

The Lake Superior lighthouses

by ANNE TODESCO

It is the time of year when the lightkeepers leave for their seasonal residence at the light stations along the Lake Superior coast. The lighthouse stations are usually situated on islands among them being Parisienne Island, Slate Islands, Battle Island and Lamb Island, to mention a few of them.

Following is a story heard from retired lightkeeper, Willard Hubelit and his wife Josie. Hubelit known as Bill by his friends. He started as an assistant keeper at Battle Island light in 1960. He was on 12 hour shift work from twelve midnight to noon each day. The lighthouse light was run with coal oil and air mantel. The lamp had to be filled twice a night. It had a timing device with a balance weight that had to be wound up twice a night. For power we had two Fairbanks motors to operate the fog horn, with water compressors that ran by belt from the motors and had to be started when the fog set in. It gave a very loud booming sound that could be heard for twenty or thirty miles. The house didn't have electricity at the time, only coal oil lamps and to heat the building there were the good old wood burning stoves and an oil burner heater. The building was very cold in the early spring and fall. We had to keep firing up the wood burning stove and it never failed them

like present electrical heating systems when there is a power failure.

Bill says, "Then the new way came." The houses were renovated and they were given running water, electricity, propane stoves, hot water tanks and indoor plumbing as opposed to the outdoor privy, carrying water from the lake and finding wood for the stoves. Now they had refrigerators and freezers for preservation of foods.

Bill vividly remembers the big storm in November of 1971 when he lost part of his ring finger. Bill and Josie recall the mountainous waves were rolling in right over the lighthouse. He estimated that the waves were at least a hundred feet high. They washed away the oil tanks and his boat all over the place. Bill was working in the engine room when the storm hit its height and the first of many big waves hit the building and knocked one of the windows out. Bill started for the door at the back of the building hoping to reach the dwelling before the storm became worse. He batted down and fastened everything up as quickly as possible. Another wave hit the building and slammed the door on his ring finger of his right hand. He said that he never missed part of his finger until he was half way to the house. His chief lightkeeper John Joiner

came to his assistance and gave him first aid attention. He then radioed to Thunder Bay of the accident.

After the heavy sea roll had died down, Joiner took him into the Terrace Bay Hospital, two days later. It was too late to save the finger. The accident happened on November 2nd so he was left off duty the rest of that season.

In the year 1973 Bill took the chief's job at the Parisienne Island lighthouse. He and Josie were quite discouraged when they landed there that spring as everything was in quite a mess. It took them a couple of years to get the house and grounds cleaned up from debris from storms and neglect. Everything had to be painted etc. to make things into decent living conditions. Outside all their hard work, they were delighted to find that everything was more modern at Parisienne Light. They had UHF telephones a new light and fog horn that went on automatically when the fog came in about a mile and a half from the light's location. One summer the fog had settled in for three days and nights and they could hear many ships' horns blowing to prevent them colliding with one another they said. When the fog finally lifted on the fourth night, the Hubelits said that the whole lake as far as they could see looked like a large city all lit up. The ships had moved in around the island and looked like a large city and a beautiful sight.

The Hubelits recall the night that the Edmund Fitzgerald went down. It was a busy and sad night of that fatality. Everyone was busy trying to keep pulpwood sticks, boom logs and debris away from the buildings. Huge waves washed right up to the buildings. When daylight came they were sent out to search the shoreline looking for bodies or life boats that might have washed ashore. They said that they had quite a clean-up job to around the buildings and lawn



