

THE WOMEN OF TILLAMOOK ROCK???

ERRONEOUS MYTHS DISPELLED!

By Debra Baldwin

Every Sunday during the summer of 1905, the upper echelon of Astoria, Oregon could look forward to reading "The Week in Society as Seen by Mademoiselle Yvonne" in her regular "Sunday Chatter" column for the *Daily Astorian*. The Mademoiselle reported on all the happenings "With the Elite," ranging from anniversary and wedding parties, to club news, visitors, dances and entertainments.

On July 2nd of that year, a heading in her column read, "Guests of Captain Gregory," as if the good Captain had decided to host a dinner party for out-of-town visitors. Mademoiselle Yvonne continued: "Captain Gregory entertained a number of young ladies aboard the steamer *Heather*, on Thursday afternoon, when he made a trip to Tillamook Rock Lighthouse. The members of the party were safely landed on the rock where they were shown through the government building."

The casual reader was probably unaware that Captain Gregory was the Master of the U.S. Lighthouse Service tender *Heather* on a work trip to the lighthouse at the time; or that in order to make a landing on the rock, those women would have had to ride in an open, slatted box swung from a rocking, small cargo ship by means a derrick to a landing platform on the rock, flying through the air at a height of at least 60 feet.

The article then gave the names of 15 women "who enjoyed the outing" to the Rock, which included two daughters of Captain Gregory and also a daughter of his First Mate, Carl Hammarstrom. The group were members of the Dixie Girls Club at the time and ranged in age between 14 to their early 20s.

This page from the Register of Visitors at Tillamook Rock Light-Station shows the signatures of the six young ladies from the Dixie Girls Club who ascended the Rock on June 29, 1905 along with Captain William Gregory. (*Lighthouse Digest* archives)



This very rare mid-1880s drawing of Tillamook Rock Lighthouse was saved in an album of head keeper Rasmus Petersen. The U.S. Lighthouse tender *Shubrick*, shown to the right of the Rock, helped deliver materials to build the lighthouse. Perhaps Kate Hobson rode out to Tillamook Rock on the *Shubrick* prior to its decommissioning in 1886. (Courtesy of Elizabeth Petersen Bottemiller)

Astoria socialite Gertrude Upshur was voted Queen of the Astoria Centennial Pageants in 1911 and the most beautiful woman of the city according to her peers. Newspapers claimed she leaned toward "domestic life rather than to athletics," though that certainly wasn't the case on her visit to Tillamook Rock Lighthouse as she rode the box up to the Rock in June of 1905 on her Dixie Girls Club outing. (*Oregon Daily Journal*)

REGISTER of Visitors at		TILLAMOOK ROCK LIGHT STATION	Light-Station.
DATE	NAME	RESIDENCE	ADDRESS IN.
June 29, '05	Feta Drain	Astoria, Oregon	165 Bond St
"	Lois Parker	"	239 Asil St
"	Gertrude Upshur	"	169 Com St
"	Elizabeth Gregory	"	397 Eight St
"	Anna Painter	"	1613 Franklin
"	Wm. Gregory	U.S.S. Heather	
"	May Morgan	Astoria, Oregon	678 Jerome
July 31	W. H. Fair	See Side	Conroy
Aug 2	Alfred Gilbert Jr	Seaside	Oregon
		Portland, Oregon	590 Alameda

However, regarding this social jaunt, the Register of Visitors at Tillamook Rock Light-Station only records the names of six of the girls who actually signed it, proving their presence in the lighthouse itself, rather than just viewing it from the water on the tender. Perhaps the other nine lost their desire to take an inside tour when they saw what they would be required to do to get up to it. Captain Gregory accompanied those who did agree to make the effort, and it could be imagined that he rode with them, perhaps two at a time in the box, to make sure nothing happened to them on their trip up and back.

