

PERSONNEL PROBLEMS UNDER THE U. S. LIGHTHOUSE ESTABLISHMENT 1790 - 1852

By Mary Louise and J. Candace Clifford

Early keepers of lighthouses were often chosen for political reasons and so were not always very good at their jobs. There were no age limits, nor any specific qualifications for the appointment. Responding to a letter criticizing the keeper of Cape Henry Light at the entrance to the Chesapeake Bay in Virginia, constructed in the 1790s, President Thomas Jefferson stated, "I think the keepers of lighthouses should be dismissed for small degrees of remissness, because of the calamities which even these produce."

The Lighthouse Establishment dealt with a wide variety of "degrees of remissness" over the years.

Old age

In 1812 Henry Dearborn, a Boston Customs Collector who was also superintendent of lighthouses for that region, wrote to Albert Gallatin, Secretary of the Treasury, that "Mr. Knox, the Keeper of Boston Harbor Light, has become so infirm that he no longer can perform any of the Duties which devolve upon him. He is nearly 80 years old & for the last year & at present a man has necessarily been employed to take care of the Lights. From motives of humanity he [Knox] has for the last four or five years been continued & being poor it is unpleasant to turn him out, but either

he must give some portion of his pay to an assistant or another keeper be appointed."

Apparently a Mr. Bruce had been sent to assist Knox, but Winslow Lewis, a prominent builder of lighthouses and optics, wrote Dearborn complaining that Knox was "seldom on the Island, & when he goes there his conduct is such that no one can stay on the Island." He adds that "Mr. Bruce has done everything he could as it relates to the Lights & will stay till something is decided on as it relates to Mr. Knox, and I do think him a valuable man as a Keeper of the Light, but I think he nor no other person of any ambition will long put up with the daily abuse which they now receive from Mr. Knox."



When reporting on Mount Desert Rock, Matinicus Rock, and Saddleback Ledge in Maine in 1843, I.W.P. Lewis wrote, "These four places are lone rocks, standing several miles from shore. There is nothing but the naked barren rock & the lighthouses, for the eye to rest upon. In storms the sea break furiously over the buildings & the keepers & their families are in danger of being swept away. Nothing can well be imagined more desolate & uncomfortable than such situation. All supplies of stores & fuel are necessarily obtained from the mainland during the summer season as these rocks are inaccessible during the fall & winter" This ca. 1859 photo shows the third tower (and the shorter tower it replaced) on Boon Island. Photo courtesy of USCG Historian's Office.



In a 1816 survey on lighthouse keeper's salaries, Winslow Lewis reported to the Commissioner of the Revenue that Sequin Lighthouse was "situated on an Island six miles from the Main; no wood but has pasturing & hay for three cows." This ca. 1859 photo shows the third and last tower built on Sequin. Photo courtesy of USCG Historian's Office.

get into the Light house. The Indians after discharging a few shots, made a fire against the [locked] light house door, from which it soon communicated to the oil and other combustible materials kept on the ground floor of the stairs. The two men retreated into the lantern, carrying with them a Keg of powder, with which the Keeper had been furnished for the purpose of defense. The wooden door gave way before the flames, and the heat compelled these men to go on the other side of the lantern & lay down on the platform. In this situation they were exposed in some degree to the rifles of the Indians, and to an intense heat, which melted the glass from the lantern. There Thompson received three rifle balls through one of his feet, was wounded in the ankle [sic] of his other leg, and Carter was killed by a rifle ball. In this horrible situation Thompson, finding the heat unsupportable at length threw down the Keg of powder through the scuttle, probably with the design of destroying himself & building together. But it is supposed that it exploded near the door, as its principal effect was to throw down the burning staircase and deaden the fire.

"The U.S. Transport Schr. *Motto* was within sight of the burning buildings & the crew heard the explosion, but on account of light & adverse [wind] could not approach closer than seven miles of the scene that night. The next morning, the wind being still unfavorable, two boats were launched from the *Motto* and proceeded to the Cape. On their way they recovered a sloop boat,

A similar situation arose in 1838 at Bald Head (Cape Fear) Light in North Carolina. The Treasury Auditor, Stephen Pleasonton, in charge of lighthouses, wrote to the Secretary of the Treasury that "The Light House at Bald Head (Cape Fear) . . . is very badly kept. The Keeper is represented to be eighty-eight years of age, and was appointed in consequence of his revolutionary services. No consideration would induce me to recommend his removal; but in order that the public service may not suffer, I respectfully propose to add an Assistant Keeper, with a salary of one hundred and fifty dollars."

