

# Angel of the Lighthouse: Elizabeth Whitney Williams

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*Elizabeth Whitney Williams a grandi à Beaver Island dans le nord du lac Michigan. Elle est devenue gardienne du phare du port de cette île en 1872, à la suite du décès de son mari, gardien de phare lui-même, lors d'une tentative de sauvetage de marins naufragés. Après douze années de service sur Beaver Island, elle s'est assurée un autre poste de gardienne à Harbor Springs, Michigan au phare de Harbor Point Light, où elle a servi pendant vingt-neuf années.*

*Elizabeth Williams a obtenu une notoriété modeste avec la publication de son autobiographie, *A Child of the Sea (enfant de la mer)* en 1905. La biographie d'Elizabeth William est frappante, en partie, parce que peu de femmes ont tenu la position de gardienne de phare. Ce gardiennage, cependant, était un métier socialement acceptable pour un petit nombre de femmes au 19<sup>ème</sup> siècle car leurs fonctions étaient souvent compatibles avec des notions de domesticité femelle dans les classes moyennes.*

In 1904, *The Designer*, a women's magazine, published an article profiling women with an unusual occupation – lighthouse keeping. While reassuring readers that women were not assigned to the most dangerous of light stations, the article's author maintained that women possess the most important quality for a good lighthouse keeper – a keen “devotion to duty.” According to the author, “Mrs. Daniel Williams . . . stands first” amongst female Great Lakes lighthouse keepers “in point of achievement.” Indeed, Elizabeth Williams had been tending lights for more than thirty years, was writing her memoirs, and was still fulfilling her responsibilities as a homemaker.<sup>1</sup>

Light keeping was primarily a male occupation in the early twentieth century, and the author of the article acknowledged that female keepers were a distinct minority. During her long career as a lighthouse keeper, however, Elizabeth Williams tended lighthouses at Beaver Island and the resort town of Harbor Springs on northern Lake Michigan. Elizabeth received some modest notoriety with the publication of her memoir,

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Richards Gray, “Our Women Lighthouse-Keepers,” *The Designer* 20 (1904), reprinted in *Lighthouse Digest* (February, 1997) online via *Lighthouse Depot Online*, <[www.lighthousedepot.com/digest/Storypage.cfm?storykey=657](http://www.lighthousedepot.com/digest/Storypage.cfm?storykey=657)> (27 June 2005).

*A Child of the Sea, and Life among the Mormons*, in 1905.<sup>2</sup> According to a 1924 *Milwaukee Journal* article, *A Child of the Sea* cemented Elizabeth's reputation as Beaver Island's one true historian. Her "simple" yet "intensely interesting" narrative provided vignettes of northern Michigan pioneer life to early twentieth-century readers.<sup>3</sup> She also presented sensational stories of Beaver Island's Mormon community, which she asserted were told to her by those who "suffered under Mormon doctrine."<sup>4</sup> While Elizabeth's tales of isolated white settlements, of Native American communities, and of wild animals that prowled northern forests would be engaging to readers now removed from the frontier experience, these were stories recalled from Elizabeth's early childhood, and their details are therefore suspect. Likewise, her history of the Beaver Island Mormons is peppered with rumours and second-hand stories.<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, her memoir presents a glimpse into nineteenth-century northern Michigan family life, and the final pages of her narrative also provide a rare first-person account of the experiences of a lighthouse keeper.

Williams's life story is striking because very few women held the position of lighthouse keeper. Most female lighthouse keepers received their appointments after the death of a light keeper husband. Lighthouse keeping, however, became a socially acceptable occupation for a few women because the duties, including cleaning the apparatus, receiving visitors, and protecting the lives of others, were often compatible with nineteenth-century middle class notions of female domesticity. Elizabeth's simple memoir provides a window into the world of the female lighthouse keeper.

Elizabeth Whitney was born on Mackinac Island in 1842. Her father was a ship's carpenter. Her mother had been a widow with three sons before she married Elizabeth's father. When Elizabeth was small, the family moved from St. Helena Island in the Straits of Mackinac to Manistique on Michigan's Upper Peninsula. The Williams family settled on Beaver Island when Elizabeth was four.<sup>6</sup>

A splinter group of Mormons, led by charismatic lawyer James Jesse Strang, founded their own kingdom on Beaver Island. In a few years, Strang's political influence, and his endorsement of polygamy, created strains in the Mormons' relationships with their "gentile" neighbors. Like the rest of the non-Mormon minority, Elizabeth's family left for the mainland, settling in the town of Charlevoix, Michigan in

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<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Whitney Williams, *A Child of the Sea, and Life among the Mormons* (Grand Rapids, MI: Seymour and Muir Printing, 1905).

