

## **ALF helps the Friends of Wood Island Lighthouse find a Keeper.**



Edward Frank Wood Island Light Keeper 1952-1956

Steve Frank, son of Keeper Edward Frank read an article, by Bob Trapani, in the Kennebec Journal which is a local paper in Augusta, Maine. At the end of the article, it said that if anyone had ideas, artifacts or any information about lighthouses – please contact Bob Trapani. Steve called Bob and Bob asked Steve to call Tim Harrison. Well, you know what happens when you get in touch with Tim – the wheels turn. Because of Tim at ALF, Steve was invited to do a talk at the April 2006 ALF dinner. It was here that the Friends of Wood Island Lighthouse met Steve. Thank you Tim and Bob for it has been a wonderful opportunity and great honor to meet both Steve and his mother Eloise Frank. She has shared many stories and much information about life and work at Wood Island Lighthouse as well as many photographs.



Steve Frank, Eloise Frank and Michel Blake

Ed and Eloise started their assignment on Wood Island in January 1952. Steve was born three months later on April 1<sup>st</sup>. Michel being of school age, lived in Vermont with her grandmother during the school months and joined the family on Wood Island for summer and Christmas vacations.

It would take a lot of space to report all of our findings gleaned from Eloise so we will just mention a few.

The lighthouse on Wood Island (just off Biddeford Pool, Maine) marks the entrance to Wood Island Harbor and the Saco River and has done so for nearly 200 years being built in 1808. It stands on the East end of the island in order to best send its' guiding beam to mariners at sea. Those coming to the island from the mainland approach from the west end. It is about a ½ mile walk from the boat landing to the lighthouse, from Eloise we learned that the boardwalk which we enjoy today was not there when she and Ed brought baby Steve home from the hospital on April 10<sup>th</sup>, 1952. It was built a bit later and came right through the middle of the island as it does today. The narrow path which they trod on April 10th came around the southern shore which is the most protected side of the island.

The light source inside the fourth order Fresnel lens at this time was a mantel lamp which burned Kerosene. Eloise described in great detail how this all worked. She also confirmed that the clock work mechanism to turn the lens was the mode of the day. Michel reported that she even got 25 cents if she would get up early for the predawn

winding. Edward did the last light prep at about 11:30 PM. All apparatus worked for only about 6 hours before another winding was needed. Mom and Dad must have enjoyed those times when Michel took a turn ascending the tower and winding the crank. Another of her tasks when she was on island was to manually ring the fog bell when her Dad was rewinding the fog bell clock-work mechanism. She had to do it just right to keep the fog bell characteristics correct during this interval. She used the ring on a string in the lower left of this photo. The string pulled the clapper on the bell.



Keeper Edward Frank winding Fog Bell

The last jewel which I will mention, given to us by Eloise, is the story of the Fog Bell itself. We have through our research followed the bell from its casting in England in 1872 to its' current location at Vine's Landing in Biddeford Pool.



This location overlooks the lighthouse and is much more secure than its' previous precipitous location on the edge of the cliff on Wood Island. As it was cast in steel, the salt air caused it to quickly corrode. It was removed from the Fog Bell Tower in 1890 and it sat in the yard for over 100 years. What we didn't know, was that sometime between 1890 and 1952, it was buried upside down in the ground in order to make a flower planter

out of it! Eloise described how she and her husband dug it up and managed to roll it to a better location opposite the bell tower – they thought that is where it should be. That is where it remained until its' journey to Biddeford Pool aboard Marshall Alexander's boat the Dee Dee Mae in 1976 and ultimate display at the landing.

Where is that buried fog bell?



Investigation of a 1944 photo from the Coast Guard Historian's Office, (Wash. DC) proved Eloise's story without a doubt.



When you focus in – there that bell is – buried upside down right there in the yard!  
A mystery uncovered – Thank you Eloise!

Edward and Eloise kept the light at Portland Head Light  
after their work at Wood Island Light.  
Keeper Edward Frank passed away July 16, 1980.

Thank you ALF for bringing FOWIL such a treasure as Eloise Frank.

Article by Sheri Poftak, Friends of Wood Island Lighthouse