



Friends of Wood Island Lighthouse
A chapter of the American Lighthouse Foundation
P.O. Box 26, Biddeford Pool, ME 04006



<http://woodislandlighthouse.org>

**OUR SUMMER TOURS ARE OPEN FOR RESERVATIONS
AND WE'LL SOON BE BACK OUT ON THE ISLAND!**



**Pursuing Maine Specialty
License Plate To Raise Funds
For Lighthouse Preservation**



<https://www.mainelighthouse.org/>

FOWIL Vice Chair Sean Murphy has formed the Maine Lighthouse Trust, a charitable organization, to benefit all Maine lighthouses with the proceeds generated by the sale of a new specialty Lighthouse License Plate.

Maine motorists throughout the State are urged to pre-order the new plate to meet the 2000 threshold required for state authorization of specialty plates. Once authorized, \$10 of the normal \$25 fee motorists pay for specialty plates will go into the Trust to be distributed to Maine lighthouses & lighthouse organizations for preservation and restoration of Maine's iconic lighthouses, and for public education.

When the threshold is met, the Trust will submit the pre-paid application funds to the Maine Secretary of State to submit proposed legislation to the Maine Legislature seeking authorization of the specialty plate. The legislature will also have final approval of the design of the license plate itself. The Secretary of State has already given its approval of a design proposed by the Trust. That design features our own Wood Island Lighthouse Tower!

The goal is eventually to sell many thousands of plates and generate a significant annual revenue stream to the Trust for distribution which will be via a grant application process. Once the plate is approved and in production, possibly taking a year, each of the 2,000 pre-sale registrants will receive a BMV voucher, which can be taken to a local municipal office or BMV branch and redeemed for a set of lighthouse plates. The Maine Lighthouse Trust will then receive \$10 from every plate purchase and renewal.

A special feature of the Trust's campaign will allow motorists making one of these 2000 pre-order purchases to designate a particular lighthouse to be the direct recipient of the \$10 the Trust receives for the initial purchase and every renewal of those particular plates. So, here is how you can help Wood Island Lighthouse:

- Pre-order a \$25 plate for each of your Maine-registered vehicle(s) AND,
- Be sure to name Wood Island Lighthouse as the beneficiary of the funds from your plate pre-order purchase!

For information on how to pre-order and more information about this initiative, visit: <https://www.mainelighthouse.org/>

Carl Gatto is FOWIL's Len Hadley Volunteerism Awards Volunteer of the Year for 2018 - Presented at the Annual ALF Gala on April 29th at the Nonantum Inn in Kennebunkport, ME

Carl Gatto became a Friends of Wood Island Lighthouse volunteer in 2016, after taking his first trip to the island as a guest during the summer of 2015. Starting in 2016, he became a Tower Host and has fit in as many tours as possible, given his work schedule as a programmer in Portland.

In the winter of 2017 FOWIL decided it needed a new reservation system with the goal of minimizing the amount of volunteer effort required to manage over 1,000 guests throughout the summer season, and to make reserving a space easier for guests. Carl took on this task enthusiastically and built a system that

met all of the needs from the detailed list given by F.O.W.I.L.'s reservation volunteers. He also produced an exceptionally detailed and useful manual and trained the reservation volunteers to use the new software. As the system went on line, Carl monitored every single reservation and, during the summer, introduced new capabilities to automatically manage wait lists. He takes full ownership of his volunteer duties and has recently become the newest member of the Chapter's Executive Committee. Carl's many contributions are in the finest tradition of lighthouse volunteerism and so the Friends of Wood Island Lighthouse take great pleasure in recognizing Carl as their 2018 Len Hadley Volunteerism Award recipient.



Carl Gatto of the Friends of Wood Island Lighthouse (FOWIL Photo)

Wood Island Lighthouse Poem by a Keeper's Wife

By: [American Lighthouse Foundation](#) Published: September 27, 2017

The following poem was penned by Elmenia P. Lurvey, wife of Wood Island lightkeeper W. F. Lurvey (1917-1923). The poem appeared in the Bar Harbor Times on February 14, 1923.