<sup>3</sup> George H. Archer, "When the Irish Sailors of Beaver Go Down to the Sea," *The Milwaukee Journal*, 12 October 1924, in *Inland Seas* 26, no. 2 (1970): 148.

<sup>4</sup> Williams, *Child of the Sea*, 5.

<sup>5</sup> In *The Women's Great Lakes Reader* (Duluth: Holy Cow! Press, 1998), Victoria Brehm argues that while some of Williams's stories are "exaggerated, . . . they highlight nineteenth-century concerns with gender, sexuality, and women's ability to determine their own lives" (287).

<sup>6</sup> Williams describes her childhood before her family's move to Beaver Island in Part I of *A Child of the Sea*, 11-59.

1852. Conflict, however, still brewed between the islanders and mainland communities. In 1856, Strang was assassinated by disgruntled followers. After their leader's death, the Mormons were forced to leave by their former neighbours. After living in the Traverse City area for a number of years, the Williams family returned to Beaver Island in 1857.<sup>7</sup> Apparently, her mother was homesick for the island. Although Elizabeth hated to leave the Traverse City school that she attended, she was unwilling to be separated from her family in order to continue her formal education.<sup>8</sup>

In 1860, eighteen-year-old Elizabeth married Clement Van Riper, a cooper who had moved to the island from Detroit for his health. The newlyweds' neighbours were the McKinleys, who tended the Beaver Island Harbor Lighthouse on the north end of the island. In July 1862, Clement assumed a teaching position in the Native American community on nearby Garden Island. For two years, Elizabeth enjoyed assisting her husband, whose duties included demonstrating supposedly proper gardening techniques to Native Americans.<sup>9</sup> In 1869, Clement obtained the keeper position at the Beaver Island Harbor Lighthouse after Peter McKinley resigned his post. McKinley had been in poor health, and his daughters had been fulfilling his duties at the lighthouse for years.<sup>10</sup>

The lighthouse, near the island town of St. James, had originally been constructed in 1856 as a navigational aid for ships seeking refuge in Beaver Island's natural harbour. The light's first keeper Lyman Granger had been ably assisted (in Elizabeth's estimation) by his wife, who kept the lamp polished.<sup>11</sup> In 1867, this lighthouse was deemed inadequate. After Congress appropriated five thousand dollars for improvements, a new forty-one foot cylindrical brick tower with a fourth order Fresnel lens was constructed. Elizabeth also appreciated the new brick kitchen that was added to the keeper's quarters. Clement was now charged with tending the taller, improved structure.<sup>12</sup>

Because of her husband's poor health, Elizabeth took on the duties of cleaning and maintaining the lamps. The "beautiful" Fresnel lens was under her particular care.

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<sup>7</sup> See Part II, *Ibid.*, 60-229. For more sympathetic treatments of Strang and his Mormon community, see Doyle C. Fitzpatrick, *The King Strang Story: A Vindication of James J. Strang, the Beaver Island Mormon King* (Lansing: National Heritage, 1970), and Roger Van Noord, *King of Beaver Island: The Life and Assassination of James Jesse Strang* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988). See also *The Journal of Beaver Island History* for local history.

<sup>8</sup> Williams, *A Child of the Sea*, 178-80. Williams discusses her family's return to the island, her marriage to Clement Van Riper, and her career as a lighthouse keeper in the final pages of her memoir (181-229).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 210-11.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 208.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

<sup>12</sup> Charles K. Hyde, *The Northern Lights: Lighthouse of The Upper Great Lakes* (Lansing: Two Peninsula Press, 1986; repr., Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995), 111 and Williams, *Child of the Sea*, 213.

The lighthouse held a special place in her heart, since her three brothers were sailors.<sup>13</sup> By helping to maintain the harbour light, she was doing her part to keep mariners safe.

