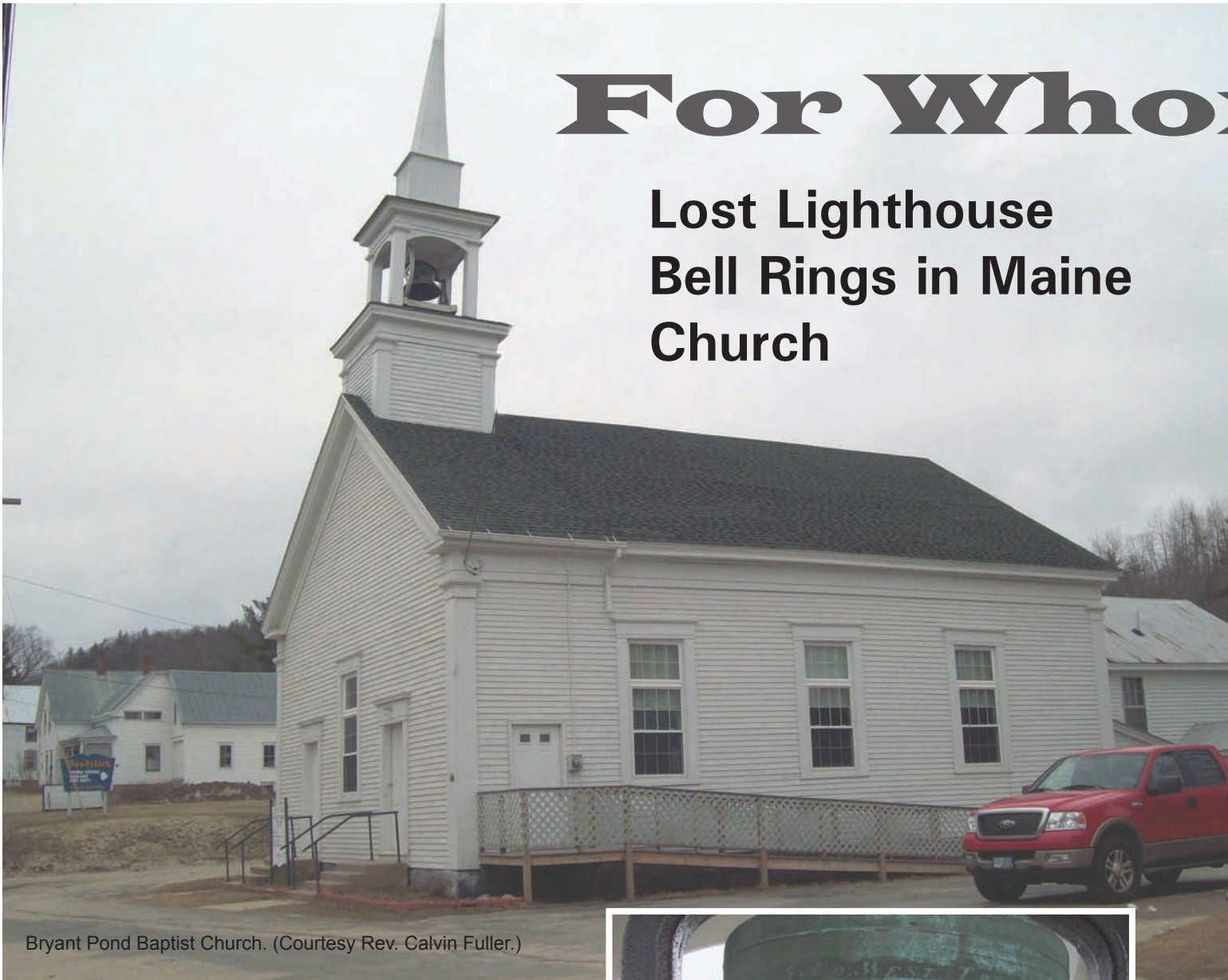


For Who

Lost Lighthouse Bell Rings in Maine Church



Bryant Pond Baptist Church. (Courtesy Rev. Calvin Fuller.)