Lines from a Lighthouse

I am sitting beside this billowy ocean,
And gazing on naught, but the sea and the sky;
The crystal waves roll with an unceasing motion,
As they rush on the sea shore, in foam breaking high.

We three are alone on this desolate island:
Alone with my husband and Wilbert, his son.
He is lightkeeper here on the Wood Island Light Station,
When daylight is ended his work is undone.
For, when nearly sundown, he ascends the high tower,
He lights the big lantern that gleams through the night;
For the sea-faring sailors, roaming over the ocean,
Who patiently watch for the red beacon light.

When the clock points to midnight, he again mounts the tower,
To wind the machinery revolving the light.
He carefully watches till its beams shine forth brightly,
Then wakefully slumbers through the rest of the night.

At the dawning of sunrise he starts for the tower,
To put out the light, tidy up for the day.
There's enough work to do to keep things running smoothly,
It is work while the day lasts, not much time for play.

More especially now, since the burning of soft coal,
Keeping everything covered with black, smutty dust;
It is useless to growl at the U.S.A. government,
But shovel the coal and in Uncle Sam trust.
Both outside and inside the tower must be painted,
The stairs painted too, winding up to the light;
The dwelling inside must be painted & varnished,
Outside every building is all painted white.

In sea fog and snowstorms he enters the tower,
To mind the big weight so the clock may run well;
For the benefit of seamen approaching the harbor,
Who anxiously listen for the sound of its bell.

Mrs. Elmenia P. Lurvey
Wood Island Light Station
Biddeford Pool, Maine



Wood Island Light Station
(American Lighthouse Foundation archives)



Wood Island is located near Biddeford Pool, Maine
(Maine Maritime Museum archives)



Painting Wood Island Light
(American Lighthouse Foundation archives)

The Furnishing Committee reports that with near certainty, the Keeper's house will be furnished this summer. All the authentic furnishings have been acquired and are waiting to be moved into the house. Our chosen "period of significance" for the restoration is 1906 when the lighthouse was expanded to its current Dutch Colonial configuration. The furnishings are all from that era and include some pieces donated by the descendants of Keeper Thomas Henry Orcutt (1887 - 1905).

We Sadly Report the Passing of 2 Friends of FOWIL

Len Euart, 65, a teacher from Dartmouth, MA, who summered in Maine and was a Docent for FOWIL, passed away on May 10, 2018 after a long battle with cancer. Len gave the guests an enthusiastic tour of the lighthouse and will be sadly missed.

Also passing from cancer on March 29, 2018 was acclaimed author and Biddeford Pool summer resident Anita Shreve, age 71. She wrote many historical novels with our area as the setting. She aided FOWIL with some of its fundraising efforts and was a friend to many of the volunteers.

KEEPER CHARLES ALBERT BURKE Wood Island Lighthouse Keeper 1905 - 1914



FOWIL is pleased to report that our volunteer, Dick Parsons, has put together a summary biography of Charles A. Burke, Wood Island's Keeper during the time of the 1906 Keeper's House expansion, when it took on the Dutch Colonial look it has today. That era, chosen by FOWIL as the "period of significance" to which we would restore the Light Station, was selected because it represented the architectural high water mark for the lighthouse. Charles Burke was the first and foremost inhabitant of the re-designed Keeper's House for the first eight years. We have known only Burke's name and nothing else about him or his family until Dick Parsons volunteered to do some research. He quickly produced some vital statistics on Burke.

Now Dick, with the invaluable assistance of Sheri Poflak, (FOWIL History Chair) and Candace Clifford (researcher at the National Archives and Records Administration) has expanded that initial summary into to a 37-page monograph on Burke and his time at Wood Island. Also included are sections on the "Life of Keepers" in general, and selected elements of Keeper work and perseverance, such as coping with bureaucracy (Inspectors and Inspection), confronting the natural elements ("Dealing with the Forces of Nature") and anecdotal stories of Keeper performance above and beyond the call of duty ("Unsung Heroes").