Williams had loved the water since she was young, and her new duties at the Beaver Island Harbor Light afforded her long hours to contemplate Lake Michigan's moods. In fair weather, she enjoyed hearing the sailors' songs drifting from the ships anchored in the harbour. She also delighted in watching captains' families gathering berries along the shore during the warm summer days.<sup>14</sup>

She loved to watch the lake from the light tower during stormy nights, too, even though her duties kept her busy. The wicks in the lamps had to be trimmed at least two times each night. The lamps were fuelled by lard oil, and it was especially difficult to keep the oil flowing to the wicks in cold weather. Although light keeping duties were demanding, she was inspired by the shouts of sailors offshore as they tried to bring their storm-tossed ships into St. James Harbor. On some evenings, Elizabeth and her husband "could count fifty and sixty vessels anchored in our harbor, reaching some distance outside the point, as there was not room for so many inside. They lay so close they almost touched at times." On clear mornings, however, "[w]ith weather fair and white sails set, the ships went gliding out so gracefully to their faraway ports."<sup>15</sup>

Elizabeth was, perhaps, better suited for the light keeper's life than many other individuals. She had spent much of her childhood in northern Michigan, and her father had been dependent on Lake Michigan for his livelihood. Elizabeth was fortunate, however, because Clement was not assigned to an extremely isolated and unfamiliar post. Many other wives of lighthouse keepers could not readily identify the charms of tending a light in a particularly remote location. For example, Kate Walker, who became one of the most well known female lighthouse keepers on the east coast, had grave misgivings concerning her husband's appointment in 1883 as head keeper of Robbins Reef Light Station, a solitary light off of Staten Island. John previously had served as assistant keeper of New Jersey's Sandy Hook lighthouse, and Kate had aided her husband in his duties there. When Kate saw the isolated tower at Robbins Reef and the cramped quarters where she would be expected to set up housekeeping, she protested. At first, Kate refused to unpack and even threatened to leave her husband. Eventually, she did settle into her family's new quarters and, indeed, learned to love the light that would be her home for the next thirty-six years.<sup>16</sup>

Certainly, some wives approached their duties at lighthouses with trepidation. Nonetheless, some relatives of keepers relished a life on the water, became able assistants in lighthouse keeping (often without official recognition of their achievements), and demonstrated their resourcefulness in emergencies. Before Clement received his

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<sup>13</sup> Williams, *Child of the Sea*, 212-214.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 213-214.

<sup>16</sup> Dennis L. Noble, *Lighthouses & Keepers: The U.S. Lighthouse Service and its Legacy* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1997), 114, and Edward Rowe Snow, *Famous Lighthouses of America* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1955), 285.

appointment at Harbor Point Light, Peter McKinley's daughters Effie and Mary fulfilled their father's responsibilities when he became too ill to tend the light.<sup>17</sup> Abbie Burgess, who would later become one of Maine's most prominent lighthouse keepers, learned a keeper's duties while her father was stationed at the isolated post of Matinicus Rock Light Station off the Maine coast. In January 1856, Abbie's father Samuel left the island for supplies, leaving Abbie to care for the light, her invalid mother, and her three younger siblings. A violent storm then pounded the small island, keeping Samuel away for a month. The storm flooded the keeper's quarters, and the family had to take refuge in the light tower. Abbie reported later that she never let the light fail in spite of these stressful circumstances.<sup>18</sup>

Although nineteenth-century keepers with families were usually assigned to less isolated posts, many keepers' families were jeopardized because of the light's remote location. In November 1883, the keeper at Passage Island Light at Isle Royale left his family to obtain supplies. Before he returned, winter storms had set in, which delayed his return until spring. Fortunately, his resourceful Native American wife was able to fish and to trap animals to feed her children through the winter. Nonetheless, the family barely escaped starvation.<sup>19</sup>

A worse fate befell the relatives of the keeper of Squaw Island Light in the Beaver Island Archipelago. The keeper, his wife, niece, and two assistant keepers left Squaw Island for the winter on 15 December 1900, in a twenty-two foot sailboat. The boat capsized in a sudden squall, and the two women, one of the assistants, and the family dog perished before the two survivors were rescued.<sup>20</sup>

Of course, life at a lighthouse was usually defined by the monotony of tending, cleaning, and maintaining light equipment. All nineteenth-century wives of lighthouse keepers were expected to fulfill their domestic duties in the living quarters, often while fulfilling the role of assistant keeper. Although most histories of lighthouse keeping do not detail these domestic responsibilities, homemakers must have found the cramped quarters of many light stations a challenge.

Many middle-class women were aided by servants, but homemaking generally was an arduous task in the 1800s. After the mid-nineteenth century, middle-class women usually cooked their families' high fat, high starch meals on cast iron stoves.<sup>21</sup> Laundry took two days of a woman's workweek to complete.<sup>22</sup> The middle-class woman was also expected to keep an ordered, neat, and decorated house. Spring cleaning ensured that

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<sup>17</sup> Williams, *Child of the Sea*, 201.