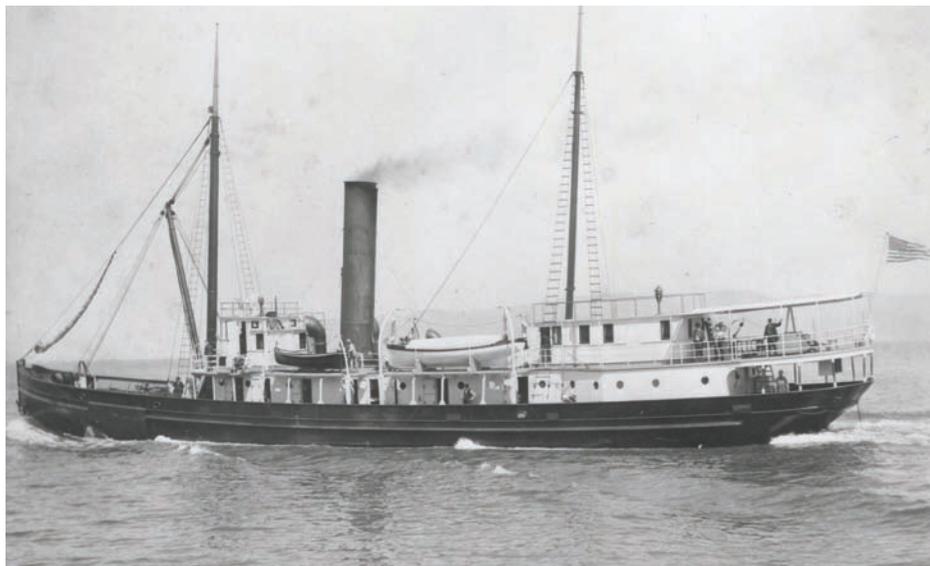
It was probably the most memorable excursion the Dixie Girls Club ever took and was never forgotten by the six young ladies who were brave enough to make the ascent.

The Written Evidence

The Register of Visitors, which was started in 1896, contains the signatures of no less than 18 women who actually made it to the top of the Tillamook Rock to visit the inside of the lighthouse between 1903 and 1905. The first entries appear on February 19, 1903, when the Lidwell sisters, Lillian and Nellie, came accompanied by 13th District Inspector Carlos Calkins. The purpose of their visit isn't known since they had no direct relationship to any personnel at the lighthouse.

They both worked for the phone company in Astoria and their father was a sea captain. However, that was the year there was talk of putting in a telegraph for communications from the lighthouse to the mainland, so possibly they were connected with that process somehow.

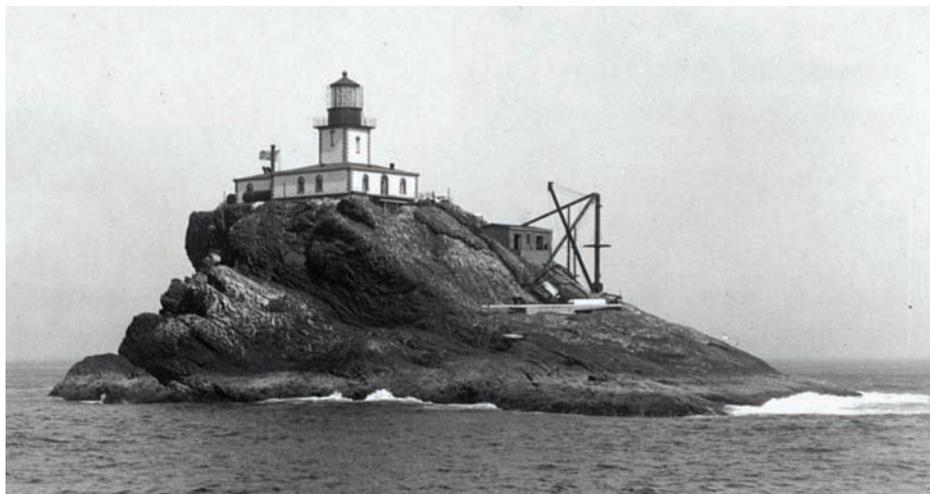
The next group of women visitors came a few months later in June of 1903, with Captain Gregory escorting them, this time from the tender *Manzanita*. In that group of six ladies, Marie Amundson had ties to the lighthouse crew, being the niece of keeper Lars Amundson, Tillamook Rock's 1st assistant at the time. Two years later, Lars transferred to Cape Arago Light and Marie went with him to do the housekeeping. She married his assistant, Oscar R. Langlois and after Lars died, she and Oscar went to Coquille River Lighthouse until 1939. Did she have any inkling that her willingness to visit Lars on Tilly would result in spending more than 35 years of her life as a full-time resident of lighthouse life?



The lighthouse tender *Heather* was the third tender in the 13th district. Captain William Gregory was the first captain with Emil Hammarstrom as his Mate. Both of these men had their daughters with them out to visit Tillamook Rock Lighthouse in 1905 as part of the Dixie Girls Club group. (Courtesy of Clatsop County Historical Society)



Captain William E. Gregory (b. 1848) spent over 30 years on lighthouse tenders in Oregon, Washington, and Alaska. He was on the tender *Manzanita* from 1886 until he took command of the lighthouse tender *Heather* when it was built in 1903. (James Clafin collection, *Lighthouse Digest* archives)