A penciled note (probably by the Secretary) asks why the principal keeper should not pay for the assistant.

Security

In January 1836 Keeper John Dubose at the Cape Florida Light Station was suspended from his duties by Collector W. A. Whitehead for "addressing intemperate language" to him in his office. The Key West Inquirer reported on January 11 that Seminole Indians had taken possession of the vacated station. Whitehead sent William Cooley, along with five guards to Cape Florida, as temporary keeper. The Indians departed, Cooley left, and Dubose returned as keeper. In July 1836, while Dubose was absent in Key West, Indians again attacked the station.

In a letter to Stephen Pleasonton, dated August 1st, 1836, Key West Customs Collector

William A. Whitehead describes the tragedy: "It becomes my painful duty to announce to you that on the 23rd July a party of about forty Indians made an attack on the Light house at Cape Florida, and burned all the buildings at that place. The two men there in charge, [John W.] Thompson and [Aaron] Carter, were hired by Mr. Dubose [Keeper], to remain there constantly, while he occasionally came to Key West to visit his family. Dubose had left the Light house to visit Key West five days before the attack of the Indians. So sudden and unexpected was the attack that these men [Thompson and Carter] had hardly time to



According to the 1819 salary survey, the station at West Quoddy or Passamaquoddy "has the advantage of Wood, but is situated in a cold part of the County where provisions are always high." This ca. 1859 photo shows the new tower recently constructed at West Quoddy Head. Photo courtesy of National Archives.



In evaluating the \$400 annual salary for Sandy Hook, Winslow Lewis remarked "This appears to have been a long established Salary, has horse & cart allowed, which ought to be discontinued, for it [the station] has many advantages . . ." Photo courtesy National Archives.

which the Indians had taken & in which they had deposited their plunder. It was found impossible to rescue Thompson from his elevated situation that day, as every effort made to shoot up a line proved abortive. The day after, however, it was accomplished, after he had been suffering there more than thirty-six hours. The other man, Carter, was buried and the place abandoned. Thompson was brought to this place [Key West] & is in a fair way to do well, . . ."

Later military troops landed and set up a fort and hospital; dragoons galloped along the beach; and the Florida Squadron patrolled Atlantic waters and Key Biscayne Bay. The lighthouse was not rebuilt until 1847.

Meager salaries

Keeper John Polerecky at Seguin Island Light Station wrote on November 11, 1796: "I received 25 barrells [sic] of oil by the hands of Mr. Webb, . . . It took four . . . men to carry one barrel to the houses, and the same four men and myself to lift the barrel on the top of the cisterns to empty them, being six foot high. If I could afford to keep a pair of steers or horses, I could save all the trouble & expences [sic] in taking the oil on the shore to the house in half this time, but I should run myself in debt without 300 dollars are allowed to me. I have but one cow here for my family and one [wag-onload ?] of hay I purchased for her, delivered to the house, cost me 20 dollars and so it is with all the necessaries . . . Therefore hope

you will be so obliging as to have my salary raised to 300 dollars. . ."

Boon Island Light Station in Maine, a wave-washed circle of rock with no vegetation, was not an attractive post. Keeper Thomas Hanna wrote to Henry Dearborn in 1813: "It will be one year on the first day of April next since I have lived on this desolate island . . . My contract with the Government (made with Mr. Ilsley, Collector at Portland) was for the sum of three hundred dollars and to be provided with all necessaries for myself and family. I have fulfilled my part of the contract but the Government have not theirs. It has not provided me in any manner with any article for my support. . . ."

"I now must state that unless the Government provide for me and my family as

agreed, I shall, on the first day of April leave this place. If the sum of \$150 be added to the salary [\$300] I shall be satisfied and will provide for myself."

