

History of Marshall Point Light

The U. S. Lighthouse Service was established in 1789. In the Town of St. George the oldest lighthouse is on Whitehead Island in Penobscot Bay, built in 1804. There are 22 other lights in Penobscot Bay.

The history of the Marshall Point Light Station goes back to 1831, when Samuel Marshall sold 4 acres of land to the U. S. government for \$120. Additional acres were added later to extend the site to 6.5 acres. With a ¼ mile shoreline, it is a nature spot enjoyed by thousands of visitors every year.

Lighthouse

The first lighthouse at Marshall Point, made of rubblestone, was built in 1832. John Watts became the first Keeper. The round tower, made of the same material, was 20 feet high, 17 feet in diameter at the base, and 9 feet at the top. The base was 3 feet thick and the top 2 feet. The base of the lantern was made of soapstone, 4 inches thick. The "light" consisted of 7 separate lard oil lamps, each with a 14 inch reflector, 4 in one row, and 3 directly above. They all pointed out to sea. The cost of the tower and Keeper's house was \$2,973.17

In 1858 a new tower was built at its present site, at water's edge. It is 24 feet from base to light level. The first 12 feet are made of granite and the remaining 12 are brick. The lantern is cast iron and contains the light, which is 29½ feet above sea level. The ball on top is called a ventilator ball, made of cast iron. Above it is a lightning conductor spindle. A Fresnel lens replaced the 7 lamps. It is classified as a 5th order light and is white and fixed (not flashing). The cost of the new tower was \$5,000.

In 1898 a bell tower with a bronze bell attached on the outside was added. The bell weighed 1,018 pounds and was 36 inches in diameter. Inside the tower was a weight mechanism (something like a grandfathers clock) with a hammer through the tower wall. A winding would last 4½ hours and the bell was struck by the hammer every 20 seconds. A weather mast displaying signals was constructed by the U. S. Weather Bureau at that time, and a telephone was also put into service. In 1969 the bell was replaced by a fog horn and the bell tower was dismantled.

The Light was electrified by 1935, with a kerosene oil wick lamp for standby. In 1971 the Light was automated and no longer required a lightkeeper. The Fresnel lens has been removed. The present light comes from a tiny bulb encased in a plastic lens. Batteries provide a back-up electrical power source.

Keeper's House

The original Keeper's House was built in 1832 at the same time as the first tower. The first photo is from 1859 and shows 3 chimneys on the roof. Specifications for the house show that it was 46 by 20 feet with stone walls 1½ feet thick. There were 3 rooms downstairs and 3 upstairs, with a fireplace in each downstairs room. There was a crane in the kitchen fireplace and an oven for baking.

In 1879 the house was renovated, mostly on the inside. A picture shows 2 chimneys instead of 3, and we assume that stoves replaced the fireplaces. A summer kitchen and a barn with small outbuildings are visible in the photograph.



[The photograph at the left has this description of the renovations: "The stone keeper's house after it was renovated in 1879. (Two chimneys in place of three.) The renovations were internal, rather than external. The tiny building at right was the privy. The larger a workshop. When the house was destroyed by lightning in 1893, the workshop was moved to a site nearer the entrance to the property and the Skinner family lived in it until the new house was built."]



1879 Keeper's House as seen from the water.

In June, 1895 the Keeper's house was struck by lightning and destroyed. By November, 1895 a new house, the present structure, was built. Plans exist for this house. The style is late 19th century Colonial Revival with gambrel roof. The stoves in the Keeper's house burned coal, brought by the Lighthouse Inspection boats. Water supply was mainly rain water. A brick cistern holding 1,500 gallons was built in the cellar. It has been torn out, but the outline of the base is visible. A well was later dug in the woods behind the house, although it is no longer functioning.



Keeper's House 1895



Keeper's House 1987

Lightkeepers



The Lightkeeper who served the station for the longest period was Charles Clement Skinner. He was a Civil War veteran who worked at Marshall Point from 1874 to 1919 (the longest tenure of a keeper at the same light in the history of the Lighthouse Service). He had a wife and 6 children, one son and five daughters. The two youngest daughters were both long-lived. Eula Kelley was born in the old Keepers house in 1891 and lived until 1993, her last years in a cottage that her father built on Marshall Point Road. Marion Dalrymple was the first child born in the present Keepers house in 1895. She lived with her sister until her death in 1992. Both sisters were present at the opening of the restored Keepers house in 1990.

The Coast Guard took over the Lighthouse Service in 1939. Charles Allen was a keeper at the time, and his service spanned the 2 different administrations.

In 1971, when the Light was automated, the last Keeper, Will Boddy, left the House. A LORAN Station was established at Marshall Point, and the interior of the house was changed to serve that purpose. However, the LORAN equipment became obsolete, and in 1980 the Keeper's House was boarded up and deserted. The Town of St. George took a 3 and later a 5 year lease on the grounds to keep the site available to the public.



Charles Allen, Lightkeeper 1933 - 1946

Restoration and Current History

In 1986 the St. George Historical Society took the responsibility of restoring the House, under the Town's auspices. A Committee was established to raise money and oversee the restoration, which was started in 1988. A 30 year lease with the Coast Guard was signed by the Town for the house and the grounds. The Light, connecting ramp, and oil house remained under Coast Guard control.

In 1989 tenants moved into the apartment on the second floor. The Marshall Point Lighthouse Museum on the first floor was opened in 1990. It is open during the summer and staffed entirely by volunteers. At least 7,500 persons visited the museum in 1991. Attendance has risen, and exceeds 10,000 per year. In 1995, to provide more space for exhibits, and to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Keeper's House, a replica of the Summer Kitchen was erected, connecting to the Museum on the north.

Legislation to transfer ownership of 35 Maine lighthouses to federal or state agencies, towns, or non-profit organizations was proposed by the Island Institute, enacted by Congress, and signed by the President in 1996. The Town of St. George successfully applied for Marshall Point, and ownership was transferred in June, 1998. The Coast Guard is now responsible only for operation of the light and fog horn.

Any history of Marshall Point would be incomplete without mentioning that a scene from the movie "Forrest Gump" was filmed at the Lighthouse in 1993, and that two books about Bob Ensor's pet "Nellie the Lighthouse Dog" have been very popular. A third book by the Ensors, "Good Golly, Miss Molly" was published in 1997.

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