The summer of 1989 was critical for us - to wait another year would mean further deterioration of buildings and another year of Seguin being another abandoned Light Station. The Friends had already received a \$20,000 matching grant from the Maine Historical Preservation Commission funded by the Federal Historic Preservation Fund Lighthouse Grants to begin restoration of the duplex dwelling. Obtaining this grant required expertise and Friends of Seguin Island were professionally assisted on this by George Schnake of Trident Associates, a consultant to the U. S. Lighthouse Preservation Society.

We proceeded so confidently because of one man, Captain Gerald Underwood the Commanding Officer at Coast Guard Group South Portland. Gerry had a particular interest in Light Stations which was immediately apparent when Anne Webster, Nat Chandler, and Sewall Webster met with him. Walking into his office the first time, they noted his blackboard listing the status of each endangered lighthouse in his district. Seguin's status stated "Friends of Seguin Island - lease pending". When they visited Underwood a year later, the updated status board was there. Captain Underwood communicated and kept us informed on the Friend of Seguin Island lease status. His professional assistance was greatly appreciated.

The summer of 1989 was spent renovating in order to ready the island for a caretaker for the summer season of 1990. Caretakers' responsibilities are to maintain the premises and greet visitors from Memorial Day through Labor Day. Our caretakers to date are listed below:

NAMES	SUMMER OF	CONNECTION MADE BY
M. K. Chandler - Allie Jones	1990	Small Point
Paul Wren - Susie Wren	1991	Kennebec Point
Chris Wren - Jenny Parody	1992	Advertising
Chris Wren - Jenny Wren	1993	1992 Caretakers
Elissa Wolfson - Brian Hudgins	1994	Advertising
Mike Murphy - Leslie Anderson	1995	Advertising
Harry & Lawrence Denkers	1996	Advertising
Nick & Staci Bottinelli	1997	Advertising
Mark Eisel & Pat Blakeslee	1998	Advertising
Kim & Nancy	1999	Advertising
Rick & Jen Naugler	2000	Advertising
Jim Woods & Kris Piscatorie	2001	Advertising
Joe Rapinsky & Donna Hyatt	2002	Advertising
Michael Brzoza & Marilyn	2003	Advertising

Lucey		
Barb Pederson & Jeff Lewis	2004	Advertising
Jack & Toby Graham	2005	Advertising
Jack & Rose Spieght	2006	Advertising
Cyndy Carney & Kate Power	2007	Phippsburg

*During the summer of 1993, Susie Wren returned to Seguin to establish a museum which opened August 31, 1993.*

Friends of Seguin Island welcome visitors during the summer season and offer tours of the lighthouse, museum, and freedom to walk and enjoy the marked trails around the island. Hyde School students spend four weeks a year helping clear trails, remove boulders from the beach, clear under the tramway etc.

## THE LIGHTHOUSE KEEPERS

### FIRST AND LAST CIVILIAN KEEPERS

#### MAJOR JOHN POLERECZKY

On March 29, 1796 Major John Polereczky was appointed keeper of the new lighthouse on Seguin. On April 1, 1911 the **Bath Independent** ran an article on Seguin Island's first Keeper. "Who is John Polereczky? He describes himself as "John Ladislas, Count Polereczky, de Polereca, formerly Major of the foreign volunteers of Lauzan, lieutenant for the King, of the town of Rosheim, in Alsatia, born 5th Sept., 1748, resides now in Pownalborough." Rosheim was a little place near Strausborg, France. Polereczky's "family tree", so far as it can be deciphered, indicates that he was of Hungarian or Polish origin. Records show that he came to Pownalborough as early as 1785, in which year he was married to Nancy Pochard, daughter of a Huguenot immigrant of 1752. He was a naturalized citizen of Massachusetts, Nov. 21, 1788. In 1789, and in subsequent years, he was chosen to various town offices. It is possible that he was induced to come to the Kennebec by the circumstances that a colony composed largely of French was already settled in this part of Pownalborough, and most of them still spoke the French language."

In 1794 the west parish of Pownalborough was incorporated as Dresden. At the first meeting of the voters, Polereczky was chosen town clerk, which office he held for two years, or until he moved to Seguin, where he lived for six years. While on Seguin, he described the place as his residence, but he maintained his connection with Dresden. On March 20, 1799, he paid \$47 for pew No. 47 in Rev. Freeman Parker's Congregational Church. After his return from Seguin, he was kept in the office of town clerk for a period of 23 years overall. At his retirement in 1828, Dresden voters gave him \$50 "for past services."

Aside from military training it is reported that his education was limited and his life a continual struggle with the English language. Tradition has it that he was dignified and soldierly, nervous and

irritable, but genial, as well as a fine looking man who was very "Frenchy" in his manners. He was also reported to have been a multi-talented man. About 1798 he, with others, built the schooner "Nancy" to engage in cod fishery, James Gould, master.

Major Polereczky's assistant on Seguin was his wife's brother, Christopher Pushard. Cris, described as "somewhat hairbrained and slightly unruly, would run considerable risk in going to the mainland in a small boat to visit his lady friend.", reports Fred Humiston for the **Portland Sunday Telegram** on April 19, 1964.

The Major pointed out the danger. There was always a ground swell and the seas, even in good weather, were usually high. He protested in vain. Finally to stop the travels, the Major destroyed the unsafe boat. Then Cris started on a rude raft that he had constructed out of driftwood. The nervous Frenchman was anxiously watching Cris' progress through his glass in the tower. As he would rise on the crest of a wave and then sink in a hollow, the Major would mark time with his movements by swaying his body up and down and exclaiming, "Now he goes up! Now he goes down!"

Cris did make it safely to shore, but returned in a boat. He later married his lady friend and brought her to Seguin where their daughter Jane was born. Perhaps out of revenge, when a barrel of rum floated ashore on the island, Christopher secreted it and would often annoy his chief by partaking too freely of the liquid, while the Major was ignorant of the source of supply. Rum was regarded as a necessity in those days.

## CLARENCE SKOLFIELD

Clarence Skolfield, a fifth generation saltwater farmer from Harpswell, entered the U. S. Lighthouse Service in 1936. His first duty station was Seguin Island. His tour of duty saw him through the transition on Seguin from the U. S. Lighthouse Service to the U. S. Coast Guard in 1939. When Clarence left Seguin in 1944, he became noted as the last civilian Keeper on Seguin Island.

Saltwater farming had suffered setbacks due to changes in the habits of eelgrass. As Fred Kahrl reports in his Aug. 14, 1964 article for the **Portland Press Herald**, "Lacking the small sum brought by his fishing, Clarence decided to accept a position as Lightkeeper when it was offered. A merchant mariner in World War I, he had put his name on the list years before on a whim and had given it little thought until money got scarce."