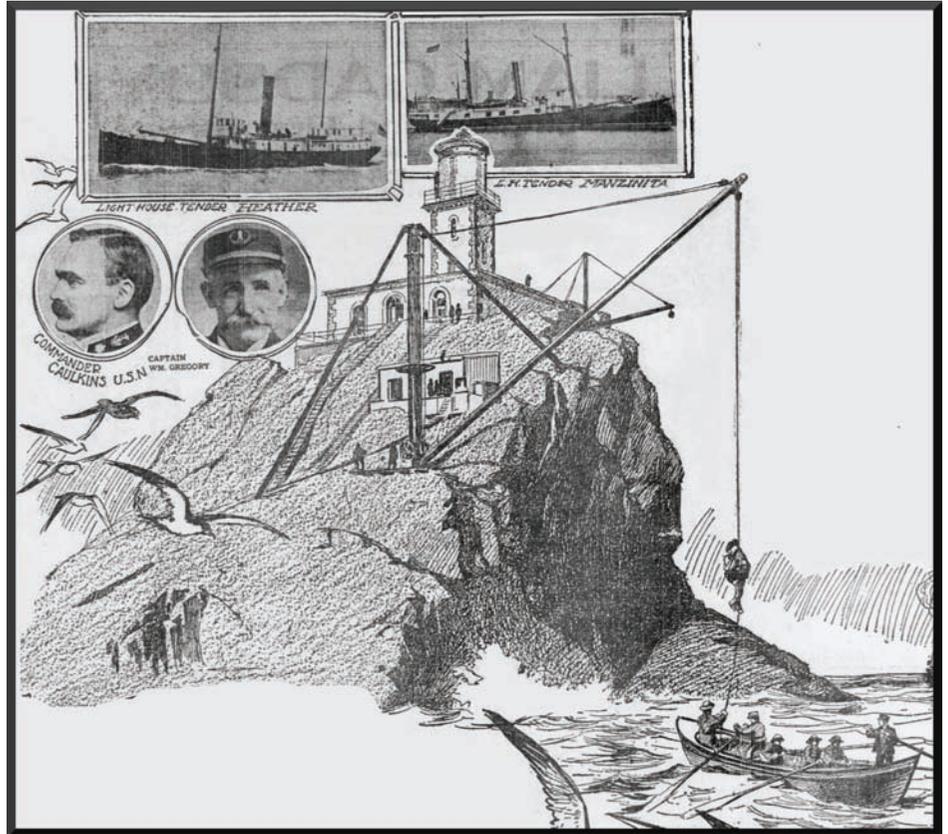
Two years after this photo was taken in 1891, Charlotte Petersen, wife of head keeper Rasmus Petersen, stayed for an entire four weeks at Tillamook Rock Lighthouse. (Library of Congress)

Then, in March of 1905, Inspector Calkins returned again, bringing his daughter, Harriett, and three other women up to the lighthouse for a visit along with Captain Gregory. But this was not the first time an inspector had bought a family member onto the Rock. According to an article published in January of 1900 in *The Daily Morning Courier and Journal*, "Lighthouse Inspector Sebree took his bride there on their wedding tour in 1888."

The article, in describing the isolation and solitude of a lighthouse keeper assigned to the Rock, reported that "... diversions for those lonely keepers consist in the visits of tourist parties with ladies, who are permitted to ascend to the rocky home in the basket or cage. Mrs. Kate Hobson, of Astoria, was the first lady who ever visited the lighthouse via the basket car. . . One keeper is said to have had his wife at the lighthouse one entire summer month, she coming in by small boat, which was derricked up alongside."

The Temporary Family Station

We know that this keeper's wife was Charlotte Petersen, during the first year of her marriage to head keeper Rasmus Petersen. Regarding Charlotte's arrival and departure, Rasmus wrote in his personal journal on August 14, 1893: "I put off for the Rock in my boat taking my wife along, leaving the beach at 10:15 and arrived at the Rock at 11:45AM. All well as the weather was fine and the sea smooth." And next month on September 11th, he recorded that: "Mr. Pesonen and I landed my wife at Clatsop Beach, left station at 10AM and landed 11:15AM and we went with her to P. Mattson's ranch and



This illustration for the April 17, 1904 edition of the *Sunday Oregonian* shows Captain William E. Gregory and Inspector Carlos Gilman Calkins, along with the U.S. Lighthouse Service tenders, *Heather* and *Manzanita*. Calkins also accompanied women out to visit Tilly, including his daughter, Harriet. (*Lighthouse Digest* archives)



Pictured are Lars F. Amundsen (b. 1853) and his niece Marie Amundsen. Marie visited Lars at Tillamook Rock Lighthouse in 1903. He would later transfer to Cape Arago Lighthouse where he died of stomach cancer in 1909, ending his lightkeeping career after 11 years. (Courtesy of Greg Kandoll)



returned again to the Station at 4:30PM. Light south wind and sea smooth. My wife's stay on the Rock, 4 weeks to date."