<sup>18</sup> Noble, *Lighthouses and Keepers*, 110.

<sup>19</sup> Hyde, *The Northern Lights*, 61.

<sup>20</sup> "Tragedy," *The St. James (Michigan) Beaver Beacon*, 1948, reprinted in *Anchor News* (March 1978), 9-11.

<sup>21</sup> Mabel Collins Donnelly, *The American Victorian Woman* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1986), 105, and Ellen M. Plante, *Women at Home in Victorian America: A Social History* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 1997), 146.

<sup>22</sup> Plante, *Women at Home*, 155.

furniture was polished and well maintained and that rugs and drapes did not accumulate too much dust and grime.<sup>23</sup> General housecleaning activities would have been especially important to women making homes in lighthouses, since official lighthouse inspectors examined the dwellings as well as the lantern room.

Needlework was an exceptionally important skill for the Victorian woman. Women made much of the family's clothing, even as finished clothing for purchase became more widely available as the century progressed. Women also used needlework to demonstrate their skills in the decorative arts. According to historian Ellen M. Plante, a woman's needlework was viewed as "symbolic of a well-bred and industrious nature."<sup>24</sup> Little girls created needlework "samplers" to hone their skills. Adult women quilted, cross-stitched, and tatted. Refined middle-class women also were skilled in other decorative arts. Women created dried floral arrangements, painted watercolours, wove baskets, découpaged, and created shell objets d'art.<sup>25</sup> Such activities demonstrated women's good taste and refinement and turned the home into a supposedly restful, wholesome, and beautiful environment for the family.

Nineteenth-century homemakers often kept gardens to add variety to their families' diets, to produce herbal medicines, and for recreation. The US Lighthouse Board, which supervised lighthouse keepers since its establishment in 1852, also encouraged keepers to cultivate gardens to alleviate boredom and to supplement their diets.<sup>26</sup> Many light keepers and their families managed to scratch out small gardens in rocky, windswept, and marginal soil. Female lighthouse keepers and the wives of keepers often confronted an inhospitable environment for either raising a garden or domestic animals. For example, Abbie Burgess had tremendous difficulties in keeping the family chickens alive during the January 1856 storm.<sup>27</sup> Clara Emory Maddocks, keeper of Maine's Owl's Head lighthouse and fog bell, participated in the rescue of her cow after it had fallen over a cliff. Clara, however, was satisfied that the cow was no worse for wear.<sup>28</sup> *The Designer* magazine also spoke approvingly in 1903 of Emily Fish, keeper of the Point Pinos lighthouse in California, who (along with her servant) kept "leghorn hens, bebies of pigeons, French poodles, . . . Jersey cows," a fine garden plot, and a reception room of "refinement."<sup>29</sup>

"Botanizing" and other naturalist pursuits also had become genteel and wholesome middle-class hobbies by the mid-nineteenth century, and women were

<sup>23</sup> Donnelly, *Victorian Woman*, 103, Plante, *Women at Home*, 154.

<sup>24</sup> Plante, *Women at Home*, 142.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 162, 165.

<sup>26</sup> Noble, *Lighthouses and Keepers*, 98.

<sup>27</sup> Mary Louise Clifford and J. Candace Clifford, *Women Who Kept the Lights: An Illustrated History of Female Lighthouse Keepers* (Williamsburg, Virginia: Cypress Communications, 1993), 26-27.

<sup>28</sup> De Wire, Elinor, "Women of the Lights," *American History Illustrated* 21, no. 10 (1987): 44.

<sup>29</sup> "What Women are Doing: A Woman Lighthouse Keeper," *The Designer* 19 (November 1903): 85.

encouraged to take up these pursuits as long as they did not neglect their domestic responsibilities or exert themselves to the point of damaging their health. Laura Hecox, who became keeper of California's Santa Cruz light in 1883, had collected natural history specimens since she was a child. Laura would eventually donate her substantial collection of eggs, marine specimens, and fossils to the city of Santa Cruz for a museum.<sup>30</sup>

Of course, childcare was the primary responsibility of women in the Victorian home. Some lighthouse keeping women, like Kate Walker, had the additional burden of transporting their children to the mainland for school in small boats.<sup>31</sup> Although Elizabeth did not have children, her responsibilities were many as the wife of a keeper.