Kahrl continues, "Because his son Thomas was only a year old at the time, Clarence and his wife, Annette, decided it was better that he go alone to Seguin, leaving his family at their old homestead. The other two keepers had their wives on the island to cook and do washing, but Clarence had to fit this work in with his regular duties as Third Assistant Keeper and later, as Second Keeper. Only on a few balmy weekends and during summer vacation did he enjoy the company of his family. Dried beans, corned beef and potatoes were staples in a time when canned goods were still a novelty and refrigeration almost a fantasy. The ocean was a larder that provided lobster and fish to break the monotony but Clarence remembers longing for some fresh meat when long stretches of bad weather cut them off from the mainland."

Clarence remembered his first Thanksgiving on Seguin very vividly. He had arrived just days before and was planning on returning to Popham to pick up supplies and have Thanksgiving dinner with his family. The North Atlantic didn't cooperate and the storm prevented Clarence from making the trip. His Thanksgiving dinner was sardines. Wife and family enjoyed a bountiful dinner at Popham Beach.

Clarence is remembered fondly by many. One of these is Robert Werner who served on Seguin with Clarence from October of 1944 to October of 1945. Robert remembers well the first day he took his family to Seguin Island. In a letter he sent to Friends of Seguin Island Bob said, "It was the end of January and we arrived at Popham Beach in the late afternoon. One of the Coast Guardsmen pointed to the light out in the ocean and told my wife --- there's your new home!

Getting out to the Island with two babies, one 15 months old and the other six weeks, plus all the luggage, baby equipment, etc. was quite an adventure. Rowing out to the motorboat and then transferring everyone and everything from one boat to the other was a feat...repeating the process when we neared the island was another. But the best was yet to come...once we "arrived" we had to take a tram car, powered by a gasoline donkey engine, over a chasm of rock and rushing water, to the top. It had snowed the day before and everything was either white with snow or gray and forbidding. This condition could have been a real downer but then Clarence Skolfield and his wife Annette and son Tommy greeted us and invited us in for coffee to "warm up and get acquainted". That was the first of many, many cups of coffee and a warm friendly relationship. Clarence Skolfield was a good friend and teacher. His lessons will live for a very long time."

Clarence's son Tom told colorful stories recalling memories of his father's tour of duty on Seguin when speaking at a Friends of Seguin Island program in the fall of 1992. Tom stated his father knew the waters around Seguin better than anyone, but remembers most clearly the day he and his father were coming in from fishing and a wave broke where it wasn't suppose to break and flipped the boat end over end, throwing both in the water. Tom said he was knocked out and when he came to his father was thumping him hard on the bottom of the overturned boat. He later discovered he had a very close call. When his father came to the surface, he saw Tom floating about ten feet from the boat. Clarence swam to Tom and brought him back to the boat unconscious. He managed to get Tom hoisted over the keel and began pounding Tom against the bottom of the boat to get the water out of his lungs. It took three attempts in rough seas before Tom regained consciousness. Their dog who was with them didn't make it.

Another of Tom's stories, which his sister Lorraine Lowell doesn't remember as vividly is when Keeper Urquart had a very mean bull. According to Tom the bull liked to chase his sister, even up to the porch of the house. Clarence spoke to Urquart about this matter, but he didn't seem to believe Clarence or else chose to ignore what he was saying. One day when Clarence was finishing his duties he returned to his quarters to find Lorraine cornered on the porch by the bull. He went into the house by the kitchen door and came out the front with a shotgun. Tom related that his father shot off the gun next the bulls head once and that the bull just shook his head. The bull didn't move so Clarence fired again. This time he was successful and the bull took off for the north end of the island not returning for weeks. The ornery bull never bothered Lorraine again.

While the Skolfield's were on Seguin it is clear they had developed a strong fondness for this striking island despite privations modern lighthouse keepers might find frightening. They made the best use of what they had, fulfilled their duties with diligence, and exemplified the best of a lighthouse keeper and his family.

## HISTORY OF MANNING OF LIGHTHOUSES

The manning of lighthouses has been under several government entities. Congress, by the act of August 7, 1789, authorized the maintenance of lighthouses and other aids to navigation at the expense of the United States. This established the Lighthouse Service of the United States, which was supported entirely by revenues of the Government and was free to vessels of all nations from 1789 to the present. There was no system of light dues, as was the case in a number of foreign maritime countries.

According to the "**United States Lighthouse Service - 1915**", the maintenance of lighthouses, buoys, etc. was placed under the Treasury Department and up to 1820 was directed personally by the Secretary of the Treasury. In 1820 the supervision was transferred to Auditor of the Treasury, who was popularly known as the General Superintendent of Lights. He remained in charge until 1852, when the United States Lighthouse Board was organized. The Board, with the Secretary of the Treasury as ex officio president, consisted of Naval officers, Army officers, and civilians.

The Lighthouse Service was transferred to the Department of Commerce on July 1, 1903. On July 1, 1910, the Lighthouse Board was terminated and the Lighthouse Bureau was established. On July 7, 1939, the maintenance of the lighthouses, buoys etc. was transferred to the U. S. Coast Guard, Department of Transportation.

## SEGUIN ISLAND LIGHTHOUSE KEEPERS

**1776 - 1926**

The following list is compiled from two governmental sources of record: The Department of Commerce, "**Bureau of Lighthouses 1776 - 1927**" and the National Archives Microfilm Publication "**Register of Lighthouse Keepers 1845 - 1912**".

NAME	KEEPER	ASST. KEEP	DATE
John Polereczky	X		1786-1802
Christopher Pushard		X	1786-1802
Moses Haskell	X		1802-1822
Jonathan Delano	X		1822-1825