In 1800 the keeper of the Gay Head Light in Massachusetts submitted a claim of \$25.93 for wood. The local lighthouse superintendent was informed that "... the President of the United States has been pleased to fix the Salary of the Keeper of the Light House at Gayhead at 200 Dollars per annum. . . . The Keeper's charge for Wood introduced in your Account will not be admitted, as nothing of the kind is allowed to Persons employed in similar situations."

Ebenezer Skiff, a later keeper at Gay Head Light asked in 1815 that his salary be increased from \$250 per year because the light was changed from fixed to revolving, adding the frequent winding up the clock mechanism to his duties: "Tending the former light might be deemed a simple business compared with the tendance [sic] of the present complicated works and machinery, which requires much time, care, etc.

"The lately constructed light with a stove revolves by a clock, which is to be stop[p]ed every time any thing is done to the fire, which, in cold weather, must be kindled the sun an hour high, or sooner, and recruited until eleven o'clock, or after, when I have to trim the lamps & wind up the weights of the clock and can go into bed at nearly midnight, until which a fire is kept in the dwelling-house, consuming more wood than when I tended the former light.

"The business respecting the light is mostly done by me in person, yet I occasionally leave home to procure wood and many other necessaries; previous to which I have to agree with and instruct some trusty white person to tend the light in my absence. If my salary would admit, I would hire some person to live constantly with me lest I should be sick. I have no neighbors here but Indians or people of colour.

"When I hire an Indian to work, I usually give him a dollar per day when the days are long and seventy five cents a day when the days are short and give him three meals. Now supposing the meals worth twenty-five cents each, they amount to seventy-five cents, which is seven cents more than the wages for my service, both a day & night (while I board myself) only sixty cents, computing my Salary (as it now is) at two hundred & fifty dollars a year and the year to consist of three hundred and sixty-five days."

Instructions to the Keepers of Light Houses Within the United States

1. You are to light the lamps every evening at sun-setting, and keep them continually burning, bright and clear, till sun-rising.
2. You are to be careful that the lamps, reflectors, and lanterns, are constantly kept clean, and in order; and particularly to be careful that no lamps, wood, or candles, be left burning any where as to endanger fire.
3. In order to maintain the greatest degree of light during the night, the wicks are to be trimmed every four hours, taking care that they are exactly even on the top.
4. You are to keep an exact amount of the quantity of oil received from time to time; the number of gallons, quarts, gills, &c., consumed each night; and deliver a copy of the same to the Superintendent every three months, ending 31 March, 30 June, 30 September, and 31 December, in each year; with an account of the quantity on hand at the time.
5. You are not to sell, or permit to be sold, any spirituous liquors on the premises of the United States; but will treat with civility and attention, such strangers as may visit the Light-house under your charge, and as may conduct themselves in an orderly manner.
6. You will receive no tube-glasses, wicks, or any other article which the contractors, Messrs. Morgan & Co., at New Bedford, are bound to supply, which shall not be of suitable kind; and if the oil they supply, should, on trial, prove bad, you will immediately acquaint the Superintendent therewith, in order that he may exact from them a compliance with this contract.
7. Should the contractors omit to supply the quantity of oil, wicks, tube-glasses, or other articles necessary to keep the lights in continual operation, you will give the Superintendent timely notice thereof, that he may inform the contractors and direct them to forward the requisite supplies.
8. You will not absent yourself from the Light-house at any time, without first obtaining the consent of the Superintendent, unless the occasion be so sudden and urgent as not to admit of an application to that officer; in which case, by leaving a suitable substitute, you may be absent for twenty-four hours.
9. All your communications intended for this office, must be transmitted through the Superintendent, through whom the proper answer will be returned.

