

The Keepers and their Families

The Job

Potential keepers were interviewed at the Marine Department's Head Office in Wellington. The application forms were quite detailed and as well as the usual personal details included a reference and certificates attesting to sobriety, honesty, industry and good health, in particular 20/20 vision.¹⁵¹ Once the men were hired they went through a six month probationary period where they were to learn the trade and prove their sobriety, obedience, cleanliness and competence.¹⁵² Anecdotal evidence says a number of candidates failed at this point because of the high stress levels created by isolation. The probationary keeper would then be promoted to an assistant keeper (second then first assistant) before being promoted to a principal keeper (after many years of experience).

From the 1950s the Marine Department purposely hired married men for the keeper roles, presumably to reduce the loneliness and to encourage a sense of community. From the 1960s there was a shift to hire keepers with more applicable trade skills and an inventive mind, especially relating to diesel electric equipment.¹⁵³ This reflected the shift in technology used in lighthouses and the need to have someone onsite if the light stopped working. Keepers were also assessed for even temperament in an emergency, good social skills and pleasant manner.¹⁵⁴ These aspects were apparently assessed by a department psychologist for whom there was a long wait for appointments.¹⁵⁵

During the first half of Cape Brett's functional life the keepers worked in a three shift cycle every night, starting an hour before sunset and ending at sunrise.¹⁵⁶ The first keeper would light the lamp and would stay in the light to maintain the gas pressure - by hand pumping - in the kerosene lamp. He would also spend 15 minutes of every hour winding the weights.¹⁵⁷ The last keeper would be assigned the job of trimming the lamps, cleaning the lenses and drawing the curtain to prevent sun damage to the lens.¹⁵⁸

The routine post-electrification involved the keepers spending an hour each morning and evening tending to the light. The routine consisted of a 20 minute walk up to the light, 20 minutes for turning the light on or off and then the 20 minute walk down from the light. The hour would start 20 minutes before dusk and 20 minutes after daybreak.¹⁵⁹

Much of the rest of the keepers' time on the stations was split between paperwork, maintenance and life-support activities. The paperwork was a necessity and related to every aspect of the station's running and it would appear that the Marine Department eventually managed to develop a form to suit every occasion.¹⁶⁰ Forms included:

The Standard Books:

- Day/Log Book (for examples see Figure 97 & Figure 98)
- Outward Letters Book
- Inward Letters Book
- Visitor's Book
- Monthly Reports (which included the majority of the details).

Monthly reports included such details as how many wild goats were shot, what maintenance had been carried out, who the visitors to the station were, what boats called in, what medical supplies were used from the station kit, the state of the equipment, and the anticipated leave.

These were just a few of the tasks reported to the Marine Department, and provided a good picture of what was happening at the settlement.

Helen Beaglehole also provides a generalised list of paperwork that includes:

- Reports
- Letters
- Explanations
- Lists
- Requisition Requests
- Property Registers
- Weather Recording Books
- Weather Returns
- Drum Returns
- Animal Returns ¹⁶¹

The reports had to be juggled so they could be submitted daily, weekly, monthly, bimonthly, six monthly and annually depending on the expected due dates.¹⁶²

The maintenance consisted of keeping the tower, houses and auxiliary buildings up to standard. The machinery had to be maintained and strict records were kept on all parts and when they needed to be replaced. Other tasks included maintaining and renewing fences, repainting buildings and tower when necessary, laying concrete, cutting grass and chimney sweeping.¹⁶³

The life-support activities consisted of:

- The ordering/unloading/distribution of supplies
- Tending to the horse, cows, chickens
- Milking
- Butchering of any animals for fresh meat
- Fishing
- Tending to the garden and [harvesting] fresh vegetables

Most of these activities also had to be worked into the daily routine for the keepers, possibly with help from their wives if they had time.