Capt. John Salters	X			1825-1839
Nathaniel Todd	X			1839-1849
James Marston	X			1849-1853
A. E. Osgood	X			1853-1857
Boyd L. Miles		Removed	X	1855-1855
Joseph King		Resigned	X	1855
Stephen Marson, Jr.	X	Removed		1857-1857
Daniel Dodge		Resigned	X	1857-1857
John C. Lowell	X	Deceased		1857-1859
Granville Lowell	X			1859-1861
Tallman B. Lowell		Resigned	X	1859-1860
William M. Knight		Removed	X	1860-1861
Zina H. Spinney	X	Resigned		1861-1866
P. O. Spinney		Resigned	X	1861-1865
David Spinney 2nd		Resigned	X	1861-1863
David Spinney		Deceased	X	1863-1865
Rachel Spinney		Resigned	X	1865-1866
William S. Oliver		Resigned	X	1865-1866
Francis L. Morrill	X	Removed		1866-1868
William C. Marr		Resigned	X	1866-1866
Ephraim S. Marr		Resigned	X	1866-1866
Henry E. Morrill		Resigned	X	1866-1867
Charles S. Morrill		Deserted	X	1866-1867
Mrs. Jane Morrill		Removed	X	1867-1869
Arthur Hutchins		Removed	X	1867-1869
Samuel G. Crane	X	Resigned		1868-1875
J. B. Crane		Resigned		1868-1874
O. B. Crane		Resigned	X	1868-1871
Mrs. Louisa N. Lane		Resigned	X	1871-1872
Turner Jewett		Resigned	X	1872
Elisha B. Crane		Resigned	X	1874-1875
Ephraim Marr		Resigned	X	1874-1875
Thomas Day	X	Acting		1875-1876
Thomas Day	X	Resigned		1876-1886
Henry Day		Promoted	X	1875-1876
Thomas H. Bibber		Transfer	X	1876-1880
Willis E. Chase		Resigned	X	1875
Henry Wiley		Transfer	X	1881-1882
Samuel Cavanor		Transfer	X	1882-1883
Fernando Wallace		Transfer	X	1883-1886
Edwin M. Wyman		Transfer	X	1886-1889
Henry Day	X	Acting		1886-1887
Henry Day	X	Resigned		1886-1890
Henry M. Clark		Resigned	X	1887-1887

William H. Wyman		Transfer	X	1888-1889
Jesse Pierce		Resigned	X	1889-1889
Merritt P. Pinkham		Promoted		1889-1890
Jacob W. Haley		Transfer	X	1890-1898
Merritt P. Pinkham	X	Transfer		1890-1898
Parker O. Healey		Transfer	X	1890-1893
Herbert L. Spinney		Promoted	X	1893-1898
George A. Lewis	X			1898-1903
William A. Stetson			X	1898
Herbert L. Spinney	X			1903-1907
Fred H. Hodgkins			X	1903
George A. Lewis	X			1907-1912
Walter S. Adams			X	1907-1908
Clifford B. Staples			X	1908-1912
Henry M. Cuskley	X			1912-1915
Maurice M. Weaver	X			1915-1922
Napolean B. Fickett	X			1922-1926

Note<sup>1</sup> The Federal Register notes that in 1800 John Holloway was the individual on Seguin when the census was taken. Whether he was an official keeper is unclear as Keeper Polereczky is rumored to have paid him out of his own pocket and without governmental knowledge in order not have to spend another winter on Seguin.

Note<sup>2</sup> Non-governmental sources indicate that both Llewellyn Oliver and Orlando Pye who were stationed at Popham were Relief Keepers for Seguin in 1916.

Note<sup>3</sup> Family history reports Nathaniel Springer Todd of Georgetown, who served as a keeper from 1839 to 1849, watched the battle of the Enterprise and the Boxer from Seguin during the War of 1812. He may have served as an Assistant Keeper at that time.

## SEGUIN ISLAND LIGHTHOUSE KEEPERS

1926 - 1985

The following was compiled from several sources: official documents, personal documents, newspaper reports, and many personal reports. If one date is listed in the middle, it is known that the individual served on Seguin within a year of that time.

NAME	KEEPER	ASST KEEPER	DATE
Elson Leroy Small	X		1926 - 1930
Frank E. Bracey		X	1926 - 1930
Frank E. Bracey	X		1930 - 1936
Clinton Dalzell		X	1933
Maxwell H. Urquart	X		1936 - 1938

Clarence Skolfield		X	1936 - 1944
Mr. Hill		X	1936
Joseph Conners, Sr.		X	1937
K. F. Witty		X	1937
Maxwell A. DeShon		X	1937 - 1939
Alton Cheney	X		1939 -
Archie McLaughlin		X	1944 - 1945
Robert J. Werner		X	1944 - 1945
Clarence Skolfield	X		1944 - 1946
Irving Dobbins		X	1944 - 1944
Alonzo Morong	X		1946 - 1948
Clyde Whittaker		X	1948 - 1951
Edgar M. Wallace	X		1949 - 1950
Harry L. Cressey		X	1949 - 1952
Daniel Irving		X	1949 - 1950
Harvey C. Lamson	X		1951 - 1952
Harry L. Cressey	X		1952 - 1954
Horace Smith		X	1953
Douglas R. Cameron		X	1953 - 1953
Francis Manzie		X	1953
Mac McKinley	X		1955
Charles A. Hart, Jr.		X	1955 - 1957
George F. Barnes		X	1955
Marshall Wetherall		X	1955
Mr. Farrington	X		1957
John Johnson		X	1957
James R. Wilson	X		1961 - 1963
Kenneth J. Dukes		X	1961 - 1963
George F. Johns		X	1962 -
William B. O'Neill	X		1963 -
Timothy Flaherty		X	1963
Henry Le Blanc		X	1963 - 1963
Robert Bly	X		1964 - 1965
Elwynne Kenny		X	1964 - 1965
Robert Grindall		X	1966
Fred Kahrl		X	1966 - 1967
Hank Lipian	X		1976
Oreta Bridgeman		X	1976
Edward T. Brown	X		1983 - 1985



## HISTORICAL NOTES AND ANECDOTES

### BATTLE OF THE BOXER AND THE ENTERPRISE

The following is reported by Mr. & Mrs. Stanwood Gilman in their book "**LAND OF THE KENNEBEC**" describing the erroneous battle during the War of 1812.

"The American ship Marguerite, bringing needed goods from Canada, hired the British Captain Blythe of the H.M.S. Boxer for one hundred pounds, or about \$500, to escort her to the Kennebec and protect her from privateers. Near the mouth of the Kennebec, Capt. Blythe fired a couple of shots to make things look well, and it appeared that all would go off as planned.

But Capt. Burroughs of the U. S. brig Enterprise in Portland heard the shots and hurried over, squaring for battle. Here, off Seguin, the famous sea battle between the Boxer and the Enterprise took place. Both young captains were killed, and the Enterprise won the victory.

Longfellow chronicles this battle in a poem:

I remember the seafight far away:

How it thundered o'er the tide;

And the dead captains, as they lay

In the graves o'erlooking the tranquil bay

Where they in battle died."

NOTE: The captains were buried side-by side in Portland.