By Timothy Harrison

Almost lost and forgotten in the dusty pages of time is the little known fact that the bell that hangs in the steeple of the Bryant Pond Baptist Church in Bryant Pond Maine is, in my opinion, without doubt, the most famous bell in lighthouse history. In fact, with perhaps the exception of the Liberty Bell, it could easily be stated by some that it is one of the most historically significant bells in the United States.

Every Sunday morning for the past ten years, 80-year-old bell ringer, Ken Hoyt, pulls on the heavy rope to ring the historic bell that hangs high above him in the belfry of the Bryant Pond Baptist Church. Mr. Hoyt has followed in the footsteps of other bell ringers who have been ringing this bell at the church since it was installed there 105 years ago in 1906.

To the many who hear its tune, it probably sounds like any of the thousands of other church bells that ring all across the world to summon people to Sunday morning worship. But there is something very special about this bell. At 816 pounds, it is far from being the heaviest church bell in this county and is certainly no comparison to the 15-ton bell at St. Francis de Sales Church in Cincinnati, Ohio. It's also not the oldest church bell in the United States; that distinction goes to Boston's Old North Church with a bell that dates back to around 1775. Also, its bell doesn't hang from the highest steeple; that record goes to the Riverside Church in New York City



One side of the bell today in the Bryant Pond Baptist Church. (Courtesy Bryant Pond Baptist Church.)

From the Bell Tolls

that can seat 2,100 people for its Sunday service. Instead, the bell at the Bryant Pond Baptist Church hangs from a steeple that is characteristic of many small churches across the land. But, this bell is unique to the annals of history.

This church bell is the original fog bell from the infamous 1850 Minot's Ledge Lighthouse that was toppled in a colossal storm in April of 1851, claiming the lives of its two assistant keepers. First-hand accounts of the time stated that the people on shore heard the fog bell tolling feverously from the lighthouse. Some thought that it was keepers signaling for help, but others, who felt they were "in the know," believed it was caused by the violent shaking of the tower, especially in those last minutes as the tower swayed from one side to another before it toppled over into the raging sea.

But how did this fog bell end up Maine? Although old records of the transaction have remained elusive, historical society records indicate that the bell was purchased at a salvage auction by Dwight T. Faulkner a couple of years after the lighthouse collapsed. Faulkner then had the 650 pound bell transported to Maine. Eventually, in 1861, the bell was installed by his son, Francis T. Faulkner, in the tower of his business, the Turner Woolen Mill. The bell was probably rung as a signal to the workers when it was time to break for lunch, when to return to work, and when one work shift ended and when another one started.

The bell of the old Minot's Ledge Lighthouse hung in the tower at Turner Woolen Mill where its tones were heard not only by the workers at the mill, but by the entire surrounding community. However, that all changed on a fateful Sunday morning on September 3, 1905 when tragedy struck the bell for the second time in its 54 year existence.

It is known that Francis T. Faulkner, the owner of the mill, and another man, only identified as a Mr. Bray, were in the building at the time when a fire of unknown origin started. It is known that both Faulkner and Bray grabbed fire extinguishers and approached the fire from different directions. However, within minutes the fire was totally out of control. Bray got out, but Faulkner went back to his office, perhaps to save some company documents or close the doors of the company safe. But in doing so, Faulkner apparently became trapped by the fast moving fire. One of the men who showed up to help fight the fire said he saw Faulkner through one of the windows, but then lost sight of him as flames and smoke devoured the structure. Faulkner was never seen alive again.

As the support timbers from the bell tower gave way, the men fighting the fire surely must have heard the lighthouse bell clanging its tragic toll as it fell, crashing down to the surface below. Perhaps it was the same clanging sound that it had made years earlier at the Minot's Ledge Lighthouse just moments before the tower toppled into the sea.

