

Guidebook For *Pottawatomie Lighthouse* *Resident Docents*

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Pottawatomie Lighthouse Docent's Guide
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Presented by
The Friends of Rock Island
In cooperation with
The State of Wisconsin
Department of Natural Resources

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A “docent” is “A Lecturer or Tour Guide in a museum.” Resident docents at the Pottawatomie Lighthouse are this yet a bit more. These pages are intended to guide you to a pleasant experience as a Lighthouse Keeper and Docent at the Lighthouse on Rock Island. The Friends of Rock Island and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources will attempt to answer your questions and help you to anticipate all that is required for a successful stay. We will explain what you may expect and what is expected of you.

May your tour of duty be delightful and rewarding for you and those you serve.

What to do before you arrive:

Remember that you will have no store to go to if you find you have forgotten something. If you have previously camped at Rock Island you have already have a good idea of what to expect and how to prepare for your stay as “Keepers of the Light.” *The Park Staff is not responsible to supply those things forgotten.*

Lighthouse Rules:

Volunteers and guests will be *limited* to a maximum of **6** adults and their children not to exceed a total of 10 people.

- . **No Smoking** is permitted in the lighthouse.
- . No candles, kerosene lamps, gas lanterns or other open flames are permitted in the lighthouse.
- . **No Pets** are permitted in the lighthouse.

What to Bring:

- . Bring bed linens for a full size bed or sleeping bags, washcloths and towels. The Lighthouse quilts are for display only. They are antiques and need to be handled with care.
- . Bring soap, toilet articles and bug repellent.
- . There are no shower facilities, so you may wash up in the lake or in the house.
- . Water is available from the pump in the yard. Large containers for washing and cooking are provided.
- . A gas refrigerator and stove with an oven and broiler are provided.
- . The kitchen is fully stocked with cooking and eating utensils. Review the [Kitchen Inventory page](#) and bring anything else you may need.
- . Bring food and beverages sufficient for your planned stay. All items brought for your stay need to be taken home with you if they are not used. Don't leave food, snacks, or anything else in the cupboards or refrigerator for the next docents.

- . Remember there is no electricity. There are several battery-powered lanterns with batteries for your use.
- . There is a propane gas heater in the living room/parlor to take the chill out. It is sized to only heat that room and not to be used to try to heat the lighthouse. Close the doors to that room when using it. ***Do not run it continuously.*** Once the room is warm, turn it off. Propane is expensive on the island and requires handling 100 pound tanks on boats and vehicles. Bring warm clothing!
- . Be sure to have enough clothes for the period you'll be staying. {including dark colors and long sleeve shirts and pants to keep biting flies and cool evenings at bay}
- . Please leave cupboards, fridge and stove clean for the next docent's arrival.
- . Pack entertainment for the evenings {books, games and such} Some games, cards etc. are available along with the books in the Lighthouse library.
- . Bring a cell phone and a/c charger if you have one. An outlet is provided in the composting toilet building for ***charging a phone or camera only.*** Be aware that cell phone coverage is poor on this remote island and cannot be relied on. Also roaming to Michigan will result in the wrong time zone appearing on your phone. See the note below in emergency procedures about using 911. You may reach Delta County, Michigan and they will not be able to help you!!

Arrival:

- . Arrive in time to catch the first Karfi ferry over to Rock Island. {Allow ample time to load your gear on the ferry} You are expected to arrive in the morning so park staff can get you and your gear to the Lighthouse when it fits into their daily work schedule.

Questions or schedules? The Karfi can be reached at 920-847-3322 or 920-535-0122 and Washington Island Ferry can be reached at 800-223-2094 or check out their web site, wisferry.com.

How to Get to the Lighthouse:

The State Park Staff will provide ***one trip*** up to the Lighthouse to haul gear on Sunday when you arrive. They will pick you up for a return trip down to the boathouse the following Sunday.

Note: Additional guests/docents arriving at any other time will be required to walk and haul their own gear.

- . The park staff will give you an introduction to the Lighthouse, show you how to lock the doors and review the rules with you. Any questions can be addressed at that time.