Rasmus probably assumed it would be easier for Charlotte to get on the Rock by remaining in the station boat while it was hoisted up to the landing platform instead of riding in the box, but according to family memories, after Charlotte had arrived, she had emphatically declared, "When I get off of this Rock I will not get back on."

Captain William E. Gregory is shown leaning on the railing above one of the tender *Manzanita's* life buoys. Captain Gregory escorted at least 16 women out to the Rock on lighthouse tenders from 1903 to 1905. (James Clafin collection, *Lighthouse Digest* archives)



13th Lighthouse District Inspector Uriel Sebree and Anna Bridgman were married on June 16, 1886. Probably not too many society brides of that era could boast that their wedding tour included riding a box from a rocking boat up to a lighthouse on an ocean rock. After an illustrious naval career, Inspector Sebree later served as the secretary of the Lighthouse Board from 1904 to 1907 and retired as a Rear Admiral. (*Lighthouse Digest archives*)

Still, when the tender came after two weeks, presumably to check up on her and see if she wanted to leave, she stayed for another two weeks beyond that. Four weeks for any 19th century woman to spend in a such a confined space, with or without her husband, and in the company of three other men, with no type of plumbing let alone a toilet, certainly would have been a challenge.

Rasmus also recorded in his journal during July of 1893 that a group of six women visited the Rock “The *Manzanita* came here on the 11th at 10AM. Landed supplies and oil. The Asst. Inspector J.B. Blish and six ladies landed on the Rock together with Capt. Gregory of the tender and another gentleman. The ladies all enjoyed the visit and the inspector inspected the station with satisfaction. The Stmr. left again at 3:30PM for Astoria.”

Since the first 15 years are missing from the Register of Visitors from 1881 to 1896, we don’t know how many more women actually toured the Rock or stayed longer than a day. During the first three decades of Tilly’s operation, there were probably

Anna Sebree was very active socially throughout her life due to her husband’s fame and positions. She was president of the “Official Womans Board” at the 1916 California-Panama Exposition in San Diego. (*Lighthouse Digest archives*)

many more women who came onto the Rock, braving the cargo boat and box, just for the adventure and a chance to take a tour of the lighthouse. But all that came to a grinding halt sometime after 1910 when the Lighthouse Bureau reorganized and George R. Putnam became the commissioner.

The Forbidden Years

There are several letters preserved in the National Archives of requests from or in behalf of women to gain permission from Commissioner Putnam to be taken out to Tillamook Rock by the lighthouse tender for a tour. In all instances, between the years of 1918 to 1932, the requests were officially denied. Some of the reasons for the petitions and the subsequent denial responses were rather humorous.