The heat from the blazing inferno was so intense that it melted most of the old bell into a large chunk of molten metal. The only remains of Mr. Faulkner to be found were a few bones. Miraculously, Faulkner's valuable Swiss watch, one of only two ever made before the manufacturer died, survived the fire.

Francis R. Faulkner had been a popular and respected man, and many of the men in town had worked for him and his family



Another side of the bell as it appears today. (Courtesy Bryant Pond Baptist Church.)



Ken Hoyt, the bell-ringer at Bryant Pond Baptist Church. (Courtesy Rev. Calvin Fuller.)

for many years. His funeral was the largest in the area's history. Among the many attendees were over 400 Masons and members of other fraternal orders, as well as a number of dignitaries, some who had travelled great distances.

Faulkner left behind one child, Mrs. Anna Mont Chase, who was determined to keep her father's memory alive forever. After a few family members of the Faulkner family were given small pieces of the bell, Mrs. Chase had what was left of the heavily damaged bell recast and donated it to the Bryant Pond Baptist Church where she was a member.

The original Minot's Lighthouse fog bell which hung at the Turner Woolen Mill was reported to weigh 650 pounds. After the fire only 285 pounds of the bell were left. Because there were so many fires in those days, the recasting of bells was a common occurrence. After recasting, the bell now weighed 816 pounds, which is over 150 pounds more than it originally weighed. With its mountings, the total weight is now 1,250 pounds in the belfry of the church. On April 4, 1906, volunteers raised the bell and installed it in place atop the church. At a church meeting held

Continued on next page.

Lost Lighthouse Bell Rings in Maine Church

a few days later, on April 7, 1906, at the home of Emily Fell, with Rev. Nathan Hunt presiding, the church members voted to extend letters of thanks to those who helped raise the bell and to Mrs. Chase for donating it.

A special service, probably attended by many, was held when the bell was dedicated, and Mrs. Chase was the first person to ring the bell. Inscribed on the bell, on opposite sides, are the words:

*This Bell Is Given To
The Bryant's Pond Baptist Church
In Loving Memory Of
Francis T. Faulkner
The Turner Woolen Mill Bell,
Previously at Minot's Ledge Light House,
Is Incorporated Herein
1906*

Although some accounts of the day referred to the bell from Minot's Ledge Lighthouse as being a Paul Revere Bell, according to bell historians, only bells made before 1811 can actually lay claim to the title of being Paul Revere Bells. Although two of Revere's sons and a grandson did make bells after that, some of these bells are also incorrectly referred to as Paul Revere Bells. In 1906, shortly after the bell was rededicated, 89-year Otis H. Watson, of Waltham Street in Boston, tried to set the record straight when he reported that the bell had originally been cast by Henry N. Hooper & Company, a noted bell foundry of the time.

Shortly after the bell was dedicated at the Bryant Pond Baptist Church, the *Lewiston Journal Newspaper* of Lewiston Maine heralded the bell with a giant banner above a number of images that said, "A Bell That Has Told Two Tragedies." The images shown in the layout included the first and second Minot's Ledge Lighthouses, the Turner Woolen Mill, Francis T. Faulkner, the church, the recast bell, and the bell as it appeared after the fire. Of these, only the image of the damaged bell seems to have been misplaced in the pages of time, yet to be rediscovered. Original copies of the newspaper also seem to have been lost, with only poor quality copies still in existence. Amazingly, the clapper of the original bell from Minot's Ledge Lighthouse still remains in the possession of the Bryant Pond Baptist Church.

It took 150 years before a memorial was built in Cohasset, Massachusetts to honor the memory of Joseph Wilson and Joseph Antoine, the two assistant keepers who lost their lives when the Minot's Ledge Lighthouse collapsed. However, during all those years, with the exception of a short period of time and without the knowledge of most, their memory has been honored by the ringing of the bell that found its way to Maine, 146 miles inland from the ocean where it was once suspended.