. On Sundays, the park staff will give tours from 11a.m. to 3p.m. to cover the changing of the docent staffs. You are not required to give tours on Sundays, but the park staff is very appreciative for the help if you choose to give tours on Sunday.*

. There is a message board in the kitchen closet for communicating with other docents as well as sharing tips and ideas to make the operation run smoother. Note any repairs needed, supplies needed etc. Communication with the park staff when they stop by is important as well.

. Tours should only last 15 to 25 minutes. Docents' enthusiasm sometimes results in tours that run much longer than park visitors care to take in. Use discretion if it's a slow day and the visitors are very interested then share the stories. However, on busy weekends many people really just want to duck in, take a quick tour and move on. And the people outside may not be enjoying the biting flies! Just a note. ***People are not allowed to just do a self guided tour.*** Admission to the lighthouse is by tour only.

Work Schedule:

.Your week will run Sunday to Sunday. You will be expected to have the lighthouse open for viewing from 10 a.m. to 4p.m. Monday through Saturday. {*see above for Sunday schedule} This will be sufficient time to provide tours for all day-trippers. You may be open earlier and stay open later to accommodate campers if you wish but it's your option.

. If you are not near or in the building, you must keep it locked. A key is provided. Always keep the screen door locked when you are inside, as people will just walk in day or night. If people are hanging around late at night, don't hesitate to send them on their way. They belong in the campground after 11p.m.

. A clock is provided to set "tour times" outside the summer kitchen door. If docents are working alone, it informs the visitors to utilize their waiting time efficiently.

Your Day as a Docent:

Arise, have breakfast, take care of personal needs. Sweep, mop, and dust before daily tours. The outhouse must be cleaned and swept daily as well. Cleaning supplies and equipment are provided in the kitchen closet.

All personal items need to be stowed. Dressers and closets are for your use for all personal belongings. The built in summer kitchen cabinet can be used for cameras, electronic and outdoor supplies. {Note: The summer kitchen needs to be occupied when tours are given, unless door is locked. Be sure everything is out of sight.} ***Please do not leave water containers on the sink.*** Plastic jugs weren't used in 1910.

Your first duty is to raise the Lighthouse flags on the flag pole, before

10a.m. each day, {weather permitting}. The American flag goes on first and the Light Station {pennant} flag second. The flags are kept in the front hallway.

Lower the flags for night anytime after 4p.m. Fold them properly and return to front hallway.

Emergencies and First Aid

A first aid kit is provided in the lighthouse kitchen in the left drawer of the china hutch.

The park staff will help with any questions or problems. Use your cell phone to contact the **park office at {920}847-2235, Kirby at home at {920}847-2293, or Randy's cell at {608}477-0609.** Reception can be spotty on the island so be prepared to send a messenger to contact the campground host. A word about 911 calls – it has happened that Delta County, Michigan received an emergency call from a cell phone. They cannot help you. Be careful at all times as Rock Island is a very remote site.

Tours

Tours should be limited to six to eight people due to limited space in the lantern room. A 15-30 minute tour is sufficient. Docents should be aware that not everyone shares their strong interest in this lighthouse. If people are appearing bored, don't hold them captive. They may have something else planned and be limited for time. The screen door should be latched while giving tours or your partner should hold new visitors in the summer kitchen for the next tour.

If you have enough docents on your team, it works well with 3 docents to split the tours duties into the summer kitchen, first floor, and upstairs tours. Upstairs tours may take a little longer as the steps to the lantern room require more caution and some linger in the lantern room taking in the view. Tours do not include the storage area of the basement. Park staff does not want people in that space. If you have enough docents to include basement tours, feel free to take them into the "schoolroom." **Do not just leave the door open to the basement for people to roam.**

A brief outline for Docent material

Summer Kitchen Tour:

Point Out the merchandise for sale and the lighthouse donation box. Inform visitors that the proceeds from the sales and donations are primarily used for

maintenance of the lighthouse. The Fresnel lens in the lantern room along with the Cliffside fence were restored from donations made to the lighthouse museum. Also note that the rag rugs were handmade and donated by women on Washington Island to give a homey look as well as to protect the painted floors. The thick rag rugs were donated by the family of Charlie Boshka who was a keeper at this Lighthouse.