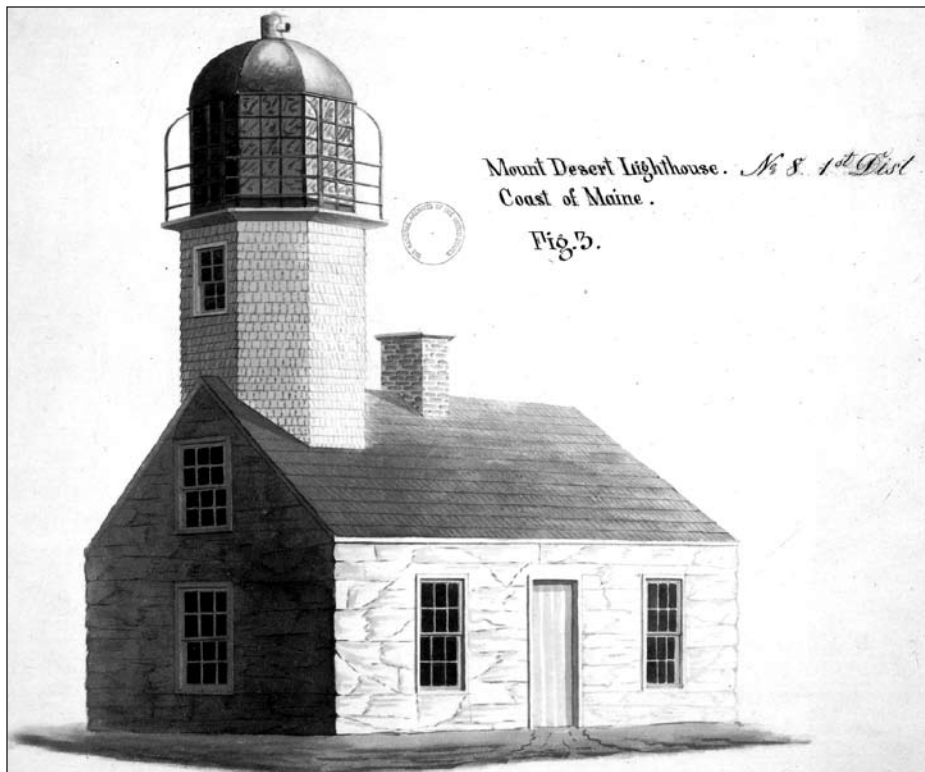
Fifth Auditor and Acting Commissioner of the Revenue
TREASURY DEPARTMENT
Fifth Auditor's Office

April 23d, 1835

In 1820 that same keeper at Gay Head Light asked for a cart and casks to use in fetching water, inasmuch as the spring he had relied on had given out. Frugal Stephen Pleasonton, Fifth Auditor at the Treasury, asked how much it would cost, then authorized the local lighthouse superintendent "to procure a pair of wheels and water casks for the use of the Keeper of Gayhead Light House, provided the expense shall not exceed the sum you state, viz., fifty dollars."

In 1825 Winslow Lewis wrote to Stephen Pleasonton about keeper salaries at West Quoddy Head Light Station: "Ever since the

bell was placed on Passamaquoddy Head, it has been found to be of so much importance as to require the greatest attentions, that place being enveloped in fog a great part of the time, when the wind blows hard on the shore it is found necessary to have the bell rung by hand to be heard at a distance which must necessarily occupy a considerable part of the keepers time. For this extra duty the keeper had never received any additional compensation. In all instances where a beacon light has been added to any of the Light Houses establishment, the keeper had been allowed extra pay for attending them, the bell at Quoddy Light



Mount Desert Rock Lighthouse was established in 1830 and replaced with a sturdier masonry tower in 1847. Drawing of 1830 tower courtesy of National Archives.

at least requires as much extra labor and attentions as any beacon light that has been built.”

In 1829 Stephen Pleasonton reviewed all keeper salaries in an attempt to introduce wages appropriate to the situation at each individual light station. They ranged generally from \$300 to \$500, those receiving the lower amounts earning less than one dollar a day.

Pleasonton wrote the Secretary of the Treasury in 1830: “The salary of Esaias Preble, lately appointed Keeper of the Light house on Mount Desert Rock, in the State of Maine, was fixed at five hundred dollars. It now appears by a communication from the Superintendent, as well as from the Keeper himself, copies of which I now enclose, that this salary is inadequate; the Keeper being obliged from the great distance the rock is situated from the main land, to employ one, if not two men, to keep the Light in constant operation. I respectfully recommend therefore that the salary be increased to six hundred dollars per annum.”

