



# Lighthouse - Light Station History

## Mount Desert Rock Light

State: Maine

Town: Frenchboro

Year Established: August 25, 1830 with a fixed white light

Location: Twenty-five miles due south of Acadia National Park

GPS (Global Positioning System) Latitude, Longitude: 43.968764, -68.127797

Height Above Sea Level: 17'

Present Lighthouse Built: 1847 – replaced the original wooden tower

Architect: Alexander Parris

Contractor: Joseph W. Coburn of Boston

Height of Tower: 58'

Height of Focal Plane: 75'

Original Optic: 1858 - Third-order Fresnel lens

Present Optic: VRB-25

Automated: 1977

Keeper's House – 1893

Boathouse - 1895

Keeper History:

Keeper 1872 – 1881: Amos B. Newman (1830-1916)

Disposition: Home of College of the Atlantic's Edward McC. Blair Marine Research Station.

Mount Desert Rock is a remote, treeless island situated approximately 25 nautical miles south of Bar Harbor, Maine.

"...Another important Maine coast light is on Mount Desert Rock. This is one of the principal guides to Mount Desert Island, and into Frenchman's and Blue Hill Bays on either side. This small, rocky islet which is but twenty feet high, lies seventeen and one half miles southward of Mount Desert Island, eleven and one half miles outside of the nearest island and twenty-two miles from the mainland. It is one of the most exposed lighthouse locations on our entire Atlantic coast. The sea breaks entirely over the rock in heavy gales, and at times the keepers and their families have had to retreat to the light tower to seek refuge from the fury of the storms.

This light first shone in 1830. For a lighthouse so exposed, it was of unusual design. The lantern was supported on top of the keeper's dwelling by timber framed into the roof, and the light was elevated fifty-six and one half feet above the sea...

The keepers have succeeded in raising a few flowers and fresh vegetables in earth brought by boat from the mainland and deposited in sheltered spots...

In 1893 the old dwelling which had served for nearly fifty years (having been built in 1846) was in such a state that it had to be replaced by a new structure..." - Lighthouses of New England by Malcolm F. Willoughby, p. 67-69, T.O. Metcalf, Boston - 1929.

#### "CREW OF "ASTRAL" AT MT. DESERT ROCK

Mrs. Fred Robbins, of Mt. Desert Rock station, in a letter to her mother here, gave a very interesting account of the sheltering of the crew of the "Astral," the big New York tug wrecked recently on the rock, full particulars of which have already been published in THE AMERICAN.

At the time, Mrs. Robbins was quite lame and had supposed herself unable to walk, but in the excitement of ministering to the suffering frost-bitten sailors she forgot her disabled feet and was quite as nimble as her husband, the light-keeper, in furnishing food and clothing to her unexpected guests.

The work of rescue was rendered more difficult and perilous by the thick icy vapor, which enveloped everything. The loss of a life seemed terrible, probably the first fatality of that nature at the station, but it was most miraculous under the circumstances that so many survived the cruel ordeal, in fact one other [sic] man seemed past reviving, but under skilful treatment he was rescued from the clasp of death.

The firemen especially must have suffered intensely, exchanging the heat of the engine room, in gauze underclothing and overalls, for the icy plunge among the breakers. Their physical structure must have been good to withstand the deathly chill.

It is needless to say that everything possible was done to relieve and make comfortable the shipwrecked mariners, for the ready sympathy and generous hospitality of the people at Mt. Desert light house, both the new and the old incumbents are well known and appreciated by all who chance to call at the station.

Dec. 22." - The Ellsworth American, Wednesday, December 24, 1902.

Mount Desert Rock Light is the farthest land on which a New England coast lighthouse shows its light.

See: Dolin, Eric Jay. *Brilliant Beacons: A History of the American Lighthouse* (Liveright Publishing Corporation, New York, 2016) p. 272, for the story of a life-saving dog at Mount Desert Rock Light in 1896 while Amos B. Newman was keeper.

See: New England Lighthouses: A Virtual Guide, Accessed online 02/05/08 etc.;

<http://lighthouse.cc/>

Jeremy D'Entremont's web site gives a complete history of the lighthouse, site and keepers - an excellent resource with a good bibliography.

See:

Dolin, Eric Jay. *Brilliant Beacons: A History of the American Lighthouse* (Liveright Publishing Corporation, New York, 2016)

Particularly see Chapter 5. p. 92-102, "Europeans Take the Lead," and Chapter 7, p. 132-156 for the origin of the Fresnel Lens and its use.

And p. 404-405+ for the importance of Senator Olympia Snowe's Maine Lights Program and the effect it has had on preserving lighthouses all over the country.

And p. 415, which brought the Maine Lighthouse Museum in Rockland, Maine to the attention of SWHPL archivists who were unaware that it, "places one in the midst of the single largest collection of lighthouse artifacts and Fresnel lenses in the nation."