

# Keeping the Light On in the 1800s

## Duties of a 19th Century Lighthouse Keeper

Making sure the light was always burning at night wasn't an easy job in the days before electricity. The Lighthouse Keeper couldn't just flip a switch and have the light go on and off or set a timer to have it happen automatically. They had to keep the oil supplied, the lamp functioning, the clock mechanism working, and the windows clean – inside and out – especially in bad weather. The light had to be lit before sundown and kept burning until after sunrise. During hurricanes and other storms, it had to stay on 24 hours a day.

### Turn the Light On Before Sundown



Oil Transfer Can

- Remove the lens cover and inspect the Fresnel lens and all its prisms.
- Open the drapes around the windows.
- Check the lamp to make sure the oil reservoir is full, trim the wick and light the lamp.
- Crank the clockwork to start the lens rotating.
- Remain for 30 minutes to make sure the lamp is working correctly, then climb back to the top every few hours to check the lamp and crank the clockwork. On stormy nights (and days), stay with the light at all times.



Keeper's Toolbox

### Turn the Light Off After Sunrise



USLHE Hand Lantern

- Stop the clockwork to stop the rotation, extinguish the lamp, and refill the oil.
- Clean and polish the lens with a soft linen cloth.
- Place a linen bag over the lens and close the curtains around the lamp room.
- Clean and lubricate the clockwork and polish brass fittings and tools.

### Keep Official Records

- Survey the weather and tide conditions. Take and log readings.
- Record daily operations in the official logbook, including ship traffic and anything out of the ordinary at or around the Station.
- Maintain a daily expense book and a general accounts book and ensure supplies are on hand.
- Submit required detailed reports on a monthly, quarterly and annual basis.



Fire Bucket

### Other Duties

- Clean the tower and living quarters daily, the chimneys, stove and heaters regularly, and maintain the grounds.
- Paint and make repairs to the tower and living quarters, and fix apparatus, furnishings and machinery.
- Install any replacement equipment as needed.
- Keep a current inventory of all supplies needed in the tower and living quarters.
- Conduct tours of the Lighthouse for US Lighthouse Service inspectors and engineers during quarterly inspections and for approved civilians and dignitaries upon request.
- Buy and wear the appropriate uniforms (introduced in 1883). Note: Dress uniforms looked similar to Navy officer uniforms and only had to be worn for official occasions. The daily uniform primarily consisted of dungaree blouses and trousers or overalls and the conical, flat-top navy blue caps.
- Prepare for and respond to fires. Store all flammable supplies in a separate stone or brick outbuilding. Check daily that fire buckets located throughout the Station are filled with water and sand.
- Conduct monthly fire drills.
- Give or summon aid to vessels in distress.



Wick Storage Can



Rouge Powder for Cleaning Lens



Keeper Clinton Honeywell