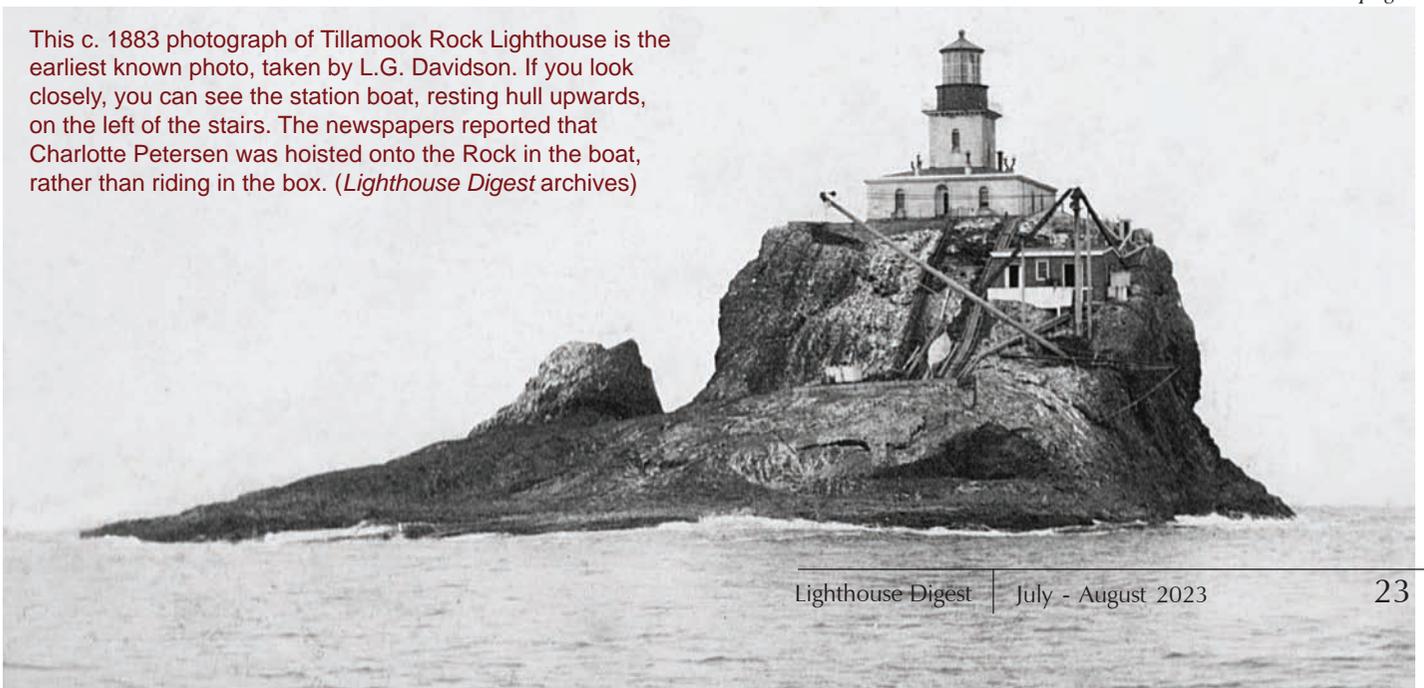


In June of 1918, a prominent Astoria lawyer, John H. Smith, wrote to 17th District Supervisor, Robert Warrack, requesting that his cousin, Miss Leslie Walker, be granted permission to ride out on the tender to visit the lighthouse because she “ranks high in scientific investigation.” She had a doctorate from the University of California and was “a fellow of the American Institute of Archeology and various other scientific orders. On archeology in particular, she is considered a high authority, having for years directed excavations and archeological research in Greece that have afforded some of the best specimens in this country.” Did she want to excavate Tillamook Rock?

Warrack forwarded the request letter to Washington, D.C. along with his

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This c. 1883 photograph of Tillamook Rock Lighthouse is the earliest known photo, taken by L.G. Davidson. If you look closely, you can see the station boat, resting hull upwards, on the left of the stairs. The newspapers reported that Charlotte Petersen was hoisted onto the Rock in the boat, rather than riding in the box. (*Lighthouse Digest archives*)





This photo of Rasmus and Charlotte Petersen, and their son, Alexander, was taken at the Seattle World's Fair in 1909. According to the family, "Charlotte was obviously a fiercely independent woman with a great sense of adventure. She left her family and followed her new husband to be a pioneer woman and agreed to spend time on Tillamook Rock – her tomboy upbringing and determination giving her the fortitude and skills to survive four weeks at the lighthouse – more than some men!" (Courtesy of Elizabeth Petersen Bottemiller)

additional comments: "The Inspector sees no objection to Miss Walker making the trip on the tender, but does not recommend that she be permitted to land on the rock, for the reason that such landing, unless conditions are most favorable, is more or less dangerous, and in the case of a woman is likely to interfere with the effective operation of the boat's crew in making the landing."

Did Superintendent Warrack think the tender crew would be too smitten with her to get her safely into the box for the ascent? Was he worried that they would trip over her skirts or have to hold her in a wrong place to steady her? Or perhaps, being thus distracted, they would allow her to be dunked in the ocean as many a keeper had been while riding in the box as it lifted off the whale boat?

The reply of denial from the Bureau chose a different tack: "Return not approved, in view of Department instructions prohibiting during the period of war admitting persons to vessels, light stations, etc., of the Lighthouse Service. Advise your correspondent accordingly."

One of the more amusing comments was made by Superintendent Warrack in a 1928 request letter he forwarded to Putnam regarding "Miss Letitia V. Wood, asking permission for herself and ten others [all women] to make a trip to Tillamook Rock Lighthouse about the end of March.

"The Superintendent personally advised Miss Wood that permission for such trips was granted only to those connected with the Service or for other public purposes and that in any case the landing of women on the rock would not be permitted on account of the danger in passing from boat

to cage and vice versa. He further informed Miss Wood that by the time tender reached the Rock they would be all seasick and unable to even look at the Rock."

Warrack went on to say that because the trip was merely for pleasure or curiosity with no benefit to the Service or of educational value to the women, he recommended that permission not be granted. The Bureau agreed with his opinion and the request came back denied.

At another point, Superintendent Warrack petitioned Commissioner Putnam for direct authority to give permission regarding all visits to Tillamook Rock, rather than forwarding every request to Washington, D.C.