Ask the tourists to either put booties over their shoes, or remove their shoes in the summer kitchen.

Proceed with the story of the first Pottawatomie lighthouse....

The first light and keeper's quarters were built in 1836. They consisted of a 30 ft. high conical stone tower, which was 18 feet in diameter at its base and tapered to 9 feet in diameter at the top with a small stone house beside it. The iron lantern room at the top had 8 sides and contained an array of 11 Winslow Patent lamps with reflectors. A depiction of these first structures can be seen on the summer kitchen wall.

Point out the Keepers Plaque. Point out the pictures of other keepers around the room, Jessie Miner and Jens Jacobson.

David Corbin who had served in the War of 1812 as a sergeant became keeper when the light was inaugurated in 1837, the first government light in Wisconsin waters. Keeper Corbin was a bachelor who had his old friend, Jack Arnold, and his horse for company until Arnold died in 1844. The Lighthouse Inspector, believing that Corbin was quite lonely, required him to take a 3 week leave to go off island to find a wife. Corbin took the leave but returned still a bachelor. He lived at the Pottawatomie Lighthouse until his death. A memorial stone to his memory was erected in the lighthouse cemetery by the Friends of Rock Island in the summer of 2003.

Jesse Miner lived in the nearby fishing village and became the keeper of the light in 1886. He served as keeper for 12 years.

The present light was erected in 1858 when the original buildings began to deteriorate, due to faulty mortar. The two major changes to the new lighthouse were making the light tower an integral part of the keeper's quarters and designing the building as a duplex to allow for an assistant keeper's quarters.

At some point the wooden annex or summer kitchen was added to the south end of the building. To provide a supply of water, two cisterns were dug

under the annex. Rainwater was obtained from roof gutters and routed into the cisterns. A small hand pump next to the sink in the kitchen was installed to obtain water as needed.

The hand pump in the yard was installed early in the 20th Century due to complaints from the keepers that in dry years they had to haul water from the lake, which meant carrying it up the 100 plus steep stairs and trail. Since Charlie Boshka lived here at the time the well was installed, he must have been most effective in his complaining.

Other surrounding buildings include the privy, smokehouse, oil house and remains of a foundation.

-The outhouse or privy appears to have been built at the same time as the original keeper's quarters, making it oldest existing structure in Door County.

-The smoke house located in the gully 100 feet to the southeast of the lighthouse, was probably used to preserve fish, venison and other meat. Note the steep roof and the exterior flue, which runs underground to the north.

-The "oil house" was built in the 20th Century as a place to store the kerosene used in the lamps in the lantern room, home lighting and kerosene stove. The keepers had objected to keeping the fuel in the cellar due to the danger of fire. Later it was used as a coal bin.

-Off in the trees to the east are the remains of a stone foundation for some sort of structure. Although we are not exactly sure what it was, it could possibly be a barn, icehouse or root cellar.

Most fishermen and families had moved away by the 1870's, many to Washington Harbor on Washington Island where the harbor was deeper and sheltered from the storms.

The last year that the Lighthouse was manned was 1946, as the light was automated. In 1988 a steel tower was erected just west of the lighthouse and the light was moved there and is now powered by a solar cell charged battery.

Keepers Kitchen Tour:

Beginning the tour in the kitchen, point out the trap door for entry into the cellar. It was used to get to the storage area and also an entry for the school room. Do not open the trap door as the stairs are not safe. An exterior entrance is outside the east side of the lighthouse for tourists to view the cellar through the windows. ***Do not open cellar door for tourists to roam.***

The kitchen originally had a fireplace used for both heat and cooking. Another was on the opposite side of the wall heating the parlor.

Other residents of the island trooped over from the east side settlement to admire a wood burning range acquired by Corbin in 1850. He hauled the stove with his mule from the boathouse area, through the path he cleared, that is now a part of the Thordarson trail. Later it is reputed that Mrs. Betts acting as a midwife on Rock Island, used the warming oven on top of the range to keep the infant warm.