### PROVISIONS INTO THE DRINK

Thomas Day, Brunswick, was Keeper on Seguin Island from 1875 to 1886 and a report on him was in the **American Sentinel**, July 8, 1880. "Boat Sunk - Mr. Day, the keeper at Seguin Light, met with an accident on the river Monday. He was taking his month's provisions down to the island from the city, alone in his boat. He had gotten down the river as far as Phippsburg Center, when he went forward to adjust his sail, probably to take a reef, as the wind was blowing hard. As soon as he left the tiller, the boat swung around and a heavy wind laid her over so that she filled and sank in an instant, leaving Mr. Day in the water. He had barely time to clear himself from the rigging as she went down. Being a good swimmer he struck out for the nearest land, an island in midstream, something like 200 feet distant, which he succeeded in reaching, although completely exhausted. He crawled upon the shore and shortly after was taken off by Mr. Alonzo Ring, who came along in a boat. A barrel of flour was the only thing saved from about \$40 worth of goods."

## SEA SERPENT SPOTTED

In July 1875, the **American Sentinel** reported a captain and his one man crew spotted a sea serpent. The monster came up to their boat and put its head over the rail. The head was the size of a hogshead. On orders of the captain the crewman struck it with his pike and the serpent went back into the water. The captain returned to port and showed the spear with the detritus still on it!! He claimed the serpent was 130 feet long!!

Later the **American Sentinel** carried another article on July 20, 1875: "The Steamer City of Portland, from St. John to Portland, reports that when off Seguin Wednesday afternoon she passed the sea-serpent within thirty feet. The monster was lazily floating along on the water when sighted, occasionally lifting its head to look around, and appeared to be making itself at home in that vicinity. Probably he was engaged in a "coast survey."

## A STUDENT'S VIEW IN THE LATE 1800'S

The following essay was written by Charles V. Minott of Phippsburg for his English Composition Class at the Coburn Classical Institute in Waterville, Maine, October 8, 1884. This was provided by his daughter, Ada Minott Haggett who stated her father had not paragraphed the essay, so she did it for him!

### "A VISIT TO SEGUIN LIGHTHOUSE"

As there was an excursion going to Seguin Island, quite a number of persons among them myself took this opportunity of visiting Seguin. We started off about two o'clock in the afternoon and had a very pleasant sail until we got to Pond Island; from here to Seguin it was quite rough.

We soon reached Seguin and came to anchor a short distance from the island. It is such a rough place when stormy that no wharf can be built, so we had to land in a small boat.

We next found ourselves at the foot of a steep hill on top of which was the lighthouse. There is a road up the hill which they have to haul up stores and coal for the steam whistle. Nearly all of us walked up to the entrance of the lighthouse and started to go in, but the Keeper informed us that only four would be allowed to go up at a time. He then selected four and showed the rest of us a card with the rules of the establishment.

At last my turn came. With three others I went up the winding stairs and, after going for what seemed a very long time, we reached the room where the light is.

All around here it is glass and you can look all around. the view was very pretty.

As the day was very warm being in July, come to get up in this room it is about as hot a place as I wished to be in. The light is lit at sunset every night and one of the Keepers, there being three of them, watches it for four hours and then another takes his place. The kind of oil used is lard oil which is supplied to them by a supply steamer which comes along once a year. They use about eight hundred and fifty gallons a year.

After coming out of the lighthouse we went into a building where the steam fog whistle is. There are two of these whistles, so if one gives out the other can take its place. It blows at intervals of fifty-six seconds and can be heard ten miles or more. We then walked around the island a little while and returned to the boat and were soon on our way back. The sail back was better than when we came and we reached our landing a little past four o'clock well pleased with our trip.

Seguin is situated at the mouth of the Kennebec River and is a very dangerous place.

## MARITIME MISHAPS

In the **Bath Enterprise**, December 5, 1890, the following article appeared. "Early Thursday morning the life saving crew at Pophan Beach discovered a vessel ashore on Seguin Ledges. With the aid of a marine glass a man was seen on the vessel. The lifeboat was quickly launched in a very heavy sea. Capt. Haley and his men made every effort to reach the stranded schooner, but this they were unable to do owing to the strong easterly wind and big seas rolling in. They got as far as Stage Island. From there they could see the man on the wreck. About 11 o'clock the tug Seguin, Capt. Chaney, with a vessel in tow from this port, in passing Stage Island saw the lifeboat. Capt. Chaney kept on his course and soon discovered a vessel on Seguin Ledges and seeing a man on it he cast off the hawser of the vessel he had in tow and put back to Stage Island and took the lifeboat in tow. At that time the man could still be seen on the wreck, but soon he was seen to disappear having been washed into the foaming sea.

The schooner proved to have been the Gondola, a British vessel, bound from Boston for Two Rivers, Nova Scotia, and in command of Capt. Martin of East Boston, who was the man seen by the lifeboat crew and Capt. Chaney of the tug. The crew of the Gondola with the exception of the captain, who refused to leave his vessel, were picked up, about 4 o'clock Thursday morning, by the schooner Louise Hastings, Capt. Kent, bound from Bangor to New York, and landed at Boothbay Harbor. The vessel was a total loss." The paper's Bay Point correspondent said later in the article "Help could not reach them from Seguin and surely the lifeboat could never reach them from the beach."

Shipping accidents were not uncommon in the heavily trafficked area around Seguin and the mouth of the Kennebec. An earlier report from the American Sentinel on October 8, 1875 comments, "The

schooner J. G. Crague of Portland was run into on her port side, Saturday night off Seguin by a large coaster, having her rail, stanchions and main boom broken besides other damages. She went into Boothbay for repairs."

Friends of Seguin Island received a letter in 1990 from Edwin Merry who wrote, "This morning I have just walked out to the family cemetery, some 1/4 mile from my home to read the date on my grandfather's stone; Cap't. Bradford Merry who was washed overboard from the deck of his coaster and drowned "off Seguin" in the year 1883. I had hoped that the cold stone might have told me the exact month-- if not the day-- of this tragedy. No month's name was entered on the stone. The name of my grandfather's vessel was the Niger, said with a long "i" sound. I remember my own father always calling the ship this way: "the old Niger."

I do know that bricks were made right here in our own brick yard; the hollow where they got the clay for making the bricks is right here just below my house. The hollow will always be here. My hardworking grandsire had got to own his ship, and I presume she was coming home light from Boston or Philly and encountered rough weather "off Seguin". A wave took the Captain off her deck and drowned him in his 49th year of life.