The life of a keeper was extremely busy especially for the principal keeper who had to act as Justice of the Peace, chairman of the school committee, fisherman, butcher, gardener, farmer, weatherman, mechanic and carpenter. The assistant keepers took the role of postmaster more than the principal keepers, with the rest of their time taken up with specially assigned tasks – in Cape Brett's case it was shooting goats.

JOURNAL

148

Cape Bret

LIGHTHOUSE

Day: *Wednesday*

Date: *28th May 47*

Hour.	Barometer.	WIND.		State of Weather.	State of Atmosphere Seawind. Clear, Misty or Fog.	State of Sea and Direc- tion from	Occurrences, and Hour.
		Direction.	Force.				
3 A.M.		<i>N.</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>B. h.</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>Smooth</i>	
6 A.M.		<i>N.</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>B. h.</i>	<i>S.</i>	<i>Slight</i>	
9 A.M.		<i>N.</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>B.</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>"</i>	
12 Noon		<i>S. S. W.</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>Cloud</i>	
4 P.M.		<i>N</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>0. P.</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>"</i>	
6 P.M.		<i>N.</i>	<i>3.</i>	<i>0.</i>	<i>8.</i>	<i>"</i>	
12 Midnight		<i>NNW</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>00</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>"</i>	

MEMORANDUM OF WATCHES

Keeper.	TOWER.		LOOKOUT.		WIRELESS.		Signature of Keeper.
	From	To	From	To	From	To	
Principal	<i>0000</i>	<i>0200</i>					<i>B. Bowley</i> <i>J. Shepherd</i> <i>W. F. Jennings</i>
1st Asst.	<i>0200</i>	<i>0720</i>					
	<i>1715</i>	<i>2200</i>					
2nd Asst.	<i>2200</i>	<i>2400</i>					

MEMORANDUM OF DAILY EMPLOYMENT (8 a.m. to 12 noon)

Details (with time occupied)

Principal keeper: *Completed packing effects, wheeling cases to dry store
Cleaned out dwellings*

1st Assistant: *Shifting into No. 1 dwelling (all day)*

2nd Assistant: *Preparing landing, crane, winch etc; for shifting in and out keeps.*

REMARKS

*Handed over P.O. to princ Dept Property, Stores, Stamps etc to Keeper
J. Shepherd.*

Signature: *B. Bowley*

Figure 97 – Copy of the Day Journal from Wednesday, 28 May 1947. Notes are separately written by keepers – Bowley, Shepherd, and Jennings.

149

JOURNAL

Cape Brett

LIGHTHOUSE

Day: Thursday

Date: 29th May 49

Hour.	Barometer.	WIND.		State of Weather.	State of Atmosphere Seaward. Clear, Misty or Fog.	State of Sea and Direction from	Occurrences, and Hour.
		Direction.	Force.				
3 A.M.		NW	6	OR.	5	High	
6 A.M.		W	7	OR.	4	High	
9 A.M.		NW	4	OPT	7	High	
12 Noon		W	3	BC	8	Abnd	
4 P.M.		SW	2	BC	8	Abnd	
8 P.M.		SW	1	BC	7	Abnd	
12 Midnight		SW	1	L	7	" "	

MEMORANDUM OF WATCHES

Keeper.	TOWER.		LOOKOUT.		WIRELESS.		Signature of Keeper.
	From	To	From	To	From	To	
Principal	0200	0721					<i>(E. J. ...)</i> <i>J. G. ...</i> <i>S. F. ...</i>
	1721	2200					
1st Asst.	2200	2400					
2nd Asst.	0000	0200					

MEMORANDUM OF DAILY EMPLOYMENT (8 a.m. to 12 noon)

Details (with time occupied)

Principal keeper: Correspondence, odd jobs around dwelling, cleaned lenses.

1st Assistant: Correspondence. Completed shift.

2nd Assistant: Rechecked water-feed line, turned on pump.