In 1872, during one of many stormy nights on Lake Michigan, Elizabeth and her husband Clement heard a ship in distress. In an attempt to aid those aboard the sinking vessel, Clement rowed out into the storm. He never returned. Although Elizabeth details little of this incident in her memoir, it is obvious that her husband's death devastated her. At that moment, however, she had little time to grieve; she was now the lone caretaker of the lighthouse. The storm raged for three more days. Although "weak with sorrow," she was buoyed by the knowledge that there were other mariners "out on the dark and treacherous waters who needed to catch the rays of the shining light from my lighthouse tower. Nothing could rouse me but that thought." Clement's body was never recovered.<sup>32</sup>

After Clement's death, Elizabeth was able to secure an official appointment as the keeper of the Beaver Island light. Although she found the responsibilities of safeguarding the well-being of so many sailors who relied on the light daunting, she "longed to do something for humanity's sake," as well earn her "own living." Her aging and now widowed mother was dependent on her as well. The lighthouse was her "only home," and she seems to have viewed tending the light as a calling and a comfort in her personal sorrows.<sup>33</sup>

Even though Elizabeth was from a "pioneer" background, notions of woman's domestic role were embraced in frontier areas in order to replicate stable, "civilized" life. Nonetheless, Elizabeth took on a traditional man's job, with the expectation that she would be capable of maintaining the light and safeguarding the lives of sailors seeking shelter in St. James harbour. On the surface, Elizabeth's new role of light keeper would seem to contradict the nineteenth-century stereotype of what a white, northern, middle-class Victorian woman should be. The woman light keeper seems to stand at odds against the pious, modest, sensitive nineteenth-century homemaker who defended her family's health and moral virtue and protected her sphere of the home. Such stereotypes, however, only hint at the complexities of real women's lives.<sup>34</sup> Certainly, poor, immigrant, and

<sup>30</sup> De Wire, "Women of the Lights," 47-48.

<sup>31</sup> Snow, *Famous Lighthouses*, 285.

<sup>32</sup> Williams, *A Child of the Sea*, 214-15.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

<sup>34</sup> See Barbara Welter's pioneering work in U.S. women's history, "The Cult of True

minority women were left out of this vision of womanhood. Many white, middle class women who embraced such notions of domesticity still sought educations and engaged in women's organizations. Even *The Designer*, a popular magazine marketed to middle-class women, approved of female lighthouse keepers by the beginning of the twentieth century, arguing that women have a particularly keen sense of duty – a quality every lighthouse keeper should have.<sup>35</sup> Certainly, safeguarding the lives of sailors could be interpreted as an extension of woman's nurturing role.



*Elizabeth Whitney Williams, from a reprint of her autobiography. Courtesy Harbor Springs Area Historical Society.*

Nonetheless, female lighthouse keepers were extremely rare. Less than three percent of all Great Lakes lighthouse keepers were women.<sup>36</sup> Generally, a little over twenty percent of American females over the age of sixteen worked outside of the home at the end of the nineteenth century. The majority of these wage-earning women worked as domestics or in textile manufacturing.<sup>37</sup> Domestic work in particular accounted for seventy percent of women's paid work in 1870 and for forty percent of women's paid work in 1900.<sup>38</sup> For middle-class women, employment opportunities were limited usually to a handful of "female" professions in post-Civil War America. These included school teacher (a role Elizabeth had fulfilled previously on

Garden Island), librarian, and office worker.<sup>39</sup> A small number of women who lived in urban areas could find employment in charitable organizations, and a handful of educated

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Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly*, 18, no. 2 (1966), 151-174. For recent critiques of Welter's argument, see Nancy A. Hewitt, "Taking the True Woman Hostage," *Journal of Women's History*, 14, no. 1 (2002), 156-62, and Mary Louise Roberts, "True Womanhood Revisited," *Journal of Women's History*, 14, no. 1 (2002), 150-55.

<sup>35</sup> Gray, "Our Women Lighthouse Keepers," 1.

<sup>36</sup> Frederick Stonehouse, *Women and the Lakes: Untold Great Lakes Maritime Tales* (Gwinn, Michigan: Avery Color Studios, 2001), 75-76.

<sup>37</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor, *Statistics of Women at Work, Based on Unpublished Information Derived from the Schedules of the Twelfth Census: 1900* (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of the Census, 1907), 9, 32.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 32, and Donnelly, *Victorian Woman*, 89.