Maxine DeShon Chamberlain whose father was an Asst. Keeper from 1938 - 1939 wrote in her story about her memories on Seguin Island: "The last part of my story is very sad. A tragedy happened that I will never be able to forget. One weekend Royal Cheney who was 21 years old disappeared from his lobster boat and was never found. He had invited some friends out to Seguin for a visit and he wanted to get some lobsters for them. It was not a good day for pulling traps or much else for that matter. It was very rough, we didn't know that he had gone out until my dad saw his boat, "Royal's Boat", flip flopping around like it was out of control.

My dad called the Coast Guard and alerted them. Dad said he would go out to Royal's boat as he didn't want Mr. Chaney to go. We were so scared it was so rough, dad's boat would go way and down and it seemed forever before it came up again. It took a good half hour before my dad could get aboard Royal's boat and when he did Royal was gone. No one knows what happened to Royal. They thought he might of got caught in the ropes on the traps, but they hauled all the traps and found nothing. The Coast Guard dragged for his body and searched for days to see if they could find it, but they never did.

Royal's mom went into shock and we had to keep an eye on her all summer. she would go down to the shore and call for Royal. It was so sad. We were afraid she would fall off the rocks. the rest of the summer was very quiet, we tried to keep each other cheered up, but it didn't help any."

These are facts. I thought you might like to know about this incident which took place "off Seguin" one hundred and seven years ago. I wish I knew the month of the tragedy, but I do not."

It is interesting relatively few reports have been discovered on shipping mishaps around Seguin and those noted seem to have encountered the ledges surrounding Seguin, another vessel, or a shipboard accident. No vessel seems to have struck Seguin directly, which we can only view as a tribute to those who diligently manned the Seguin Island Light Station.

## SETTING THE CLOCK BY SEGUIN LIGHT

Olive F. Going writes in 1991: "My mother Julia Davis Williams, who is now 97 years, recalls that as a young child she lived on the lower end of Seguinland (Georgetown). Her home was located just north of where the toll booth at the entrance to Reid State Park is located. During the late 1890's there had been a forest fire between their home and the ocean and they could see Seguin Light from their second floor hallway. Whenever their clock would stop, her mother, Christina Davis, would have the children watch for the light to come on at Seguin and by using the almanac she would know the time of sunset and could set her clock. This would have been sometime around 1898 and 1902 when there were no radios or telephones to check the time."

*Note: Julia Davis Williams lived to be 102 and saw many changes in her life.*

## GUNNING ON SEGUIN

All families on Seguin used the natural resources to augment their existence on this hard island. In addition to family farms and fishing, gunning provided game for the kitchen table. Not only did the families make use of the birds around the island, but so did others.

The **Bath Daily Times**, October 18, 1923 reports: "Ralph Small is going to Seguin the last of the week to inspect the fine radio set which Small brothers installed there during the Summer and to see that it is in first-class condition for the rough weather which will be experienced during the Winter. While down there he is planning to get in a day of gunning."

## CARING FOR THE LENS COVER

Connie Small, wife of Elson Small (Keeper 1926 - 1930), wrote the following in her book "**THE LIGHTHOUSE KEEPER'S WIFE**".

"The light at Seguin was one of the most powerful lights on the coast. Twelve feet high and six feet in diameter, the Fresnel lens was large enough for the men to go inside it to light the lamp. Like the whole station, the tower was immaculate. The lens cover of linen, twelve feet long with four sections about six feet wide, had a drawstring at the top of the lens. The cover came down over the lens and fastened at the bottom with another drawstring. It was necessary to use a ladder to reach the top to fasten and drop the cover. I washed and ironed that cover by hand with a tub and tub board and irons that heated on the stove. I was lucky to have a set of irons with a nickel cover that went over each iron and snapped into holes on the sides with two pins. They were quite an improvement over the old flatirons whose handles were so hot a holder had to be used to protect my hands. Still it was a struggle to iron this linen fabric, so long and wide and difficult to get free of wrinkles, which scorched and yellowed so easily. Elson wanted the lens cover just so, but then, having everything in perfect shape was one of the main duties of keeping a light."

## CAPTAIN KIDD'S GOLD

**Hunting For Kidd's Gold** was a caption in the title of a **Bath Independent** article on July 4, 1896. Excerpts follow:

"There still prevails on the coast of Maine a strong belief that there are many treasures, large boxes of gold and silver buried by the notorious pirate Kidd on every island, in every indentation and in every solitary grove.

Dreams have much to do with revealing the long lost treasures and I have seen many a hole that a credulous fisherman had dug, every moment hoping to strike the rusty iron box buried by Capt. Kidd in the old piratical days."

"Belief in Capt. Kidd's money is fading away. As people learn to reason more accurately, they see that Kidd and other piratical captains sailed the high seas in times when money was scarce, when gold and silver were little mined and comparatively a small amount coined; therefore people would begin to see that it would be impossible that every cove, island and point should be well stored with gold, the booty of pirates upon the high seas."

Seguin Island was long speculated to be the final resting place of both Captain Kidd's and Anne Bonney's booty. Rumors they deposited treasure on Seguin while eluding authorities in the waters of Casco Bay continued well into the 20th century. In 1936, to dispel these rumors, the Bureau of Lighthouses granted Archie Lane an exclusive permit to dig on Seguin for a one year period.

Reports have it that Lane started digging all over the island in a vigorous manner. However, after nine months and no results, Archie Lane abandoned his search. It seems that Lane had not "learned to reason accurately".

## A DAUGHTER'S INTRODUCTION TO SEGUIN

Maxine DeShon Chamberlain in her Seguin Island story remembers her first summer visit to Seguin in 1938: "After meeting the other families, dad took us up into the Lighthouse. It was fun going up the spiral staircase. My dad told us that it was called a Vapor Light, it had a mantle on it. Something like the mantle on the lamp we used at night. It was run by kerosene. The tank that had the kerosene in it had a pump on it. My dad would pump it up to about 50 or 60 pounds pressure, then he would light the fuel with a torch heating it up to form a vapor for the mantle which produced the light. My sister and I were really learning a lot from dad. Then dad took us in the Signal House where the fog horn was situated, and told us all about that. In back of the Signal House was a huge bell that was used in case the foghorn broke down."

## WILD RIDE DOWN THE TRAMWAY

The **Bath Daily Times** reported on September 24, 1949 the following: "**Woman Injured in Wild Ride Down Tramway at Seguin Mrs. Joyce Irvine Receives Broken Hip - Tosses Baby to Safety - Husband Jumps With Other Child.**"

Mrs. Joyce Irvine, 20, wife of Daniel Irvine, BM 3/c, assistant keeper at Seguin Island light, received severe injuries Friday afternoon as the result of a terrifying plunge on an uncontrolled flat car down a 750 tramway running from the highest point on the island to the shore. She was thrown clear of the car when it struck the bumper at the end of the runway. An 18-month old daughter Millie, was tossed to safety onto a grass plot at about a quarter of the way down the steep incline, by Mrs. Irvine, while Mr. Irvine and their two-year old son Daniel Jr., jumped from the car, seconds after it started its descent and were uninjured.