REMARKS

Wet day. Recd telegram from Capt. More. Marine Auckland advising that Keeper Githiland proceeding Opua Friday en route for Cape Brett. Cancelled engagement of Temp. Kpt by phone.

Signature: *(Signature)*

90 100/10/49-11 002

Figure 98 - Copy of the Day Journal from Thursday, 29 May 1949.

The Construction

The construction workers' camp was made up of tents set up in the gut (the lowest and most sheltered point of the settlement). Not many of the names are known, but there is information about David Scott, John Clark, Mr and Mrs Vette, J.P. Riding Esq., P. Stoddard and W. Street.

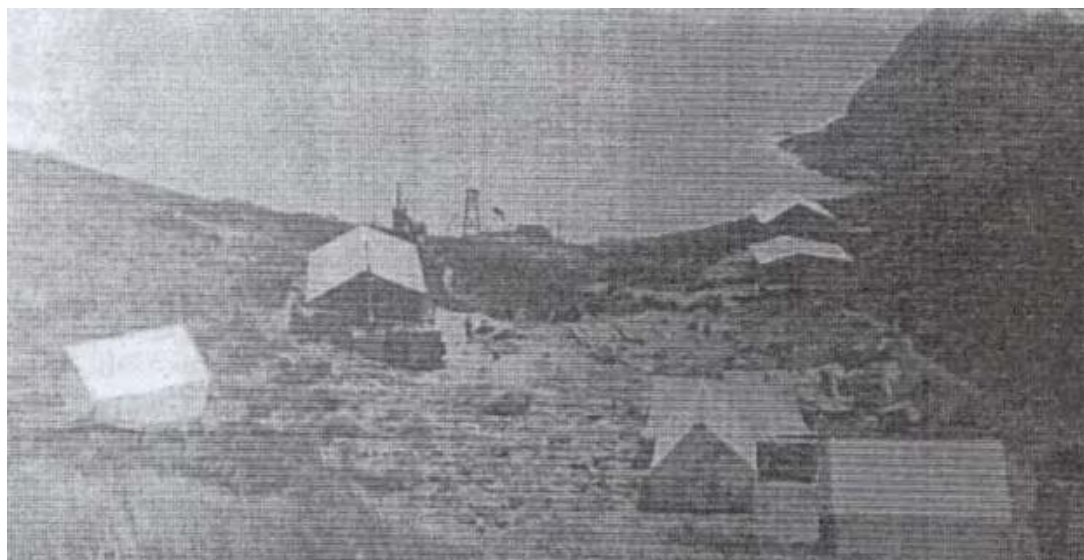


Figure 99 – The workers camp in 1909.

David Scott

David Scott was hired by the Marine Department as a lighthouse artificer around 1880. He joined New Zealand's two "leading lights" of lighthouses, Captain Robert Johnson and John Blackett, in developing the country's lighthouse system.¹⁶⁴ Scott's position as artificer, according to author John O'Ross, is a difficult position to define, best described as being a cross between an engineer and a foreman of works.¹⁶⁵ Cape Brett was Scott's last lighthouse project before his retirement in 1910. In October 1909 Scott travelled on the *Hinemoa* to Cape Brett with his five workmen (most likely four labourers and a carpenter according to the *Mokohinau* journal¹⁶⁶) to install the lantern, machine and apparatus within the tower.¹⁶⁷

John Clark (born 02/06/1880 – died 21/02/1968).¹⁶⁸

John Clark was born in Bakewell, England in 1880. He was named after an older brother (who had died young) and began work by the age of twelve. In mid 1907 John boarded the RMS *Corinthic* as a ship's carpenter bound for New Zealand; the journey lasted one month and 18 days. John's intentions upon arrival were to head to San Francisco, but due to the 1906 earthquake and subsequent fire, he chose (wisely) to remain in New Zealand.¹⁶⁹

John's first job in New Zealand was with the construction team sent to Cape Brett in 1909 and it is believed that he was part of the team that built the second house (the current hut). While working on the station John received what is considered to be the earliest piece of mail sent to the station. The postcard he received was postmarked 23 April 1909.