Warrack wrote: "The interest of the public in this particular lighthouse seems unflagging and the desire for at least a close-up view of it is stimulated by the matter published officially and otherwise concerning it.... It is recommended that authority be given the Superintendent to grant such requests within his discretion, reporting to the Bureau the name of the visitors who actually make trips.

"It has been the Superintendent's experience in the past that comparatively few visitors are physically fit when they reach the Rock to undertake the landing, and many of those who are not seasick lose their nerve when they see how the landing is accomplished. Such permission, if granted, to be at the risk and hazard of the person concerned and without expense

Robert Warrack (far left), Ralph R. Tinkham (3rd from left) and Commission George R. Putnam (far right) attended the 1929 Superintendents Conference in Washington, D.C. Putnam and Warrack would not allow women to visit the lighthouse but Tinkham was much more lenient in the 1930s. (Anna Brans Collection, *Lighthouse Digest* archives)



to or interference with the work of the Lighthouse Service.

But Commissioner Putnam did not completely agree: "Returned to 17th Superintendent, who is advised that the Bureau considers it advisable to continue present system of considering each application on its merits. Superintendent may submit recommendation in cases which he considers meritorious and desirable, and in an especially meritorious case where time does not permit asking for prior authority, he may act and get Bureau's subsequent approval. P."

A Chosen Few

As evidenced by the lack of any women's signatures in the Register of Visitors, it appears that as long as 17th District Superintendent Robert R. Warrack and Commissioner George R. Putnam worked together, they did not allow one woman to come onto the Rock between 1915 and 1929; but all that changed when Warrack retired and Ralph R. Tinkham took over the position— at least, changed unofficially.

The Register of Visitors shows women's signatures starting up again in 1930. On August 10th at 6AM, head keeper William Hill left the station for an overnight trip to Warrenton, near Astoria, to attend the burial service for former Tillamook Rock head keeper Robert Gerlof. While Hill

was gone, 3rd assistant keeper, Albert H. Johnson entertained his wife, Hazel, and a neighbor friend from Astoria, Eleanor Lambertson, for the day.

It is doubtful these ladies had any permission given from the district, official or otherwise, and maybe even keeper Hill was unaware they were coming. There are no other signatures in the Register of tender crew or lighthouse personnel accompanying them, so it is likely that Albert Johnson took William Hill to Clatsop in the station boat and met the women there to bring them back.

On June 14, 1931, 4th assistant Orval A. Risdon's new wife of eight weeks, Bertha, signed the Register as the only visitor, unaccompanied. Keeper George Wheeler had gone on leave that day. Perhaps Risdon had rowed him ashore in the station boat and brought Bertha back to the lighthouse. In this case, however, head keeper Hill was at the lighthouse, so at least he would have known about it and allowed it to happen. One more pair of women's signatures appeared about a month later in 1931, but neither of them were related to any keepers and they were not local to Astoria.

Commissioner Putnam, however, still maintained a hard line where granting women access to Tilly officially was concerned, even if they had a truly legitimate reason for going that would give some positive press for the Lighthouse Service.

In April of 1932, a request was forwarded to Putnam by Superintendent Tinkham from Miss Beatrice Bennett, who was a reporter for the *Seaside Signal*.

Beatrice wrote: "A picture of the Tillamook Rock lighthouse is a part of the *Seaside Signal* masthead and the paper indirectly derives its name from the fact that the lighthouse is not far away. The editor of the *Signal*, Max Schafer, wants me to get a firsthand story about the lighthouse for the paper."



This c. 1940 photo shows men riding the derrick box up to the lighthouse from the tender's whaleboat below. (Coast Guard Historian's Office)

Keeper Art Shaffer's wife, Olive, and her two young daughters, Donna and Kathryn, are riding in a similarly constructed derrick box at Cape Flattery Lighthouse in Washington in 1949. This photo demonstrates that women could safely undertake a trip in the box without too much difficulty, if they had the nerve. (Donna Shaffer Shinney Collection, *Lighthouse Digest* archives)



Superintendent Tinkham replied to Beatrice that he could forward her letter to Washington, D.C. if she desired, and while "There is no doubt that such permission would be granted a representative of the press, especially for the purpose indicated . . . there may be some doubt in this instance of permission being granted to a woman to visit the station because of the hazards encountered in getting on and off the station. It is frequently impossible to make landing at this rock, and in all cases, there is considerable risk involved."

Beatrice replied: "I realize that there would no doubt be some risk involved in landing on the rock, but my health is excellent and I am very active physically." So, Tinkham forwarded the letter on. There

was no reply from the Commissioner in the files, but clearly, her request was denied as she never signed the Register, wrote a story about the lighthouse, nor were there any representatives of the *Seaside Signal* listed among any of the names during the rest of 1932.