The Gay Head keeper was not the only one who wrote lengthy, verbose letters to his superiors. Caleb Cushman, Keeper of Nantucket Light Station off the coast of Massachusetts wrote to Pleasonton in 1835: “*The Instructions to Keepers of Lighthouses within the United States*, . . . have long been received, and

an opportunity of testing their operation, as well as of developing new wants & inconveniences consequent upon the new & onerous duties & restraints thereby provided; and as I have requested of the Superintendent the necessary apparatus for carrying out the process of measuring [oil] to the letter, and such an exemption from the restrictions as will enable me to perform all the duties required, and at the same time subsist upon the salary. I presume it will not be thought indecorous for me to make a statement of the peculiar situation of this light-house, and the reasons why the Keeper ought to be excused from the full operation of the said Instructions, and the justness of his expectation of an adequate compensation for the performance of the new duties required, and the new privations & obligations incident thereto.”

The 1,000-word statement that followed gave all his reasons why the instructions would be impossible for him to follow without an increase in salary.

The keepers at the first Minots Ledge Light Station, a tower on a straight-pile foundation on a treacherous ledge off the coast near Boston, Massachusetts, also felt they were vastly underpaid. The first three keepers resigned when Pleasonton refused to raise

their salaries. Pleasonton did support recommendations that braces be added to the frame of the vibrating lighthouse. The three new keepers were equally dismayed by the severity of storms, even after the braces were put in place. In 1850 after most of the braces were broken in a gale, they too asked that their salaries be increased to reflect the danger of their occupation. Collector Greely wrote Pleasonton that “The keepers we have had . . . telling exaggerated and frightful stories. I have reprovved and cautioned the present keeper, Mr. Bennett, but it is hard to keep him in the traces. . . . I have always said to you that, in my judgment, the Light House is perfectly safe, . . .”

Eight days after this letter, on April 17, 1851, Collector Greely reported the complete destruction of the Minots Ledge Lighthouse along with the death of the two assistant keepers, Joseph Antoine and Joseph Wilson. Capt. Bennett survived, being delayed on shore.

In the early years the Treasury Department preferred to rely on keeper’s families rather than multiple keepers to assist in the many duties involved in maintaining the light. In 1852 Keeper William Jordan at Cape Elizabeth Light Station in Maine wrote to Stephen Pleasonton: “I took charge as keeper of the Cape Elizabeth two Lights in the month of July, 1849, and have continued so to keep the Light, as I believe to the satisfaction of the Government, and to all navigators, as I have heard no complaints whatever; I have been faithful and economical, as the Superintendent of Lights will say. . . .”

“I have two Lights to attend and a Fog Bell. The Lights are three hundred and twenty-five yards apart and the Fog Bell from the dwelling house is about 110 feet distance. I have to hire a boy during the summer season, and a man during the winter months, and, if I did not do so, could not faithfully keep things in order. The location of the Lights is on a Cape, exposed to easterly storms and nothing to break them off, so that it is exceedingly hard work, especially in winter, to get from one Light House to another, in the night to trim lights twice—as the track in the snow, if made, fills up fast as made, and each tower is fifty feet to ascend. In view of the above considerations, I would respectfully ask you to allow me, one hundred dollars more per year, which would make my salary \$600 per year. Apparently Jordan’s request was not granted; he was replaced as keeper in 1853.

Selling government property

Not all keepers were honest and hard-working. Letters to the Secretary of the Treasury accused Ellis Dowlf, one of the very early keepers at Whitehead Light Station in Maine, of selling oil supplied by the government for the lamps. The local Superintendent of Lights wrote to the Secretary of the Treasury: “. . . the Rev. Em. Hall informed me that he bought 2 gallons of oil of Mr. Dowlf measured in the lighthouse to him. David Linahen also told me that he bought 4 gallons measured as aforesaid . . . From the best information I can obtain, Mr. Dowlf sold more than two hundred gallons of Oil within two years.

In 1818 a letter from Samuel Hurlbut, a merchant in New London, to Winslow Lewis complained that Griswold Harris, Keeper of the New London Light in Connecticut “has been in the habit of selling oil from the Light House for a considerable time back & that he has become very intemp[er]ant [sic]. I have no doubt that it would be to your Interest to have another appointed, as the Light has been neglected at many different times.”