The Irvine family had just returned to the island after shore liberty. The tramway which consists of two iron rails mounted on a trestle, similar to a railroad track, carries a flat car about four feet wide by six feet long, from the shore to the base of the lighthouse, 145 feet above the shore and 750 feet away. The car is pulled to the top by a steel cable operated by a gasoline motor on the shore. It is used for the transfer of supplies to the top of the hill and also is frequently used for transportation by the keeper's and their families.

Mr. and Mrs. Irvine, with their children and a small white puppy got into the car as usual and made the ascent to the top of the hill without incident. As it stopped at the peak, Mr. Irvine noticed that the car did not slack back as usual, but immediately started back down the slope. With Daniel Jr., in his arms, he jumped to the ground. With the car gaining speed rapidly, Mrs. Irvine was unable to get free. At a point about one-fourth way down the trestle passes over a grass plot only about three feet below the track. Here Mrs. Irvine had the presence of mind and in response to shouts from her husband, tossed 18-months-old Millie to the soft ground.

The car continued its wild plunge with only Mrs. Irvine and the dog as passengers. About 250 feet from the base of the tramway the wheels of the car left the track and the car slewed sideways but did not leave the trestle. The wheels dragging over the track ties had a tendency to slow the runaway car to quite an extent, but it still was traveling at a rapid speed when it hit the bumper at the end of the track and Mrs. Irvine was thrown clear of the car. The dog was killed instantly.

CBM Henry E. Leonard USCG, commanding the Kennebec river lifeboat station at Popham, who investigated the accident, said he "didn't know how Mrs. Irvine got out of it alive" and that the whole thing came near being a complete family tragedy. He credits the car jumping the track and slowing down with saving the woman's life. She was found, he said, sitting on the runway, leaning against the car. A coast guardsman who saw the accident from a work boat lying off the island, said Mrs. Irvine was thrown into the air when the car came to a stop.

The work boat took the injured woman to the Kennebec station where she was put ashore in a dingy and taken to Bath Memorial Hospital where officials said she had suffered a broken left thigh and was badly cut and bruised. Saturday morning it was reported that she was suffering considerable pain but her condition was not considered dangerous.

Irvine was formerly stationed at the South Portland Coast Guard depot. He was transferred to the Kennebec river station and on July 7 was assigned to duty at Seguin Island.

At Seguin in addition to the Irvines are Head Keeper CBM Edgar M. Wallace and Mrs. Wallace and Harry L. Cressey SM, and Mrs. Cressey. The dog that was killed belonged to Mr. and Mrs. Cressey."

### REMEMBRANCES BY THE CAMERONS (1953)

From Douglas and Barbara Cameron: "My wife and I were stationed on Seguin in 1953 after a tour of duty on Pond Island off Popham. At that time the main light in the tower was illuminated by kerosene and we had kerosene stoves in the kitchen and heated with coal furnaces. Three couples were assigned to the light, two couples lived in the brick house and one family in the single house near the fog signal. Seguin was a lonely, peaceful, beautiful and challenging place to live and we look back on that time with nostalgia. We are saddened to see the light closed and empty and glad the Friends of Seguin have taken an interest in preserving it for the future."

Barbara relates the following as an experience which stands out clearly in her mind:

"It was a dark and stormy night in late 1953. The Officer in Charge of Seguin Island Light Station, Harry Cressey, and his family were ashore. Only the three of us were there - the third keeper snug in his home down by the whistle house and second keeper, Doug Cameron and wife in the big brick duplex. With the tower light trying vainly to shine a warning, the horn blowing regularly, the wind howling and the surf thundering on the ledges below, it was not a night for anyone to be on the water, but they were.

Three men from Old Town had been to the Portland area to pick up an older Novie boat they had just bought and now were headed Down East and home when the storm struck. They decided to veer off course and run up the Kennebec in order to find a lee. It was rougher water than they ever expected. Off the northern end of Pond Island the keel of the boat simply opened up. One of the men could not swim.

They grabbed the life preservers, put them on and tied themselves together. In the water now and the boat gone from under them, they hoped they could grab the gong buoy off Pond Island. They were swept past it. Seguin was all that stood between them and the open ocean. The idea was to try to get ashore there, so they waited for the roar of the surf on the rocks and the barely-heard sound of the horn. When they got near, the best swimmer was sent into the surf sound with the line payed out between him and the other two. A giant wave tossed him



onto the rocks and he tried without success to get the line wedged into a crevasse. A second try worked and he managed to pull his companions in. They climbed above the ledges and rested still far below the station atop the island.

Doug had gone down to the Whistle House to check the air compressors running the horn. When he returned coming in the kitchen door, he said to me, "We have company." I smiled and said, "Oh sure! On a night like this!" There behind him stood a man clad only in his shorts and the ankle parts of his socks. Doug had found the three men collapsed in the warmth of the Whistle House. Later the other two came up to the house where we fed and clothed them and gave them a place to sleep. They were concerned that their families would be worried, but our phone was out so it was a while before they could call. In about three days when the sea had calmed, the Coast Guard boat came out from Popham Beach and picked them up. One wonders what would happen in this situation now with unattended Light Stations."

## **SEGUIN LIVING IN THE EARLY 1950'S**

Sarah Bridges, daughter of Horace Smith, Asst. Keeper in 1953, remembers many details about the finer points of living on Seguin. The washing machine was a Maytag with a gas pedal; the refrigerator and lights were powered by kerosene; and while they had generators for the hot water, she stated they weren't large enough to have a complete bath. She remembers dug wells and plenty of water. The light itself (the I.O.V. light) was a gas light which had to be pumped up to vaporize the gas before it would light. Sarah also remembers vividly the colors of the various rooms in the house. Regulations dictated the colors of the rooms: kitchen - white, dining room - orange, living room - green, hallways - yellow, and believes that the bedrooms were green.

Note: IOV or Injected Oil Vapor lamp on Seguin was a type 2 at this time.

## **ARRIVAL OF GENERATORS**

Dorothy Hart lived on Seguin when her husband, Charles A. Hart, jr., served there from 1955 to 1957. She tells that they were present for the landing of generators, a major event which was the end of the kerosene era. Dorothy also relates that she had a ruptured appendix on Seguin and had to be taken off by a Navy helicopter to Brighton Marine Hospital, as the Coast Guard didn't have a helicopter then.