It is thought that John returned to Auckland after the station's completion and later went on to meet his future wife Florence Fairburn (born 1 August 1880 in Hull, England). The two were married in Wellington on 28 December 1908 and had three daughters (the last of whom was born June 1915). John is described as having been as strong as an ox and at the



Figure 100 – John Clark.

age of 75 he was still able to carry around two concrete tubs on his back. John died in Auckland during February 1968 aged 88.

Hannah Pauline Vette (wife of carpenter). ¹⁷⁰

Mrs Vette is mentioned in the Cape Brett postal office file as having taken on the role of postmaster for the construction site from the 31 March 1909. She was presumably married to Mr Vette who worked as one of the carpenters on the station.

POST AND TELEGRAPH DEPARTMENT.

OFFICE RECORD.

Name of Office: Cape Brett (at)

Full Name and Occupation of Person in charge.	Powers of Office.	Date appointed or constituted.	Salary.	Amount of Bond, and Date.	Record Reference, and Remarks.
Vette, (Mrs) Hannah Pauline (wife of Carpenter) (postal duties)	76l.	31.3.09	76l.	5	New P.O. Salary granted.

Figure 101 – Hannah as she appears in the postal records.

J.P. Riding Esq.

Mr Riding was one of the labourers connected to the construction of the Cape Brett Lighthouse. As evidenced in a credit for imprest note dated 29 November 1909 from the Customs Department files, held by National Archives in Auckland, Riding was paid a total of £40 for his work ‘in connection to erection of the light at Cape Brett.’¹⁷¹

P. Stoddard & W. Street

Mr Stoddard was a fitter and Mr Street a blacksmith. Both were present during the construction and are recorded at Auckland National Archives as being paid by the Customs Department.¹⁷²

The First Keepers (1910-1920)

Year	Principal Keepers	First Assistant Keepers	Second Assistant Keepers
1910	Robert McIver	Frances Ernest Lee	Arthur W. Page
1911			
1912	George William Thwaites	S. William Creamer	
1913	Henry Harvey		Albert Victor Pearce
1914		Donald Cameron	
1915			
1916	Charles Reisop William Knight Cleverley		Harold McKinna
1917		Thomas Cairns	
1918			
1919	Alfred Herbert Sanders		Charles William Davis
1920		Douglas James Grindlay	

Robert McIver

Rank: Principal Keeper.

Work Period: 07-02-10 to 27-11-12.

Family: Nothing known.

Robert McIver was the first principal keeper of the Cape Brett Lighthouse. He joined the light service in 1881 and by the time he was transferred to Cape Brett had 19 years of experience at New Zealand lighthouses.¹⁷³ A memo dated 25 January 1910 puts Robert moving to Cape Brett on the SS *Hinemoa* on its northern lighthouse trip, and states that his salary per annum totalled £170.¹⁷⁴ As the first principal keeper, Robert served 1025 days (2 years, 9 months and 21 days) on the station. It is not known if he had any family with him on the station. After Cape Brett he was transferred to the Cape Foulwind Lighthouse on the West Coast of New Zealand.¹⁷⁵

Frances Ernest Lee

Rank: First Assistant Keeper.

Work Period: 30-10-09 to 26-07-12.

Family: Wife ~ Lavina May Lee.

Francis Ernest Lee (nicknamed Frank) was at Cape Brett for just over four months as first assistant keeper before the light was switched on. Prior to that he was stationed at Puysegur Point (in Fiordland) and The Brothers (in Marlborough). Frank resigned from the lighthouse service effective 26 July 1912, his last day at Cape Brett.¹⁷⁶ Frank's wife Lavina took over the role of postmaster from Hannah Vette from 1 November 1909 until they moved in 1912.¹⁷⁷

Arthur W. Page

Rank: Second Assistant Keeper.