Winslow Lewis replied: “This is the first time I have been informed of his dishonesty. I have no doubt of the facts that oil has been sold to procure rum. A removal of this keeper would have been recommended last year

had not the difficulty arisen of his owning the dwelling house, the United States never having built one. . . . It becomes now indispensable to have a dwelling house built for the keeper of the New London Light House. I think the public Land, although but a few rods, will admit of a house being built on the same plan as those built at West Chop and Tarpaulin Cover last year; if of Stone, will cost over 1300 Dollars.”

In 1826 Stephen Pleasonton wrote to James Edwards: “In answer to your letter of the 22nd instant, requesting information as to the cause of the removal of Jonathan Delano from the situation of Keeper of Seguin Light house, I have to state that satisfactory evidence having been exhibited at this Department of his having fraudulently disposed of oil, lamp, wicks, etc. belonging to the establishment, it became indispensably necessary to remove him which was accordingly done, and a successor appointed March 2, 1825. No evidence exists at this office of his being a debtor to the government.”

Neglecting government property

The Nantucket Gazette reported in 1817 that when the whaler *William Penn* was stranded on the reef near Brant Point, “. . . Three of her owners proceeded to Brant Point to get her off—when every lamp in

the lighthouse was out. They proceeded to the lamp-lighter’s house and awoke him . . . This may serve as a caution to mariners how they place dependence on the lights in their present system.”

Local Customs Collectors, who served as superintendents of lighthouses, often recommended keeper appointments and dismissals and sometimes were called upon to inspect lighthouses under their jurisdiction. In 1833 Stephen Pleasonton was informed that Ten Pound Island Light in Massachusetts was “wretchedly kept. The windows of the Lantern very dirty. The reflectors black and oily, and the whole appearance indicating extreme inattention and slovenliness [sic]. I recommend that the keeper, James Sayward, be removed, and that Amos Story of Gloucester be appointed.”

The superintendent found the same true of Chatham Light in Massachusetts. “The whole establishment badly kept. The keeper, Joseph Loveland, is a very intemperate man. I recommend his removal, . . .”

Pleasonton then asked the Secretary of the Treasury to remove the keepers at Chatham and Ten Pound Island Lighthouses. Notations on the reverse of the letter indicate the recommendations were followed.

In 1837 similar complaints came from the commander of the Revenue Cutter Campbell after a visit to the Stratford Point Light Station in Connecticut: “This lighthouse is in the worst order imaginable. The oil was when I visited it dripping from the lantern nearly to the base—the copper of the lantern deck is ripped up in many places, allowing a free passage for the oil from the lamps, under which there are no drippings [tray] to catch it. There are the strongest indications of this lighthouse being kept in the most careless, and slovenly manner.” In concluding his report, he states that Stratford Point is the worst of any he visited.

In 1838 the Secretary of the Treasury received a complaint about the filthy condition of the Cleveland Harbor Light Station: “. . . I found the deck covered an inch or more thick with Sand, old burnt wicks, soot, oil, also old rags saturated with filth, broken glass, apparently an accumulation of months, most of the reflectors more like bronzes than silver, . . . The whole care seems to be entrusted to a Negro, who had the keep of both Light House and Beacon.”



The light at Ten Pound Island was reported in 1833 as being “wretchedly kept.” The lamps and reflectors used at that time were later replaced with the sixth-order lens shown in this photo. This tower was replaced in 1881. Photo courtesy of USCG Historian’s Office.

Forbidden activities on public land

An 1826 letter deals with the keeper's erection of buildings on public land: "After a careful search of our files and records, I do not find that any sanction was given by the Gov't to the erection of the buildings on the public ground at Sandy Hook [Light Station], contained in Mr. John S. Doane's schedule & which he now claims is his property.

"It is evident that they are not necessary to the establishment & that they were built to suit his own peculiar views & for the purpose of connecting the Light House into a public House or tavern. The Shuffle board & ice House included in the schedule seems to sanction that suspicion.

"We cannot sanction the principle that a Keeper of a Light House may put up what buildings he pleases on the public ground & on leaving his charge, to demand payment for them from the UStates [sic]. On the contrary, to erect such buildings or to keep a tavern without permission is an offence for which a Keeper ought to be discharged. In the present instance Mr. Doane may have permission to remove all the buildings he actually erected, or otherwise dispose of them, but he must be told that they cannot be paid for by the UStates. The stable and fence round it may form an exception as I find a Horse was allowed him in the year 1819, and for these you may pay him what is reasonable. The Horse which he claims, however, if it is his, must be removed by him as no horse will hereafter be allowed the Keeper. Mr. Lewis is bound to deliver the oil at the Light House, so that the reason for allowing a horse heretofore, that of conveying the oil from the landing to the Light House, no longer exists."