A Last Moving Visit

But there was one last set of women's signatures in the Register to note during this era. On August 28, 1938, 1st assistant George Wheeler's wife, Mrs. Virginia Wheeler; her sister-in-law, Sadie Stiltner; and her husband, Clifford Stiltner, signed their names at 1:15PM. What makes this visit so remarkable is that it was captured on motion picture film that remains part of cherished home movies, still in the family's possession today.

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Albert H. Johnson and Hazel M. Graves were married on July 14, 1917. Beside Tillamook Rock, Albert served at least 18 years at Oregon lights: Cape Meares, Heceta Head and Umpqua River, as well as Washington lights: Burrows Island, Cape Flattery, and Lime Kiln. He also spent at least eight years at the Tongue Point Depot in Astoria, Oregon. Hazel came out to Tilly to visit him in 1930 for a day. (Courtesy of Kenneth Ryan)

The film shows Virginia Wheeler, snug in the pants of a breeches buoy life ring, being whisked into the air out of the helping hands of two crewmen from off the deck of the Point Adams Life-Saving Station motorboat. She is caught on the Rock's landing platform by her husband George, and after bouncing around a bit on her high heels, she is able to stand up while George is laughing, facing the camera as he undoes her harness.

In the Tillamook Rock Record of Absences, George Wheeler had notated on August 28 that he left the station at 10:30AM and "brought over some friends" at 1:15PM. They stayed only two hours until he recorded that he left the station again at 3:30 to take them back.

This was the last known visit of any woman to the Rock, official or otherwise, during its operational years. Once World War II began in 1939, along with the consolidation of the U.S. Lighthouse Service into the Coast Guard, Tillamook Rock Lighthouse became a military installation. The Register of Visitors had mostly the signatures of other Coast Guard personnel until the lighthouse was decommissioned in 1957.



Virginia Stiltner Wheeler (l), wife of keeper George H. Wheeler; her brother Clifford Stiltner; and his wife, Sadie Rosendale Stiltner (r), visited Tillamook Rock Lighthouse on August 28, 1938. There is family film footage of Virginia landing on the Rock via a breeches buoy that day. (Courtesy of Elaine Talbot)



Tillamook Rock Lighthouse visitors, Clifford and Sadie Stiltner (far left), and Keeper George H. Wheeler (far right), are at a family gathering c. 1939. (Courtesy of Elaine Talbot)

Orval Risdon married Bertha Poulson on April 22, 1931 and began service at Tillamook Rock on May 15th. Apparently, she couldn't wait for him to go on his first leave as a month later on June 14th, she came out to Tillamook Rock to be with him for the day. In addition to Tilly, Orval served at Smith Island, WA; Cape Blanco, OR; and New Dungeness, WA. Unfortunately, while at New Dungeness Lighthouse in 1944, he suffered a heart attack and received a medical discharge from the Coast Guard. He died five years later at the very young age of 45. (Courtesy of Chris Colpitts)



A Final Note

All in all, we know of at least 34 women who visited Tillamook Rock, and out of that number, we have definitive written proof that 32 of them made it up to the lighthouse, whether by means of box, boat hoist or breeches buoy.

Many articles and books, even those recently published, erroneously claim that "no woman ever set foot on Tillamook Rock" and further, that no woman ever lived there. But the Register of Visitors at Tillamook Rock Light-Station, along with keeper Rasmus Petersen's journal prove otherwise. If the 1900 newspaper was correct in saying that the keepers there received visits of "tourist parties with ladies," who knows how many times over the decades a woman's high-heeled boot actually left their mark on that chunk of basalt to brighten the lonely lighthouse keeper's life!

Tilly's Women

Pre-1886	Kate Hobson
1886	Anne Bridgman Sebrec
July 11, 1893	Six unnamed women
August 14, 1893	Charlotte Petersen*†
February 19, 1903	Lillian Lidwell Nellie Lidwell
June 8, 1903	Josephine Linderman Marge Ross Mrs. J. N. Callaway Jennie H. Stanyan Mary L. Amundson* Mrs. F. Belfrage
March 24, 1904	Katherine Sitton Brand Carlotta Parker Imogene Stuart Harriet R. Calkins
June 29, 1905	Leta Drain Lois Parker Gertrude Upshur Elizabeth Gregory Anna Painter May Morgan
Aug 10, 1930	Mrs. A. H. Johnson* Mrs. N. M. Lambertson
June 14, 1931	Mrs O. A. Risdon*
July 19, 1931	Evelyn Ingle Miss Ann Wagner
August 28, 1938	Mrs. George Wheeler* Mrs. Clifford Stiltner

*Keeper's wife or relative

†Stayed on the Rock four weeks

A Tragic Tilly Tale

By Debra Baldwin



Keeper George Harrison Wheeler (b. 1893) served at Tillamook Rock Lighthouse for a total of 21 years. He started as 4th assistant in 1928 and worked his way up to 1st assistant by February of 1932, when he married 24-year-old Virginia Stiltner from Washington. It was a second marriage for 38-year-old George, and he wanted to settle down and have a family with Virginia, so he was able to secure a transfer that year to Turn Point Lighthouse on Stuart Island in Washington, which was a very nice family station.