Work Period: 30-10-09 to 17-10-13.

Family: Wife ~ Name unknown.

Children ~ 1 son (Alvin).

Arthur Page was the first second assistant keeper of the station, but very little other information is known about him. Evidence suggests that he had joined Frank Lee on the trip to the Cape, both men arriving on 30 October 1909 and taking up residence in the second and third houses. He would have presumably helped in setting up of the station, ensuring everything was in working order before the principal keeper arrived. Arthur was also the second longest serving assistant keeper of this light's history. He served 1449 days (3 years, 11 months and 18 days) before being transferred to the Nelson lighthouse.¹⁷⁸ In 1929 he was stationed at the Cape Palliser light when the magnitude 7.8 earthquake, which severely damaged the South Island town of Murchison, hit on 17 June.¹⁷⁹ The Palliser lighthouse, situated on the same fault line, was also damaged by this earthquake and Page was still dealing with the earthquake's aftermath months later.

George William Thwaites

Rank: Principal Keeper.

Work Period: 27-11-12 to 15-04-13.

Postmaster: from the 27-11-12.

Family: Wife ~ Margaret.

Children (3) ~ 2 daughters, Gladys and Victoria, and 1 son, Joe.

George Thwaites transferred to Cape Brett to replace McIver as principal keeper from 27 November 1912. Thwaites had been stationed at Cape Foulwind Light in Westport before being transferred north.¹⁸⁰

According to the Eric Creamer (son of one of George's assistants) Thwaites' career was only cut short by his untimely death.¹⁸¹ Both George and his wife became very ill while on the station and were sent to Kawakawa Hospital.¹⁸² While there their conditions worsened. Mrs Thwaites died first, with her husband following the next morning (2 June 1913).¹⁸³ Their children (the eldest being 15 at the time) originally stayed with the Creamer family before moving elsewhere.¹⁸⁴ Gladys Thwaites went on to become a decorated Army Nurse in World War 2, based at Trentham Memorial Army Camp in Wellington.

S. William Creamer

Rank: First Assistant Keeper.

Work Period: 26-07-12 to 31-12-14.

Family: Wife ~ Name Unknown.

Children (2) ~ 2 sons, Eric and John (aka Joel).

William Creamer replaced Frank Lee as the first assistant keeper at the end of September 1912 taking over the residence of the second house. He had a comprehensive career as a lighthouse keeper. Before being moved to Cape Brett he was stationed at Cape Maria Van Diemen (North Cape); Manukau South Heads and Tiri Tiri Matangi Island (both in Auckland); and afterwards was moved to Cape Campbell (in Marlborough), Castlepoint (in the Wairarapa) and finally Cuvier Island (Auckland/Coromandel).¹⁸⁵

Williams' oldest son Eric wrote a biography based on recollections from his childhood, covering 1907-1922 and including most of his father's lighthouse career.¹⁸⁶ Most of his recollections are a child's view but he did visit many of the stations again during his later life, and while most were still operational as manned stations.¹⁸⁷

Some of his recollections of Cape Brett have been used throughout this text. More personal recollections include the family's personal belongings, including the piano, being offloaded by sailors, and keepers using the crane. The piano was then hand winched on the tram trolley up to the second house.¹⁸⁸ Eric also remembers heading up to the 'dobbin' (the whim) with his father and pretending to help pull the tram trolley up the track using the wire; though on one occasion this proved to be an extremely bad idea (for story see health care page 145).¹⁸⁹

The Creamers' youngest son was born at Cape Brett with his mother choosing to stay at the station for the birth.¹⁹⁰ The Creamers had a good friend, Nurse Currie, who came to stay and assist Mrs Creamer during the birth.¹⁹¹ This is the earliest record of a baby being born at the station and is likely to have been the first birth at the station.