Keeper Doane faced further trouble when Pleasonton learned that he "is in the habit of taking wood from the public land at that place for his private use . . ." The local superintendent was told to see that the practice be discontinued.

In 1836 Keeper Doane refused "to deliver possessions of that establishment to Mr. Casler, lately appointed to succeed him, unless he is paid for curtains, alleged improvements made by him, . . ." Pleasonton instructed the superintendent to ascertain "what particular buildings and improvements have been made there at public expence [sic] and what may have been made by the late Keeper, Mr. Doane. "You will

also inform me whether the Light is attended to be Mr. Doane or whether Mr. Casler has been permitted to execute that duty."

An even more complex situation arose at Fire Island Light Station. In 1838 a petition was sent to President Martin Van Buren, requesting the removal of the keeper, Felix Dominy, who was accused of the following: "That he keeps a public bar and retails spirituous liquors to be drank in the dwelling house attached to Light house, contrary to the regulations which have been judiciously prescribed to keepers of Light Houses.

"That he is a very passionate man and treats with great rudeness persons who find it necessary or convenient for their pursuits to land near the Light House.

"That he has attempted with much rudeness and violence to drive people off from fishing and fowling in the waters adjoining the lands belonging to the United States, alleging that he and he only has the right to fish and fowl in and adjoining those premises."

The petition suggests an "ardently devoted Republican" to replace Dominy. Supporting affidavits were included.

Next came a petition supporting Dominy. A letter from Pleasonton to Dominy dated June 25, 1838, summarizes the first petition's accusations and asks for explanation. More letters came to both the Pleasonton and the President supporting Dominy's character. Dominy then wrote claiming that affidavits against him bear false signatures.

The report of the Custom Collector in New York indicated that the first accusation regarding the public bar was probably true, but he did not feel this to be intolerable. He describes the whole episode as a "neighborhood quarrel" and "village excitement."

The New York lighthouse superintendent wrote in 1843, recommending Dominy's removal. "There are several objections to him. In the Summer Season, as well as during the Sporting Seasons, in the Spring & Fall—Mr. Dominy entertains boarders and company, at his dwelling on the Island—and devotes so much of his time and care to that, and other business, personal to himself—that the public charge committed to him, is not faithfully executed; his Light House duties are made subordinate objects of attention."

In an 1843 letter to the Secretary of the Treasury, Pleasonton recommended Dominy's removal. Unfazed, Dominy wrote in 1844, asking for an appointment as Inspector in the

Custom House, pointing out that he had "ever been a good Democrat . . ."

Drunkenness

According to the first Instruction to Keepers, excess indulgence in alcohol was grounds for dismissal. In 1844 disgruntled former keeper Joseph Cheever wrote Stephen Pleasonton that his replacement as keeper at the Isle of Shoals Light Station (at the boundary between Maine and New Hampshire) was "so very lame, that he can seldom, if ever, go in the Lantern himself, and the person he has with him to take care of the Establishment, works for his rum and tobacco, and whose brains are nearly destroyed by alcohol." Cheever had hopes of being reinstated when the Whigs returned to power.

United States Light-House Board

When the United States Light-House Board took over the administration of light-houses in 1852, the system for handling personnel matters became more standardized and decentralized. District Inspectors were added to the newly created districts. These officers had regular interaction with keepers, making inspections of the stations and ensuring that keepers understood their duties. As more assistant keeper positions were created, a keeper could learn the job under another keeper's tutelage and be gradually promoted to be in charge of their own station.

Problems persisted, of course, and will be treated in another article focused on the period 1852 - 1901.

The documents cited in this article were found at the National Archives as Candace was conducting freelance research for clients across the country or collecting material used in the five lighthouse books written by the authors, including *Maine Lighthouses: Documentation of Their Past*. Candace has included a finding aid for Record Group 26 on her web site, <www.lighthousehistory.info>.