

Portland Head Light
Portland Head, approximately
1/2 mile east of Shore Road
Cape Elizabeth
Cumberland County
Maine

HABS No. ME-123

HABS
ME,
3-CAPEL,
2-

PHOTOGRAPHS

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

ADDENDUM FOLLOWS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

PORTLAND HEAD LIGHT

HABS No. ME-123

- Location: On Portland Head (latitude 43 degrees 37.4 minutes north, longitude 70 degrees 12.5 minutes west) approximately 1/2 east of Shore Road, Cape Elizabeth, Cumberland County, Maine.
- Present Owner: United States Government.
- Present Occupant: United States Coast Guard lighthouse keepers.
- Present Use: Aid to navigation.
- Statement of Significance: One of only four lighthouses authorized by President Washington, Portland Head Light was the first lighted under the federal government. Although altered in height, it has never been rebuilt. It attracts more than 60,000 visitors a year and is perhaps the best known and most photographed lighthouse on the northeast coast.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: Act of the Great and General Court (legislature) of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts dated June 10, 1790 ceded land, with unfinished lighthouse and tenements thereon and jurisdiction thereover, to Government of the United States. Act of Congress of August 10, 1790 authorized appropriation of \$1,500 to complete the lighthouse. United States has owned land and lighthouse since cession by Massachusetts.
2. Date of erection: Begun by Massachusetts in 1787, completed by United States between August and December, 1790. First lighted January 10, 1791.
3. Architect: "The master builders were John Nichols and Jonathan Bryant, masons of the town [of Portland]." (William Willis, Journals of the Rev. Thomas Smith and the Rev. Samuel Deane, Portland, Joseph S. Bailey, 1849, p. 366.) "Jonathan Bryant had a lime kiln near the foot of India Street, where he burned his own limestone which was brought from quarries near Rockland." (Unidentified newspaper article dated 1893, located in Maine Historical Society)

4. Original plans, construction, etc.: Elevation pre-dating 1882 "showing the tower before it was raised, but with a new lantern;" drawing dated 1888 showing plan, elevation and section titled "Fog Signal House for Caloric Engines;" and pre-1872 drawing showing plan, framing plans and section titled "Fog Bell" are in National Archives. Plans, elevations and framing plans dated 1890 for keepers' double dwelling are in office of First Coast Guard District.
5. Alterations and additions:
 - a. Tower: Masonry as completed in 1791 is said to have been 72' high, lantern 15'. Tower "was found too high, and after about twenty years, twenty feet were taken off." (Willis, loc cit.) Willis refers to 1813, when orders were issued "to take off from the top of the tower, twenty-five feet of the stone work, and put on it thereafter a deck made of timber, sufficiently strong to support a new lantern." (Manuscript by Mrs. Chris Reardon, Cape Elizabeth, Maine in possession of Armand Houde, Keeper of Portland Head Light) Elevation showing tower before it was again raised in 1865 shows masonry 44' high capped by granite coping. (National Archives) In 1855 tower was lined with brick, a cast-iron staircase was installed, and lenses were substituted for reflectors. In 1865 \$20,000 appropriated by Congress for "Additional aids to navigation to facilitate the entrance to Portland" was spent primarily to raise tower 30' (?) and install new light. In 1883 tower was lowered 21' and new fourth order lantern, deck, watch room stairs, and new stair rail were installed. In 1885, after public protests, tower was again raised with 20' of brick masonry to present height, and a second order light installed. In 1900 tower was extensively repaired and original stones reset in new mortar. (Reardon mss. and Annual Report of the Secretary of the Treasury, Washington, Government Printing Office, 1855 ff.)
 - b. Keeper's Dwelling: In 1816 the first keeper's house was built. It was a one-story cottage 34' x 20' divided into two rooms with a central chimney, fireplace and oven with "iron mantel trees and gudgeons for a crane." (Reardon mss.) Old photographs show old dwelling had one story plus attic, central door and two front windows, two windows (one above in gable) on each side elevation, and story-and-a-half ell at rear left with second chimney. Ell connected with outbuildings which in turn joined tower, (Photographs in Maine Historical Society, Portland)

Present keepers' double dwelling was built in 1891, partly on foundations of original house. In 1905 interior was sheathed and covered with wallpaper over cloth because of plaster damage from reverberation of gunfire at Fort Preble. Other interior alterations are new heating, sinks, stoves and paint colors. (Reardon mss., Annual Reports op. cit., and interview, 1965, with Armand Houde)

- c. Outbuildings: Garage (stable) has been moved to rear of former position. Two sheds have been removed. Pyramidal-shaped bell house, probably built in 1867, certainly before 1872, is gone. Caloric engine house once had window with shutters on southerly side, now filled in. Fan vent has been cut beside former window. Present sounding board for fog horn was erected over engine house in 1939. (Photographs in possession of Mrs. Reardon and Maine Historical Society)
6. Important old views: Photograph dated 1858 of outing of the Venerable Cunner Association and Propeller Club showing lighthouse, stereograph between 1865 and 1883 showing pyramidal bell house on site, and photograph dated 1894 of new dwelling are in possession of Mrs. Reardon. Two photographs from same position before and after new keepers' house was built are in Maine Historical Society. Very good photograph in office of First Coast Guard District, Boston, Mass., taken from the north at slightly later date shows subsidiary structures clearly, out bell house is not present.