Today, every Sunday when the bell rings to summon the congregation of the Bryant Pond Baptist Church to worship, it also rings in remembrance of Francis T. Faulkner, and the two assistant lighthouse keepers, all of whom dedicated their lives for the benefit of others. But none of this could have happened without the foresight of Mrs. Anna Mont Chase and the members of the congregation of the Bryant Pond Baptist Church who, over 100 years ago, accepted the historic bell for their church.

It was suggested by some after the 1906 dedication that the bell should be rung every April 17 in memory of the assistant lighthouse keepers who lost their lives and every September 3 in memory of Francis T. Faulkner.

There is a tablet at the church which honors the memory of Mrs. Chase who gave the bell to the church. The tablet, recalling the tragic history of bell, ends with the following words, "This bell is not only appreciated by the church, but its unusual sweetness of tone must be a source of pleasure to all who hear it."



The belfry at Bryant Pond Baptist Church. (Courtesy Rev. Calvin Fuller.)



The first Minot's Ledge Lighthouse. (National Archives image, *Lighthouse Digest* archives.)



The Turner Woolen Mill where the bell from the first Minot's Ledge Lighthouse was used from approximately 1858 to September 3, 1905. (Courtesy Turner Historical Society, Turner, Maine.)

An old, tattered copy of the *Lewiston Journal Newspaper* when the former Minot's Ledge Lighthouse fog bell, installed at the Bryant Pond Baptist Church, tolled a second tragedy.
(Courtesy Rev. Calvin Fuller.)



Francis T. Faulkner in his office at the Turner Woolen Mill in Turner, Maine.
(Courtesy Turner Historical Society.)