The immediate purpose of the biography will be to equip our docents with details of this Keeper's 9-year tenure at Wood Island to enhance or interpretation of the space Keeper Burke inhabited. Now furnished with period furnishings from that era, we hope it would have struck a familiar chord if Keeper Burke and his wife Carrie could go through the house today. And we hope our visitors can stand in the shoes of Keeper Burke as we try to bring him and his family to life with them.

Ultimately, it is expected that Mr. Parsons' work will be woven into a larger chronicle of the people who manned the light throughout its history. Here are some of the facts and circumstances of Keeper Burke's life that Parsons' text recounts:

Charles Albert Burke, the 14th Keeper at the Lighthouse was born in Portsmouth NH on February 10, 1877. ... James Monroe Burke, Charles' father, originally a fisherman, later became Keeper of the Cape Neddick or Nubble Light in York, Maine.

On October 5, 1904 Charles Burke married Carrie M. Greenleaf in Boothbay Harbor, ME.

Prior to his service at Wood Island, Burke served as assistant keeper at Saddleback Ledge Light Station, situated on an islet lying between Isle Au Haut and Vinalhaven. One of the keepers described Saddleback as “the most remote and barren of all Maine Lighthouses”. It was during that duty assignment that he married Carrie.

On September 15, 1905, Charles took the oath of office to become the keeper at Wood Island. When Carrie arrived at the island, she must have thought it was an island paradise compared to Saddleback Ledge.

In 1908, Charles and Carrie became parents to twin boys, Wyatt and Wallace. We are not certain, but it is probable that Carrie was not on Wood Island for some weeks before and after birth of the twins, There are several logbook references stating that Charles arranged for a substitute keeper in mid- January and just after the twins were born on February 3rd.

The logbooks, offer the best resource on the Burkes’ life at Wood Island and the special circumstances that island conditions presented. Quotes and general information not quoted but drawn from the logbooks include:

- October 7, 1907 – a new library box was delivered. Library boxes containing a selection of books, were rotated among the lighthouses, giving the family classics and books of the day to occupy the long isolated hours.
- July 17, 1908 – “Str Mayflower [President Taft’s yacht] passed East at 9:30 A.M.”
- July 27, 1910 – U.S.S. Mayflower “passed in Harbor at 2:30 P.M. with President Taft on board.”
- July 28, 1910 – “U.S.S. Mayflower left Harbor at 9:30 A.M. going west”.
- Testy fog bell or tower lamp mechanisms brought machinists or specialists to make repairs often taking days to complete. They would become guests of the Keeper family for Carrie to feed and house.
- “Attending to regular duties” was, of course, the most prolific daily entry innocuously covering a daunting list of routine tasks to be performed by the Keeper in all kinds of weather and operational conditions. A lengthy poem of the day bemoaned loudly, the contempt the Keepers had for “Brasswork”. There are, however, details of the special care that had to be given to the sensitive glass of the Fresnel lens and to the light and bell clockworks, etc.
- Events of heroism were not recorded as such in the log books, but there are records of “assistance rendered”:
 - ◊ to a fisherman “in an open boat for two days and nights without food”
 - ◊ to a disabled Motor Boat from Fall River, Mass”

Charles A. Burke was 29 years old when he arrived at Wood Island and 38 when he left to pursue a career as a Master Mariner.

C.B. Staples replaced Burke as Keeper at the end of September, 1914.

The trove of information our docents will have from this text will add immeasurably to their ability to convey what it was to be a keeper on Wood Island more than a century ago.

Thanks to the generosity of photographer Mark Jones, we will soon be offering sets of 3 note cards featuring his stunning images of Wood Island Lighthouse similar to his photos below.. These quality cards are perfect for gifts or personal use that you will be proud to use. They will sell for \$10 a set and the proceeds will benefit our restoration, education and upkeep efforts.



*Photos by Mark Jones
Photography*