<sup>39</sup> Donnelly, *Victorian Woman*, 100-04, and U.S. Census, 32-33.



women earned a living as writers. A few broke into the professions of medicine and law.<sup>40</sup> Most of these working women were single. In 1890, only 4.6 percent of women working for wages were married. By 1900, that number had increased to 5.6 percent.<sup>41</sup>

Like most women lighthouse keepers, Elizabeth was able to secure her position through family connections. The vast majority of female keepers were the widows of keepers or relatives of a male keeper. Many of these women already possessed the knowledge and skills needed to tend a light, and an appointment as keeper often provided some financial stability to a widow.<sup>42</sup> Elizabeth, with a dependent relative, now needed to earn her own living. Of course, she was already familiar with the duties of the light keeper, having served unofficially as assistant keeper under her own husband.

In 1875, Elizabeth married photographer Daniel Williams, but still kept her position at the Beaver Island Harbor Light. For reasons she didn't specify in her memoir, Elizabeth and Daniel decided to move to the mainland, and she requested a transfer to a new light station.<sup>43</sup> The move certainly would have benefited her husband's business. Her request was granted, and Elizabeth became the attendant of the newly constructed Harbor Point Lighthouse at Harbor Springs, Michigan in September 1884. Elizabeth was now the new keeper of a harbour light near a resort town, and her duties included giving summer visitors tours of the lighthouse. Indeed, the 1904 *Designer* article noted that "the wealthiest and most exclusive of America is yearly brought to Mrs. Williams's door," where Elizabeth provided a warm reception, a view from the tower, and an explanation of the operation of the light and fog signal.<sup>44</sup> Although her new post was still in northern Michigan, Elizabeth missed seeing the ships of Lake Michigan's major shipping lanes.<sup>45</sup>

Elizabeth was in her sixties at the time *The Designer* profiled her, yet she was still "strong and robust." She was described as a "pioneer type" who also had an "intense interest and sympathy for all things human." Perhaps her sense of sympathy was intensified by the deaths of two brothers, three nephews, and her first husband at sea.<sup>46</sup> Like many other writers who have explored the keeper's world, Elizabeth commented on the loneliness and isolation of lighthouse keeping in her memoir. Elizabeth brought her own feminine perspective to bear on this issue, stating that, at many lights, "there can be no women and children about to cheer and gladden" the lonely lives of keepers. She did acknowledge that a station with three or four

<sup>40</sup> Donnelly, *Victorian Woman*, 106-08, Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 115-16, and Plante, *Women at Home*, 171.

<sup>41</sup> U.S. Census, 14.

<sup>42</sup> Clifford, *Women Who Kept the Lights*, 2. Generally, it was not uncommon for relatives of lighthouse keepers to become light keepers themselves. (Hyde, *The Northern Lights*, 52-53.)

<sup>43</sup> Williams, *A Child of the Sea*, 221.

<sup>44</sup> Grey, "Our Women Lighthouse Keepers," 1-4.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 4, and Williams, *A Child of the Sea*, 224.

<sup>46</sup> Grey, "Our Women Lighthouse Keepers," 3, and Williams, *A Child of the Sea*, 215-16.

attendants could provide companionship and at least some of the comforts of family.<sup>47</sup> Elizabeth's memoir is also peppered with many sentimental poems of the seafaring life, including emotional tales of loved ones lost to watery graves. Sentimental poetry was popular reading material for women in the nineteenth century, and the inclusion of her poems may have added appeal to Elizabeth's writings.<sup>48</sup>

During her tenure at Harbor Point Lighthouse, Elizabeth found the time to write her memoir, which was published in 1905. She served the community of Harbor Springs as light keeper for twenty-nine years, until her retirement in 1913. Elizabeth had spent forty-four years of her life tending lighthouses.

Elizabeth Williams would live almost twenty-five more years in retirement. She died on 23 January 1938 in Charlevoix, twelve hours after her husband Daniel had passed away.<sup>49</sup> Elizabeth had lived a frontier experience that was now lost to twentieth-century Michigan residents. Her memoir, which focused on her life in the nineteenth century, reflected the literary sensibilities of the Victorian woman. Her writings also offer a glimpse into the life of a female lighthouse keeper. Although her writing has been described as "naïve and sentimental," it provides valuable insight into women's experiences in Great Lakes region.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Williams, *A Child of the Sea*, 217-18.

<sup>48</sup> See *Ibid.*, 216-17. See also Plante, *Women at Home*, 169.

<sup>49</sup> "Obituary," n.a., n.d., reprinted in a new edition of *A Child of the Sea* (St. James, Mich.: Beaver Island Historical Society, 2004; first ed. Grand Rapids: Seymour and Muir Printing, 1905), 174.

<sup>50</sup> Clifford and Clifford, "Foreword," in *A Child of the Sea*, 2004 ed., iii-v.