Virginia got pregnant right away and they were excited to expect their first child by the end of that year. Tragically, Virginia gave birth prematurely to their daughter on October 29, and little Lucy Virginia Wheeler only lived for two days. She was buried in the Stuart Island cemetery about a mile away from the lighthouse on November 1st.

George and Virginia were totally devastated. George couldn't deal with the loss and the following week he went to a local establishment and got drunk. Unfortunately, he returned to the lighthouse in that condition and was promptly dismissed from the Lighthouse Service on November 7th since this was during the time of prohibition and drinking on duty was not tolerated.

George and Virginia went back to live with her family in Lewis County, Washington, to try to endure their grief. According to the family, they never did get over little Lucy's death and never had another child.

In 1935, George got back into the good graces of the Lighthouse Service and returned to Tillamook Rock, but only as a 3rd assistant. The next year, he was promoted back to the same position as 1st assistant from when he had left three years earlier. George remained 1st assistant under head keeper Ed Laschinger for the next nine years and finally was able to be promoted to head keeper upon Laschinger's retirement in 1945.

Meanwhile, George's wife, Virginia, who worked as an operator for the telephone company, maintained a home in Astoria where George would come to relax on his leaves from the Rock. It was on a two-week leave in September of 1952, that George was out fishing in a boat with some friends at the mouth of the Columbia River. According to AP newspaper reports, "He slipped on the deck of the troller *Groth* and splashed into the waves at the river entrance.

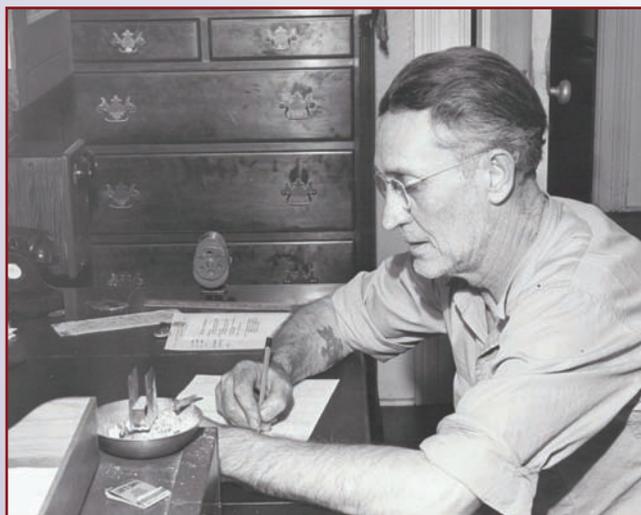
"He bobbed to the surface, and set out swimming strongly for the boat. Just as those aboard were about to haul him up, he collapsed. He was dead by the time they could pull him aboard. There was a gash on his head, perhaps suffered when he fell overboard.

"A resident of Astoria, he had been with the lighthouse service and – since 1939 – as a civilian in the Coast Guard more than 20 years. Only three days ago, he finished another of his six-week shifts on the lighthouse, and was home for a two-week period."

Had George lived, he would probably have remained on Tillamook Rock until it was decommissioned five years later in 1957 and become the longest-serving keeper there at 26 years, beating Robert Gerlof's record of 25 years. As it was, he was the second longest-serving keeper at Tillamook Rock Lighthouse.

Virginia Stiltner Wheeler lived until she was 97 years old, but never remarried. She is buried in the Stiltner Memorial Cemetery in Morton, Washington along with her brother, Clifford Stiltner and his wife, Sadie, who both visited Tillamook Rock with her so many years ago.

George Harrison Wheeler was laid to rest in the Willamette National Cemetery in Portland, Oregon. He was only 58 when he died. It is hoped that one day, a U.S. Lighthouse Service Memorial Marker can be placed at his grave to honor his long service at Tillamook Rock Lighthouse.



Head keeper George Harrison Wheeler filling out reports at Tillamook Rock Lighthouse c. 1950. (Courtesy of Oregon Historical Society)



Baby Lucy Virginia Wheeler's grave in the Stuart Island Cemetery in Washington.