## **FIRST ORDER FRESNEL LENS IS SAVED**

In 1985, when the Coast Guard was in the process of demanding operations at Seguin, Pat Moffatt (one of the founders of Friends of Seguin Island) found the Coast Guard planning the disassembly

of the First Order Fresnel Lens. "This is an Aid to Navigation and you need an Act of Congress to dismantle it," the Bay Point lobsterman said. The Coast Guard checked with their superiors and found Moffatt correct. There are few First Order Lens currently in operation and estimates of replacement range up to 8 million dollars. Thanks to Moffatt the Seguin lens is still in service.

## GHOSTS ON SEGUIN?

Ghosts are a part of American folklore or are they more? William O. Thompson certainly thinks they are more than just stories. The ghosts of Seguin Island are some he has researched quite thoroughly and the following are excerpts from articles he wrote in the June and September issues of **The Lighthouse Digest**.

"Folklore and legend tell a reported suicide and murder on the island (Seguin) in the mid 1800's. Supposedly a keeper killed his wife and himself. The death was extremely violent as an ax had been used to destroy both him and his mate. The suicide murder had taken place because it seems his wife played the same tune on a piano, over and over, sometimes for hours without a break. The poor captain's normal everyday pace went haywire. His sanity turned to insanity as his fine tuning snapped. He destroyed the piano, his wife and himself with his ax. It has been reported by passing ships that on quiet nights the same monotonous tune can be heard trickling over the still waves. Does he or his wife still roam the island? "

"The keepers I have talked to have also sighted a young girl running up and down the stairs. She has waved to the men on several occasions and some have heard her laughter. It has been reported that a young girl died on the island and her parents buried her near the generator house. "

The sites of most reports occurred in the house, light tower, or around the fog sound signal building. The sounds and sightings reported generally indicated ghosts who are comfortably making themselves at home. Sometimes they seemed to be a bit mischievous; moving and replacing tools, taking pea jackets off hooks and dropping them on the floor, or rearranging furniture.

However, it appeared that one or more of the reported ghosts didn't like the idea of the Coast Guard leaving the island in 1985. William Thompson mentions a memorable experience for the warrant officer in charge of the automation.

"All items in the house were being packed for shipment to the mainland. The work crew had retired for the evening and everyone was in bed asleep when the warrant officer was awakened by the shaking of his bed. The apparition in his oil skins was standing at the end of the bed shouting in pathetic tones 'Don't take the furniture, please leave my home alone.' The warrant officer, obviously scared half to death, bolted from his bed and ran to the next room.

It is reported the next day furniture items were loaded in the dory. The engines were started to slowly lower the boat down the skids into the water. Suddenly the engine stopped, the chain holding the dory broke and the loaded boat sped into the ocean and sank with all furniture lost. An almost impossible event taking place in very strange circumstances or something else? Who can be sure?

Lt. Peter Ganzer, Group South Portland Coast Guard Station stated after the men were removed from Seguin, the station's ghost would probably stay to keep an eye on things. In the three years he had been assigned to South Portland Coast Guard Group, he had heard officers tell stories of hearing doors open and close, piano music when there was no piano and someone coughing when all the men were in the same room and none had a cold.

## FLORA AND FAUNA

Much has changed on Seguin since the first keeper, Major Polereczky, took up residence on the island. At that time it was heavily wooded, but the woods were cleared to provide firewood and to make way for gardens and pastures. With the removal of the woods, many summer nesting birds found more conducive homes ashore. Keepers and their families brought plants and seeds from the mainland to grow in their gardens, introducing plant life not indigenous to Seguin. The waters around the island were abundant with fish and lobsters, now significantly depleted as are the rest of the coastal waters. Farm animals and pets were introduced, but today none remain.

### BIRDS ON SEGUIN

Jean Frank, Merrymeeting Audubon Society, capsulates Seguin's birdlife in the following article. Modern ornithology identifies named bird species with capital letters and bold print to contrast between old terms for birds and current. Sources used were Philmore B. Wass (**LIGHTHOUSE IN MY LIFE**), Connie Small (**THE LIGHTHOUSE KEEPER'S WIFE**), Griffin and Faulkner's (**COMING OF AGE ON DAMARISCOVE ISLAND, MAINE**), and excerpts from a talk by Captain Herbert L. Spinney recorded by the **Bath Independent**, April 20, 1922.

Accounts and reminiscences by lighthouse families along the coast tell that birdlife figured in their solitary lives. Many of the men hunted to supplement limited food supplies, observing that two "sea ducks" (**Eiders**) made an excellent meal for a family. Other species hunted were **Brant**, **Mallard**, and "sheldrakes," although the meat of these **Mergansers** was oily. One writer said that his mother soaked them overnight in soda solution to counteract the taste. Favorite wild duck quarry were "whistlers" (**Goldeneye**), **Oldsquaw**, "coots" (**White-winged**, **Black** and **Surf Scoters**) and **Black Ducks**, the latter relished for holiday dinners.

Philmore B. Wass described his boyhood hunting with a crude crossbow, and tells of inheriting, at age 7, an air rifle. At age 12 he shot more than twenty "water witches" (Grebes) and said that even Sandpipers were considered game as long as they were eaten. He comments that many lighthouse keepers hunted throughout the year, disregarding game laws,....be lieving that "a higher law gave the right to hunt for the table." Wild provender was not wasted in solitary lighthouse life. Bed ticking and pillows were stuffed with bird feathers, and gull eggs were often used in cooking.

The keepers and their families noted the seasonal migration of birds. Lighthouses were hazards then to birds, even as they are today. Captain Herbert L. spinney gave a graphic account of the magnetism of Seguin's bright beacon.

It was the light that drew many of the birds....t hey usually moved on dark nights when the air was still....Comparatively few were killed by striking the plate glass about the light directly, but many,

seeing the light, flew in an arc upward, hitting the top of the light, they could not see. Many were killed this way, and the next morning....500 or more lay at the base of the light and many more at a greater distance.

Usually these were common varieties of warblers and finches, with a few rare birds seldom seen in this locality....Some were only wounded and a few were kept as pets. One a cat ate. Another, a red (**Rose-breasted**) **Gros beak** lived for about 6 years in a cage, seeming contented.

He commented on the hazards of storms, particularly northwesterers.

As soon as the calm followed a northwester...a few birds came struggling to reach the island. Some of them were too exhausted to reach the shore and fell into the water, rising again and struggling on or dying there.... Others fell at the surf line and were washed back into the ocean by one wave, only to be caught up and hurled to safety by the next....At such times there were thousands of birds on the island resting before resuming their journey....Following them were a lot of hawks, sometimes 100 at a time.