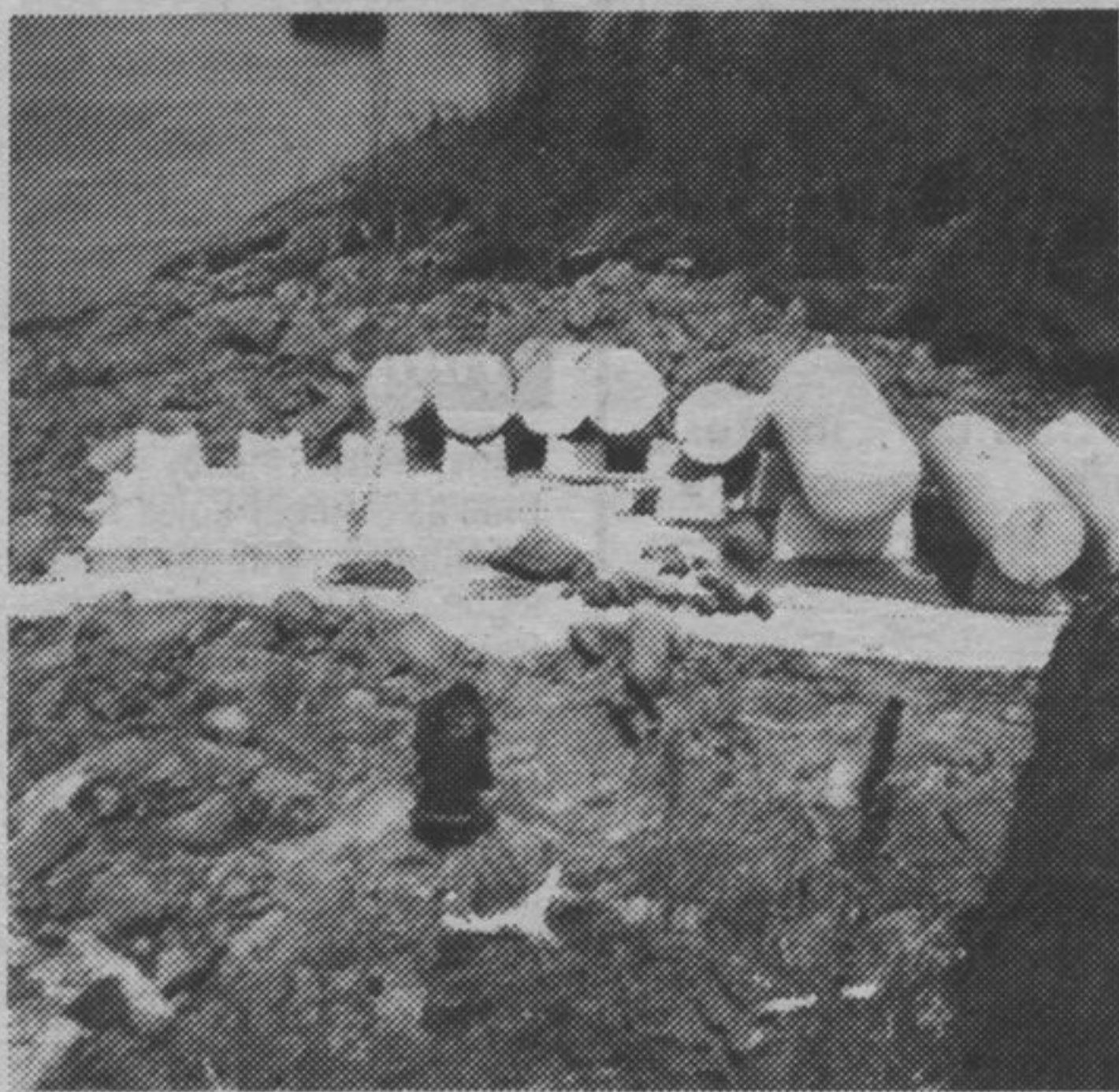
Baute Island lighthouse.

— large trees, boom logs etc. had to be removed. Trees were literally torn up by the roots.

Parisienne Island is 28 miles east of Sault Ste. Marie, just up from the locks. They could see the American side from their station, says Bill. Outside of the storms and fog, the island was a very beautiful place to spend the shipping season — it has very sandy beaches for sun bathing and swimming and a

perfect paradise away from home. They enjoyed watching the lake traffic going by whether a big freighter, a yacht, tug or a pleasure boat. All were part of the scene. They spent many a quiet hour tramping the beaches, or collecting objects adrift or swept ashore. They spent eight seasons on the island the miss the life there away from noise and pollution. They often recall their

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Cylinders of propane gas blown about during a storm at Baute Island.

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Registration will be accepted until 5:00 p.m. May 9th at the Recreation Office. Registration forms available at the office. Coaches and Umpires are required for all divisions. Leagues will operate only if sufficient interest is expressed.

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