In summer, the range was moved to the “summer kitchen” to avoid heating the lighthouse.

The kitchen floor is a replacement of the original floor that became rotten. It is the only stained floor in the lighthouse. All other floors are original and painted. The summer kitchen floor was reconstructed in 2008.

The furniture in the lighthouse dates from the 1910 era and the dishes are replica of the original Lighthouse Service Dinnerware used at lighthouses across the country. {The replica mugs are for sale.}

The large closet may have served as a pantry. It now serves to store supplies for the docents. It was unusual to have many closets in the 1850’s.

Keeper’s Bedroom Tour:

The main keeper’s bedroom has several details. Note the massive doorway to the exterior. Point out the oil house out the east bedroom window. Also the fence restored to look like the original as an Eagle scout project in 2005 with funding for materials by the Friends of Rock Island organization.

On each side of the doors, note the wide square columns. They begin in the cellar and extend up to the lantern platform. These supports form the tower on which the lantern room sits. Point out the attractive moldings that beautifully frame the doors and windows. The wide floor moldings and paneled doors were extravagant in those days. Note the 12 light, {12 panes of glass} windows. The wavy glass is original. All downstairs windows are 12- pane, and the upstairs are 8- pane.

Point out the cabinet to the left of the door, {resembling a ledge} which was constructed to hold spare panes of glass for the lantern. There is a sample pane to show how it is stored. {Imagine carrying a large pane up the steep steps to the lantern room to replace during a wind storm.}

Point out the Frank Sawyer plaque. He was the first keeper to live in this lighthouse. He carved his initials above the front outside door. He carved

the O. of his middle initial as the Masonic symbol shown on the plaque. Campers have researched Frank Sawyer in the Masonic archives, and found the photo on the plaque in the Vermont Archives. Military and Lighthouse Service records were provided for detailed history of our first keeper. If any tourists are Masons, you may want to ask how long it would have taken Frank to become a full Mason. We surmise that it took longer to complete the steps to promotion while he was serving at the Lighthouse.

Keeper's Living Room [Parlor] Tour

The downstairs living room was originally heated by a fireplace that was bricked up and plastered to be replaced by a more efficient parlor stove, such as the one seen here. A gas heater was added to the parlor stove to provide heat for the docents in the beginning and the end of the tour season.

The wide windowsills demonstrate the thickness of the Lighthouse's stone exterior. They provided nice seats for the keeper's children as they studied their lessons. Again point out the closet.

The graphophone on display plays wax cylinders. This was the type of musical device lighthouse keepers enjoyed in the 1910 era.

All federal buildings required a photo of the current U.S. president. President Taft's is displayed in the parlor and served his term from 1909-1913, during the period to which the Lighthouse was restored.

Front Hallway Tour:

The west entrance was probably the main entrance, providing access to both the keeper's quarters on the first floor and the assistant keeper's quarters on the second floor.

Point out the Library box. These sturdy wooden boxes were circulated among the lighthouses by the light ships that brought supplies from time to time. Reading was a favorite past time for the keeper's, and because of excessive reading they were often very learned. The boxes were numbered to provide a variety of books, so as to not being repetitive.

The flags are flown everyday and are kept in the front hallway at night and during inclement weather. The American Flag is from 1858 and has fewer stars than our current flag, as there were fewer states. The pennant flag is a replica of an official Lighthouse Service Light Station flag. It flies below the American flag.

Second Floor Tour

The stairway in the front hallway reaches the second floor. The banister and railings are quite nice and show that the Lighthouse Service spared no expense in building the Lighthouse not so the keepers wages. Corbin and several after him received less than a dollar per day. Of course they had a nice house to live in, yet a remote location.

The second floor has 4 rooms and an open sitting area below the stairs to the lantern room. They were originally two bedrooms, a kitchen, a parlor and an office under the stairway to the lantern room. We have restored them to 3 bedrooms for docents and a museum room, once serving as the assistant keeper's kitchen. Note all rooms have closets, unusual for that era.