Eric was apparently known for his practical jokes and he one day tricked both his father and Mr Harvey (the principal keeper). While both men were at the top of the tower Eric, ages about nine, stayed on the ground floor and successfully made a noise like a steamer. For the next 20 minutes, both the keepers searched the horizon for the mystery steamer.¹⁹²

William appears to have been a great music fan – he could play the accordion, the family had their piano and he is said to have had a large record collection containing a variety of 'accordion pop, piano and urban'.¹⁹³

It is likely that after George Thwaites was taken to Kawakawa Hospital, William would have become the keeper in charge/acting principal keeper as he was next in the chain of command. It is also probable that a relieving keeper was brought in as soon as possible to cover his shifts as at this time the shift structure required three men.

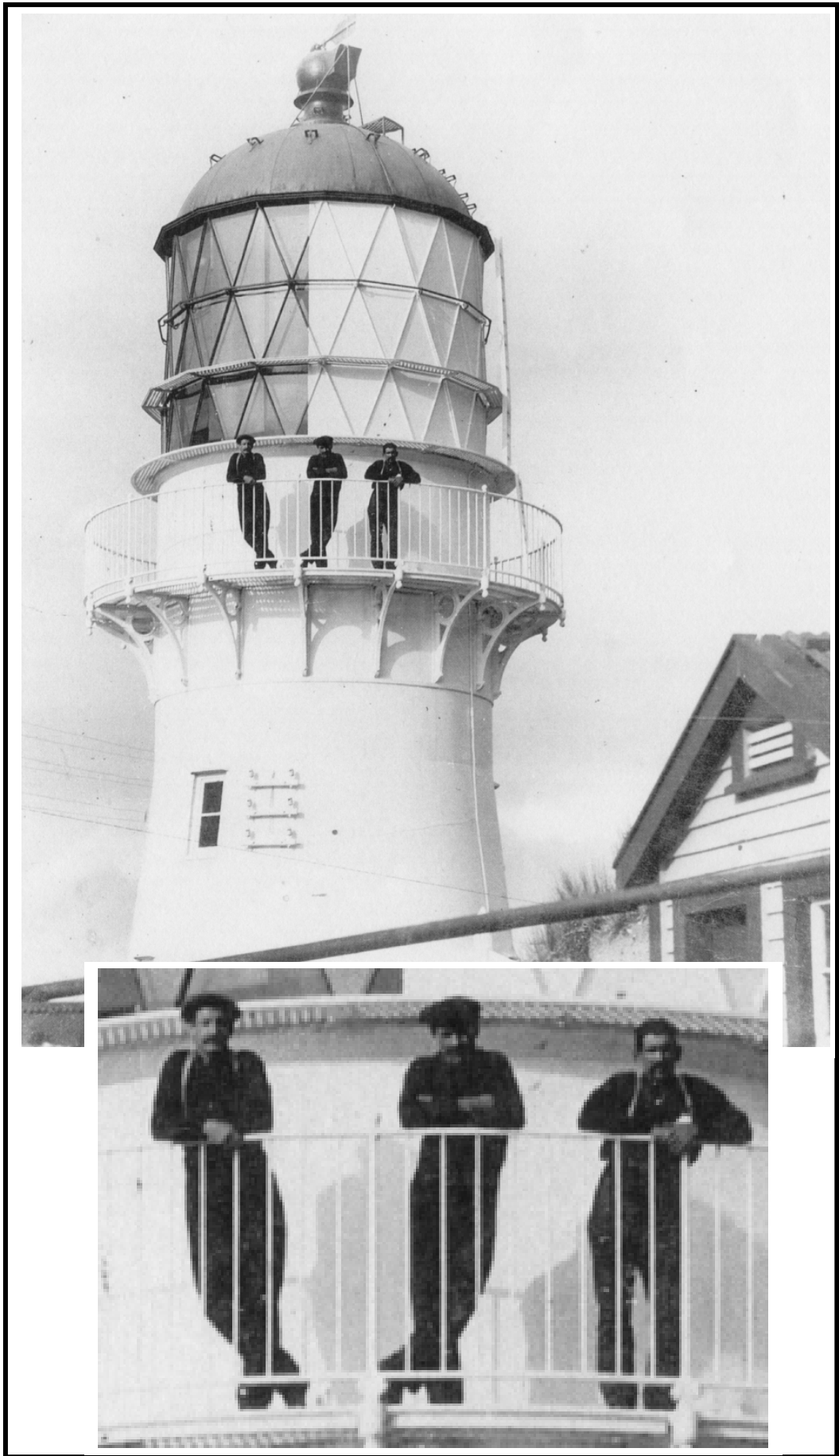


Figure 102 - Bill Creamer, Henry Harvey and Albert Pearce at Cape Brett, 1914.

Henry Harvey

Rank: Principal Keeper.

Work Period: 14-07-13 to 01-02-16.

Postmaster: from the 14-07-13.

Family: Wife ~ Mary (nee Ashmore).

Children (7) ~ 4 daughters, Alice, Charlotte, Irene and Edith and 3 Sons
Henry, Charles Brett and Sydney.

Mr Harvey and his family replaced the Thwaites in October 1913. He was promoted to the rank of principal keeper at Cape Brett from the position of first assistant keeper at Cuvier Island.¹⁹⁴

Albert Victor Pearce

Rank: Second Assistant Keeper & Principal Keeper.

Work Period: 19-10-13 to ??-03-16 & ??-01-23 to ??-01-25.

Postmaster: from the ??-01-23.

Family: Wife ~ Name unknown.

Children (1) ~ 1 daughter, Inez.

Albert Pearce was the first keeper to have been stationed at the Cape Brett light twice. The first visit was as a second assistant and the second visit, 10 years later, was as principal keeper. Not much is known about his presence on the station, though his daughter is guessed to have been about 9 or 10 in 1913 when Albert was transferred from the Nelson Lighthouse in a swap with Arthur Page.¹⁹⁵