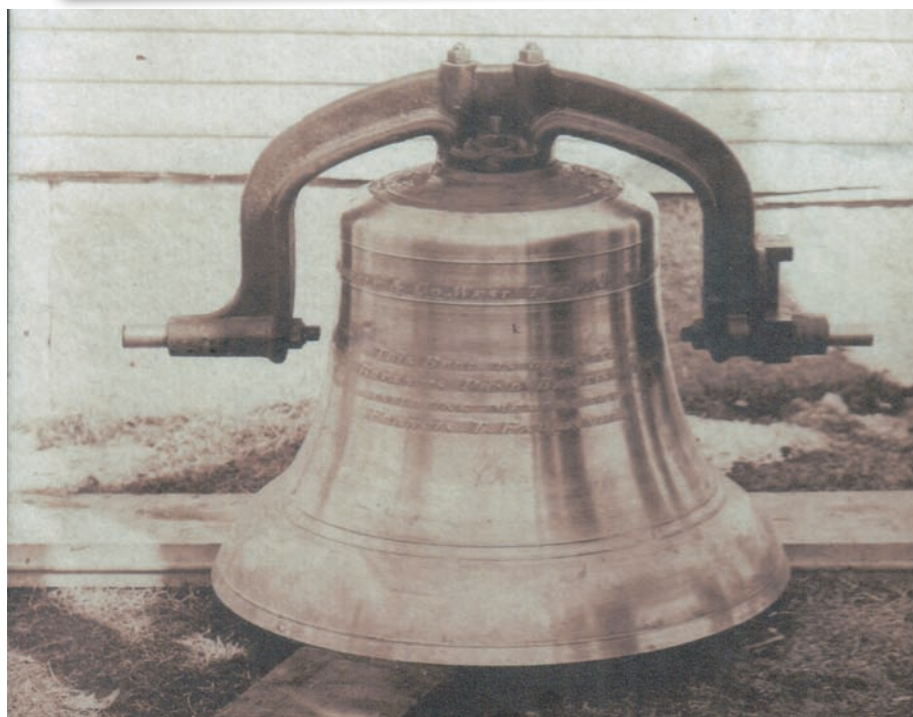
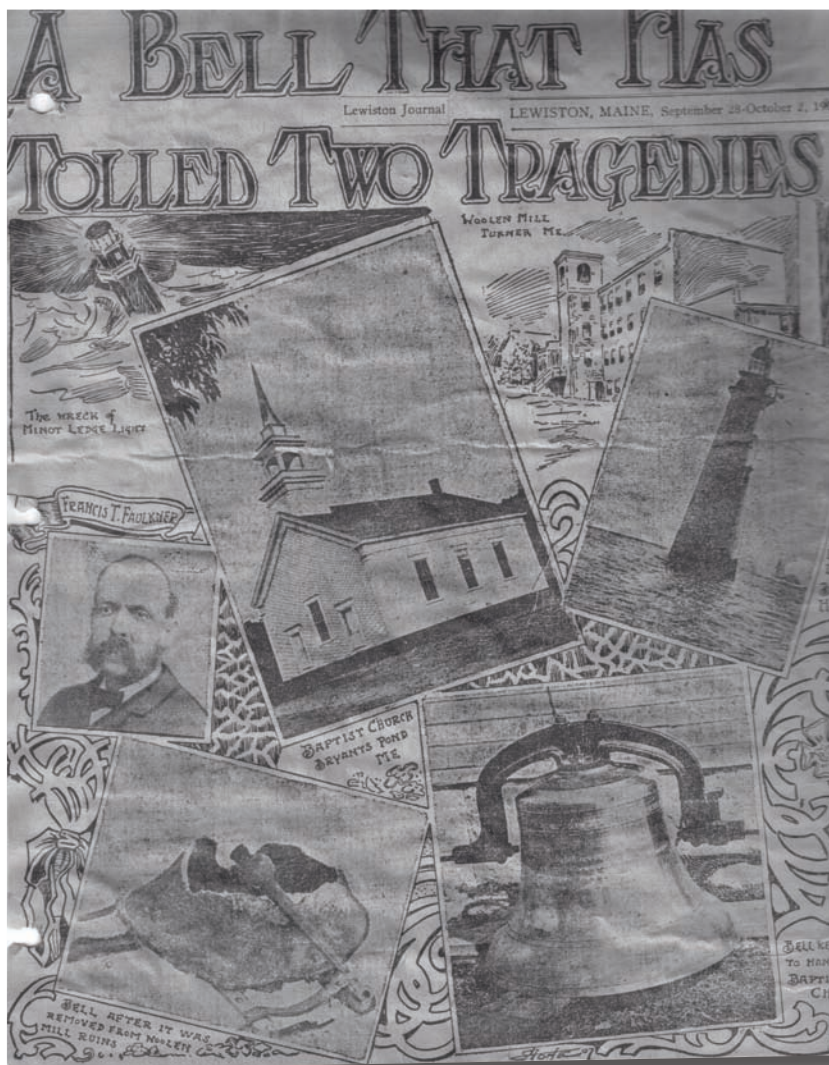
The men who fought the fire at the Turner Woolen Mill pose with their fire-fighting equipment in front of the ruins of the building and the bell tower. (Courtesy Turner Historical Society.)

Editor's note: *Our sincere thanks to Rev. Calvin Fuller, the interim pastor of the Bryant Pond Baptist Church, who brought this history to our attention and assisted us with historical information and photographs for the story. Also, our sincere thanks to the Turner Historical Society, who supplied us with historical documentation and vintage photographs.*

If you would like to hear this bell toll,
visit our website for a short movie clip
www.FogHornPublishing.com



The wreck of the first Minot's Ledge Lighthouse from an engraving by H.C. Collins from the January 1894 edition of *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*.
(*Lighthouse Digest* archives.)



The recast bell resting on the ground shortly before it was hoisted to the belfry atop the Bryant Pond Baptist Church. (Courtesy Turner Historical Society.)

Child of the Wave

By Timothy Harrison



Col. Joseph Swift,
builder of the first
Minot's Ledge
Lighthouse.

Shortly after the Minot's Ledge Lighthouse in Cohasset, Massachusetts toppled in a storm in April of 1851, taking the lives of the two assistant keepers, composer J. Philip Knight wrote the music and the words to the song *Child of the Wave*.

