

School For Lighthouse Keeper's Children

The formal schooling of the keeper's children was a serious problem at many Great Lakes lighthouses. In some cases, parents served as the teachers for their children. If possible, lighthouse keepers with school-age children would be assigned to stations near schools so that the children would not have to travel a great distance. This was not possible if the light was on an island. The children would then have to live temporarily with another family on the mainland while going to school. This was a great hardship for the entire family.

Beginning in 1876, the Lighthouse Board put together small, portable libraries for lighthouse keepers and their families. These "libraries" included about fifty books enclosed in a heavy, wooden box. It contained a Bible, a prayer book and books about history, science, poetry, and fiction. These "libraries" were left at the stations for a few months and then exchanged for another "library" when the supply ship or wagon came to the station.

These libraries were very popular. The lighthouse keepers and their families looked forward to receiving a new box of books. The books not only encouraged the children and adults to read, they also helped the families cope with the loneliness and isolation of the lighthouse station.

One Tale (Taken from *The Way It Was: Memories of My Childhood at Grand Traverse Lighthouse*, by Bette McCormick Olli)



Going to School in Winter

"In the dead of winter we never saw the lighthouse in the daylight, except on weekends. On week days we were roused out of our warm beds in the morning around 4:30 or 5:00 o'clock. We had to get up early as there were seven of us all going to school at the same time and we had to take our turns getting washed up in the wash basin in the sink. Water for washing up was supplied by a pitcher pump which pumped rain water from the cistern underneath the house. To this we added hot water from the tea kettle or the reservoir attached to the back end of the stove. After washing up we girls got dressed next to the coal heater in the parlor."