

# 1849 - 1855

## Operating the First Lighthouse Was Very Challenging

### The First Keeper Gets the Scare of His Life!

As we saw earlier, Nathaniel Scobie was the construction overseer and the first Keeper of the Light, but he certainly had his work cut out for him. He had no experience and had to learn on the job, by himself. Circumstances would get the better of him, though.

Cape Canaveral was then a very remote location with few settlers - already too many in the opinion of the local Native Americans. They attacked the Indian River Colony, a little south of here near Sebastian. Because of the perceived threat, Scobie believed he, his wife and three children were next. After requesting military help, which never came, he abandoned his post in August 1849.



Indian River Colony Attacked August 1849

### The Second Keeper Thinks the Lighthouse is Falling!

Scobie was replaced by Ora Carpenter, in February 1850. In October 1851, an Assistant Keeper, A.R. Rose was hired, and another cottage added for his family. Not long after, on March 15, 1852, Carpenter sent a letter to the Superintendent of Lights warning that the sand was disappearing from around the Lighthouse and it may topple over! Well, the Lighthouse stayed up, but Carpenter lost his job. He was replaced in July 1853.



### The Third Keeper Starts a Lighthouse-Keeping Dynasty!

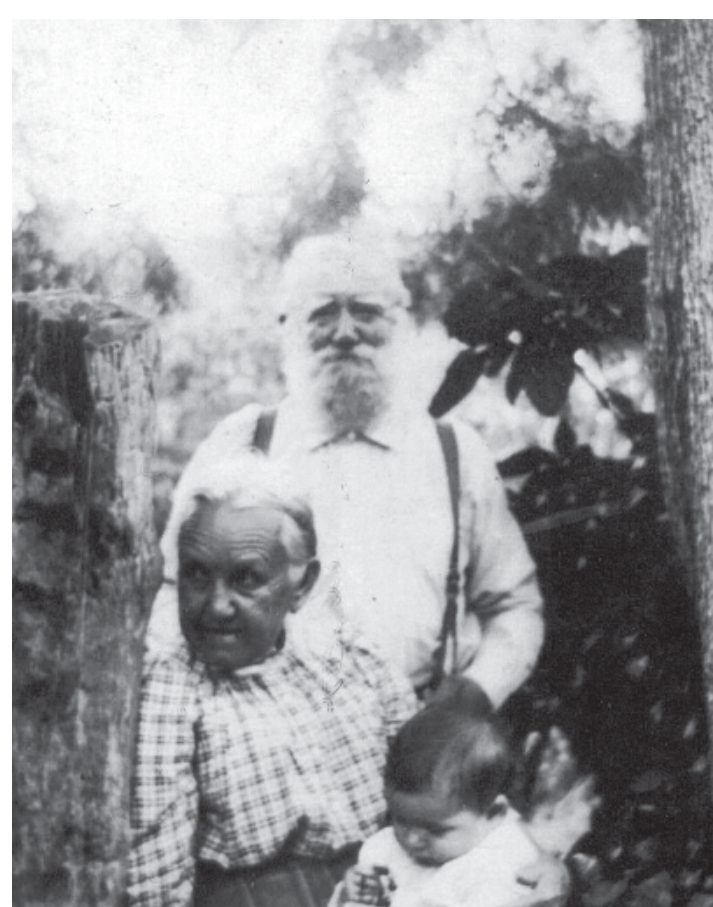
Mills O. Burnham took over from Carpenter and proved to have the staying power the others lacked. In late 1853, Mills Burnham asked for and received military protection from Native Americans. One of the troops sent was Henry Wilson, who soon left the Army and took the place of A.R. Rose as Assistant Keeper on March 12, 1855. A year later, Wilson married Burnham's oldest daughter, Frances, starting a trend that would keep the Cape Canaveral Lighthouse under the care of Burnham and his relations for the next 80 years! Burnham is also credited with naming the nearby Banana River.

### Fueling the Light was Hard on the Pocket Book and the Planet

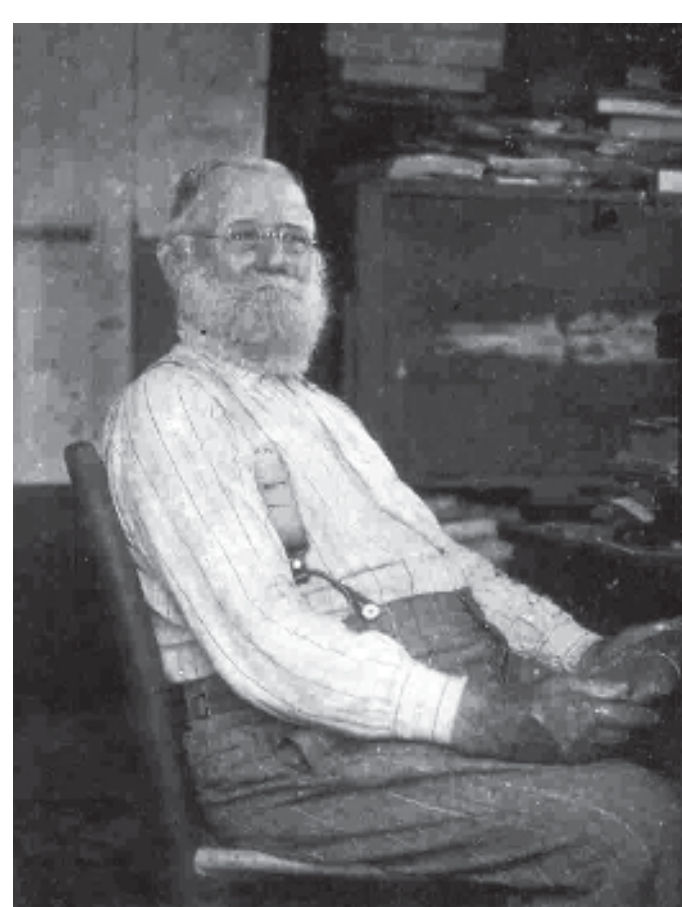
Most industries in the mid-Nineteenth Century, including lighthouses, used "sperm oil" to light their lamps. It was a waxy substance harvested from sperm whales. As demand across all industries for this oil increased and the number of sperm whales decreased, the price climbed. While many lighthouses switched to cheaper "lard oil", Cape Canaveral still had 223 gallons of sperm oil on hand when the light shut down during the Civil War.



Mills O. Burnham



Mills & Frances Burnham



Henry Wilson