The cover of the sheet music, shown here, shows an artist's depiction of the lighthouse that was commonly used in the print media of the time. When the tower was lighted for the first time on January 1, 1850, it was first lighthouse in the United States to be totally exposed to the ocean. However, from the day it became operational, none of the lighthouse keepers believed the tower to be safe and they made numerous complaints to government officials and in the local newspapers. However, their complaints were not taken seriously by Col. Joseph Swift, the man who had built the lighthouse, or by government bureaucrats.

The basket, shown in the image, was suspended on a line from the lighthouse to a rock that was a couple of hundred feet away and below. It was installed and designed by lighthouse keeper John W. Bennett for use to escape from the tower, which often swayed and rattled, in even the slightest of windy days.

When the storm came up on that fateful day, keeper Bennett, who was away on the mainland to locate a new boat for the lighthouse, was extremely worried for the two assistant keepers who were on duty at the lighthouse. He had good cause to worry.



In 2002, John Small (l) and Capt. Herb Jason (m) presented a framed photograph of the Antoine and Wilson Memorial to Timothy Harrison, editor of *Lighthouse Digest*. The framed photo is now in the collection of Maine Lighthouse Museum in Rockland, Maine. (Photograph by Kathleen Finnegan, *Lighthouse Digest* archives.)



The Antoine and Wilson Memorial in Cohasset, Massachusetts. (Herb Jason photograph, *Lighthouse Digest* archives.)

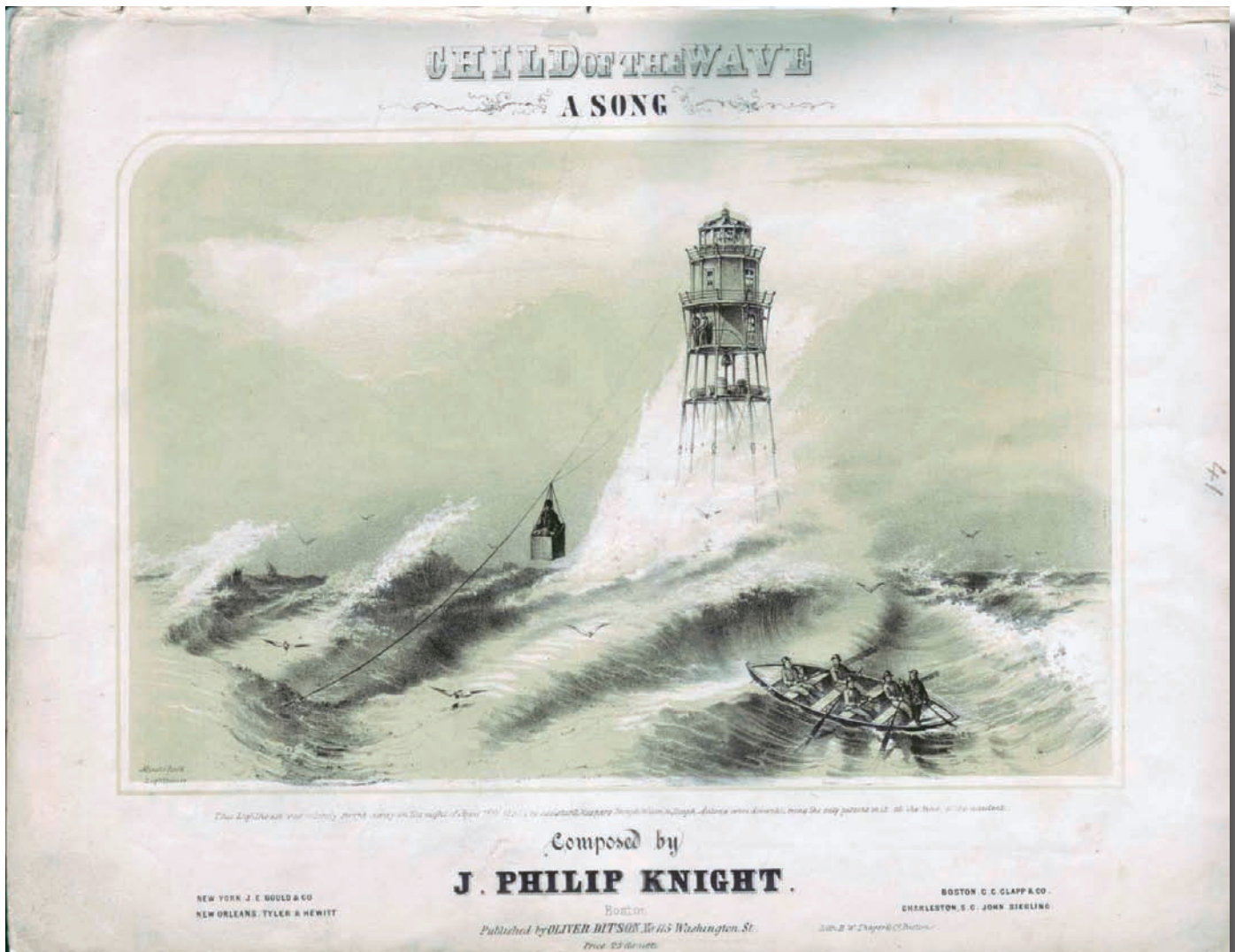
By late afternoon, witnesses on shore said that, as they looked through the stormy weather, out to sea, they could see that the tower was listing. Sometime later that afternoon or perhaps later that night, the two assistant keepers, Joseph Wilson and Joseph Antoine, hastily wrote a note and signed it saying, "*The lighthouse won't stand over to night. She shakes 2 feet each way now.*" They put the note into a bottle and tossed it into the water below.