Kid's Bedroom Tour:

The smallest bedroom was probably a child's room. Ask what tourists think the odd shelf near the window might be? No one knows the true purpose.

Assistant Keeper's Bedroom Tour:

The pink and white quilt belonged to Chief Oshkosh. It was donated by a relative. The closets had pegs for hanging clothes, and are original.

Museum Room Tour:

The right window with the wires protruding was where the first telephone was installed. The telephone cable was laid under the lake from island to island to allow lighthouses to communicate. The telephone display is a replica of the phones of that era.

The picture boards display the state of the Lighthouse before and after restoration. The Lighthouse was uninhabited from 1946 to 2004.

Its structure remained strong, however a lot of restoration was needed on the walls and floors. Paint chips were taken to match the colors of the dyes available in the early 1900's. It has been restored to appear like a working lighthouse. The restoration was funded by a Wisconsin Stewardship Grant through the DNR and by donations collected by the Friends of Rock Island organization.

Lantern Room Tour:

If you are severely afraid of heights then you may consider not going up to the lantern room. The focal plane of the lantern is over 150 feet above sea level. Great for navigational lights, not great for those afraid of heights! Also, watch your step. Treat the stairs like a ladder and face the steps going

up and backing down. Watch your head. Many people do bang theirs. It's O.K. to take a camera or binoculars with you but leave all other bags, backpacks etc. here as it's a small space and you don't want to be responsible for knocking a 4th order Fresnel lens off its pedestal. The price for that is \$25,000.00.

This is the watch room on the first landing. The keeper kept a log here. There is a sample of the original log on the desk.

In 1858 the original Winslow Patent lamp array was replaced by a 4th order Fresnel {pronounced fra-nell} lens. It used kerosene which was very expensive, although provided a much brighter light from one lamp, than the Winslow patent gave from 11 lard oil lamps. It was also far less work for the keepers.

The lantern room provides a map of the islands of the Grand Traverse Archipelago to the north of Rock Island. Between Rock and St. Martin's is the Rock Island Passage which is the preferred shipping route from Lake Michigan to Green Bay and back. The currents are treacherous through Death's Door passage, so most ships make the trip north to the Rock Island passage for a safer voyage.

Other lighthouses are visible, especially at night. Off to the northeast is Poverty Island Lighthouse marking the Poverty Island Passage to Green Bay. The lighthouse on St. Martin Island isn't visible because it's on the north side of the island. Off to the northwest is the Minneapolis Shoals Lighthouse marking the entrance to the Escanaba, Michigan harbor. On a clear day, look far to the east and you may catch a glimpse of Fox Island off the coast of Michigan.

Cellar Tour:

Hosting cellar tours is optional. The public is only allowed in the "school room". ***Do not allow any people to go into the other areas of the basement.***

In the late 1860's the cellar was used as a school. Classes were taught by the wife of Assistant Keeper Abram Grover. Mrs. Grover taught her children as well as the few remaining from the eastside fishing village. Later Mrs. Emily Betts, an assistant keeper also taught in the cellar.

The workbench in the school room is an original piece of the Lighthouse. The tools are samples of what the Lighthouse staff used in the 1910 era.

Do not give tours of the storage area.

Watch for snakes in the cellar. The cisterns host snakes and the damp cellar attracts them as well. Baby black ring neck snakes have been sighted in the school room and the storage area. Brown snakes and fox snakes also have been observed near the lighthouse. None are poisonous.

Some valuable resources:

Keepers of the Lights by Steven Karges

Rock Island State Park Guidebook by FORI

Rock Island by Conan Eaton

Wisconsin Lighthouses by Ken & Barb Wardius

It is a great privilege to live in the Potawatomie Lighthouse for this week serving as a docent to our tourists. We ask that you take pride in caring for this valuable restoration.

I _____ have read the Docent Guidebook and take responsibility for the rules and guidelines stated therein. I will respect the Lighthouse and its contents, maintaining the duties expected of me in keeping order and cleanliness.

Signed _____
Docent

Your dedication and skills will result in opportunities for future docent positions.