Captain Spinney mentioned the "butcher bird" (**Shrike**) and the **Snowy Owl** that visited the island about once in five years. Interestingly, current research bears out his estimate. He also observed Purple Sandpipers along Seguin ledges.

Few specific species lists for Seguin can be found. Connie Small, recalling her lighthouse years, mentions "thistle birds" (**Goldfinches**), **Baltimore Orioles**, and **Red-winged Blackbirds** as lighthouse collision victims. Wass comments on the presence of **Snowbuntings** (perhaps **Redpolls**) in winters of his childhood. Alberta Poole Rowe recalls **Plovers**, **Curlews**, **Sandpipers**, "sea gulls" (**Herring Gulls**), and medricks (any of the small gulls) being numerous during her years growing up on Damariscove, as well as **Kingbirds**, **Barn Swallows**, and **Chimney Swifts**. Surely these species also populated Seguin, only a short distance away.

Heavily wooded when the light station was established, certainly Seguin had the same summer nesting warblers, thrushes and flycatchers that inhabit the wooded fringes of Georgetown and Phippsburg today. As the wood was cut, a dense scrub replaced the early forest, and now one finds nesting **Sparrows**, **Blackbirds**, **Doves**, **Mockingbirds**, and other passerines that can make a living on seeds, berries, and insects that abound in the shrub vegetation. In winter surely the same occasional **Snowy Owl** that hunts the Sugarloaves or rests on Outer Head at Reid Park also hunts the wintery haunts of Seguin. And plying the water that rim the solitary island in appropriate season are **Guillemots**, **Cormorants**, **Eiders**, **Osprey**, **Terns** and **Gulls** like those that have lived there since man came to observe them. The island's birdlife is little changed, except for fewer numbers of birds due to widespread pollution and habitat loss.

## ANIMALS AND REPTILES

Currently the only regular inhabitants of Seguin Island are grass and garter snakes of different sizes and colors. Whether their predecessors arrived by stowing away on a boat, floated out on driftwood, or were carried by a friendly bird is not clear.

In Connie Small's book "**THE LIGHTHOUSE KEEPER'S WIFE**", she relates when the captain who transported them to Seguin pleasantly said good-bye and wished them well, but added that they should not expect him to visit them as he was afraid of snakes. Connie states "I wondered about the snakes, but soon enough learned that the island was infested with them and that one could fill a large can with them in a short period of time, something I decided I wouldn't want to try. Captain Faulkingham never did come up to the house, but always sent his greetings by his mate." Her cat thoroughly enjoyed catching them and Connie took so many away from him that she lost her fear of snakes. "I even got so I could step over a mother snake and her four whitish babies when they persisted in lying in my path to the dump."

Snakes today do not seem to be as prevalent, most likely because their food supply was greatly diminished when the keepers and their families left.

Seguin historically was a rocky isolated farm. Different keepers had different tastes, but generally there were cows, bulls, chickens, and sheep to help supplement food supplies obtained from shore. No mention has been found of goats and pigs, but their sporadic presence was likely.

Most families had pets with dogs and cats being the most common, but the best were the hugh Belgian hares. Three of them were brought to Seguin by keeper James Wilson and an assistant for their children. After the families left in 1963, the hares remained and multiplied. Jimmy McMahan, a Georgetown fisherman, remembers going to Seguin as a boy to catch rabbits with his father, uncle, and his uncles dog. He swears the dog used to catch rabbits in his mouth and when he got tired would lay down and watch the rabbits run under his nose. The rabbits are no longer on Seguin, whether their demise was hunting or disease is not known.

## FLORA

During the August of 1990 Dr. Elizabeth M. Bullock conducted a botanical study on Seguin Island while visiting M. K. Chandler, caretaker. Beth and M. K. spent several delightful days exploring the woods, shore land, and fields. Bullock's findings spoke to the effects habitat, sea coast climate, birds, and man had on the plant life.

While many of the plants are considered native to the island, many have been introduced by men or birds during the past 200 years. Some non-native species, such as Moss Pink, Caraway and Curly Tansy indicate old garden sites and the variety of grasses suggests planting for forage of sheep and cows. Birds most likely brought Nightshades and Canada Thistles. It is interesting to speculate how seeds arrived on Seguin. Were apple trees planted or the result of a tossed apple cores?

Plants are affected by the off-shore seacoast climate. The growing season is different than on the mainland. Ocean waters moderate air temperature and plants start growth later in the spring and

continue later in the fall. Plants which hug the ground or those that bear their fruit below ground generally do better in Seguin's environment of constant wind and salt spray which dehydrates the plants.

Plants bloom on the island from late May through late September. One early forest bloomer is the Jack-in-the Pulpit, while the white blooms of wild strawberries are found in upland patches. Rugosa roses and beach peas highlight the summer months with asters and goldenrod keeping the fall colorful.

Seguin is a berry pickers delight. Raspberries, strawberries, blackberries, and chokecherries are readily available and are used jams and jellies, baked goods, or thoroughly enjoyed right off the bush.

A varied plant life includes cat-tails growing in a bog at the top of the island, orange shore lichen clinging tenuously to rocks and buildings, several species of ferns enjoying the wetlands, pines, junipers, lilies, bayberry, buttercups, maple, sumac, and an abundance of poison ivy.

## SEGUIN HIGHLIGHTS

Second oldest light house in Maine with the original structure built in 1795 (cost \$6,300); the second in 1819 (cost \$2,248); and the third and current in 1857 cost \$35,000).

Seguin Island was placed on the National Register of Historic Places February 7, 1979.

Current buildings consist of the brick duplex, brick fog sound signal building and brick oil house at the top of the island. At the bottom of the island is a wooden boathouse and a wooden donkey house.

The 1306 foot wooden tramway on trestle is the only operating tramway in Maine.

Seguin Island reported the most fog of any station in 1907 with 2,734 hours of fog or slightly over 31% of the year. Average annual fog registers 15%

The lens is the only operating First Order Fresnel Lens in Maine whose replacement cost is estimated as high as 8 million dollars. It is a Fixed White Characteristic light with uncorrected candle power of 94,000 being visible over 20 miles on a clear night.

The light is the highest in Maine with a focal point 180 feet above sea level. The tower itself is only 53 feet tall, but its top stands 186 feet above sea level.

Seguin was a strategic naval site during the War of 1812 because of its proximity to the Kennebec River and Portland Harbor, both very active seaports at that time.

The battle of the Boxer and the Enterprise took place in the waters surrounding Seguin.