As the night turned to morning, the people on shore could hear a fast and furious ringing of the lighthouse fog bell, which may have been caused by the swaying and shaking of the tower. However, many people, at the time, believed the two men were ringing the bell as a call for help, perhaps while praying that a rescue boat would be launched. But, such was not the case.

When keeper Bennett arrived at the shore in the early morning hours, he looked in horror toward the empty spot in the sea where the tower once stood, as debris from the lighthouse was washing ashore.

Officials reportedly later said there was evidence that the two assistant keepers might have exited the lighthouse in the escape basket before the lighthouse fell. Whatever the case, the waters of the violent, storm-tossed, ocean claimed their lives. Eventually their bodies were found. Amazingly, their last hastily written note in a bottle was also found.

However, it took nearly 150 years before a memorial was created to honor the memory of the two assistant keepers who lost their lives on the fateful night in 1851. Thanks to the efforts of three men: Kenneth Jason, Capt. Herb Jason and John Small, who raised the money, and designed and installed the granite memorial, it was dedicated at ceremonies in 2000 on Government Island in Cohasset, Massachusetts.



CHILD of the WAVE

A Song by J. Philip Knight

Through the gloom of the storm, 'mid the breakers' loud roar,
When the gun of distress, flashes faint on the shore!
The life-boat from billow to billow bounds on,
Like a weed on the ocean, or bird on the foam.
Now cradled a-loft by the winds in their glee,
Now buried beneath a huge mountain of sea,
And lashed to the shrouds the drench'd mariners mark
How she shaketh her sides, the old tempest-toss'd bark,
How she shaketh her sides, the old tempest-toss'd bark.

May I perish at sea, blowing high, blowing low,
May my grave be the rock fifty fathoms below;
If in calm or in storm, I should love thee the less,
The Friend who stood staunch in the hour of distress!

Now high on the shingle, deserted and lone,
Where the waifs of the billow lie scattered and strewn,
The vessel lies stranded a wreck on the shore
To the ocean of storms she returneth no more!
The weeds be thy winding sheet, child of the wave,
And the night-winds shall murmur their dirge o'er thy grave;
For we'll bury thee deep when the heaven broodeth dark,
In the sands of the ocean, old tempest-toss'd bark.
May I perish at sea, may I perish at sea!