B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure:

Built during the first term of President George Washington from funds disbursed by Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton, Portland Head Light was the first lighthouse to be lighted by the federal government and received Washington's personal attention. He ordered that it be constructed of rubblestone taken from the fields and shores of Cape Elizabeth and stated that the stone could be "handled nicely when hauled by oxen on a drag." Henry Wadsworth Longfellow used to walk out to the light when he lived in Portland and sit and write at its base. (Reardon mss.) Two famous shipwrecks occurred near the light, that of the "Bohemian" in 1864, and that of the "Annie C. McGuire" in 1886. (Robert T[hayer] Sterling, Lighthouses of the Maine Coast and the Men Who Keep Them, Brattleboro, Vt., Stephen Daye Press, 1935)

C. Sources of Information:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Manuscript by Mrs. Chris Reardon, Cape Elizabeth, Maine in possession of Armand Houde, Keeper, Portland Head Light.

Records in office of First Coast Guard District, J. F. Kennedy Federal Building, Government Center, Boston, Massachusetts 02203

Records of U. S. Coast Guard, Record Group 26, National Archives, Washington, D. C. 20408.

Photograph file; & Post Scrapbook, vol. 4, pp. 63, 243; and Portland Scrapbook, vol. 23, p. 108 in Maine Historical Society, 485 Congress Street, Portland, Maine 04111.

Interview (1965) with Armand Houde, Keeper, Portland Head Light, Cape Cottage, Maine 04107.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Annual Report(s) of the Secretary of the Treasury, Washington, Government Printing Office, 1855 ff.

John Neal, Portland Illustrated, Portland, W. S. Jones, 1874.

Lyman H. Nelson, Beautiful Portland, 1889. (Guide book in Maine Historical Society)

Robert T(hayer) Sterling, Lighthouses of the Maine Coast and the Men Who Keep Them, Brattleboro, Vt., Stephen Daye Press, 1935.

William Willis, Journals of the Rev. Thomas Smith and the Rev. Samuel Deane, Portland, Joseph S. Bailey, 1849.

Prepared by Martha Kingsbury
Research Assistant
National Park Service
August, 1965
and Denys Peter Myers
Architectural Historian
National Park Service
May, 1967

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Total complex includes tower, double dwelling, fog signal house, former oil house now used for paint storage, and former barn now used as garage. Group is characteristic and excellent example of building types associated with aids to navigation. Round tapering stone tower begun in 1787 and frame dwelling designed in 1890 are of particular interest.
2. Condition of fabric: Excellent.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions:
 - a. Tower: Diameter of base, 24', total height approximately 90' (light is 80' above ground).
 - b. Dwelling: 47'-7" (including porches and vestibules) x 42' (not including chartroom leading to tower), one and a half stories plus attic.
2. Foundations:
 - a. Tower: Stone masonry on bedrock.
 - b. Dwelling: Stone and brick masonry.
3. Wall construction:
 - a. Tower: Granite random rubble for first 44' to top of dressed granite coping, 20' of brick above. Iron shaft encircled by railed catwalk supports lantern housing within upper catwalk. Stair shaft is brick-lined. Masonry painted white, iron black.
 - b. Dwelling: First floor is clapboarded with horizontal unbeaded matchboard arcading across porches and vestibules. Second floor is shingled except for clapboard front dormer. Attic gables have vertical beaded matchboard siding. Walls are painted white with green trim.
4. Framing:
 - a. Tower: Masonry bearing wall, iron shaft and light housing above.
 - b. Dwelling: Wooden balloon frame, studs 16" on center.

5. Porches:

- a. Tower: Entrance to tower is from brick gable-roofed office connected with chartroom adjoining ell of dwelling.
- b. Dwelling: House has two porches under lower slope of main roof with broad arched openings at front corners. Porches give access to vestibules of double dwelling.

6. Chimneys:

- a. Tower: Ball finial atop lantern roof is pierced on underside to vent heat of lantern.
- b. Dwelling: Three square brick chimneys straddle roof ridges, tops are stepped in to form truncated pyramidal caps.

7. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: None of importance
- b. Windows: None of importance

8. Roof:

- a. Light house tower: Metal cap with ball ventilator and finial.
- b. Keeper's quarters, whistle house and connecting elements have gable and hip roofs, composition shingle covering.

C. Detailed Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. Keepers' quarters: Identical two story units in parallel; the first floor of each unit consists of entry, living room, dining room and kitchen. Stairs to basement and to second floor. Three bedrooms and bath at second floor.
- b. Office, beacon room and a passageway connect the keeper's quarters with the tower room and tower.
- c. Tower: Circular space, two rectangular niches, and circular iron stairs to lantern level and catwalks.

2. Stairways:

- a. Keeper's quarters; stairs to basement and second floor.
 - b. Tower: Circular iron stair about central post, perforated treads.
3. Flooring: Painted concrete brick and wood, wood strip floors and plastic covering. Perforated and textured iron floors.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster and stone. Painted.
5. Doorways and doors: None of importance
6. Decorative features and trim: None
7. Notable hardware: Light equipment, fog horn assembly, old pintles for shutters.
8. Lighting: None of importance, except for light apparatus
9. Heating: Fireplaces in the major rooms of keepers' quarters. Modern hot water heating system.

D. Site and Surroundings:

The lighthouse complex is located on a headland from Cape Elizabeth overlooking Casco Bay. Outbuildings include a garage and paint locker. To the north of the tower and whistle house is a concrete slab fragment of an earlier building and flag staff. Walks surround the complex, and a wood and wire fence provides a barrier between the headland and rocks and water below. Blockhouses and bunkers of Fort Williams are in the immediate vicinity.

Prepared by:

F. Blair Reeves, A.I.A.
HABS Coastal Maine, 1965
August, 1965

ADDENDUM TO:
PORTLAND HEAD LIGHT
Portland Head, approximately 1/2 mile East of Shore Road
Cape Elizabeth
Cumberland County
Maine

HABS No. ME-123

HABS
ME
3-CAPEL
2

PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C St. NW
Washington, DC 20240