Donald Cameron

Rank: First Assistant Keeper.

Work Period: 31-12-14 to 29-05-18.

Postmaster: from the 01-04-16 (shared with Harold McKinna).

Family: nothing known.

Donald Cameron was transferred to the Cape to replace William Creamer as first assistant keeper. Unusually Donald shared the role of postmaster with his fellow assistant Harold McKinna; the role was usually held by one person.

Charles Riesop

Rank: Principal Keeper.

Work Period: 01-02-16 to 05-12-16.

Postmaster: from the 01-02-16.

Family: nothing known.

Charles was transferred to the lighthouse service from his post as signalman at the Manukau Heads.¹⁹⁶

William Knight Cleverley

Rank: Principal Keeper.

Work Period: 05-12-16 to ??-02-19.

Postmaster: from the 05-12-16.

Family: nothing known.

Harold McKinna

Rank: Second Assistant Keeper.

Work Period: 01-04-16 to 23-09-19.

Postmaster: from the 01-04-16 (shared with Donald Cameron).

Family: Wife ~ Name unknown.

Children (1) ~ 1 daughter, name unknown.

Harold McKinna was transferred to the station to replace Albert Pearce who left the post of second assistant keeper in April 1916.

While at the station Harold's wife became pregnant with their daughter and before she was due to give birth they travelled to New Plymouth.¹⁹⁷ Unfortunately his wife died soon after their daughter's birth and he returned to Cape Brett by himself leaving his daughter in the care of her grandmother.¹⁹⁸ He found that life had become very lonely and decided to return to New Plymouth soon after.¹⁹⁹ Harold retired from the light service in September 1919 to join the customs department before later shifting to Christchurch.²⁰⁰ Harold died in Christchurch aged 39.²⁰¹



Figure 103 – Harold McKinna.



Figure 104 – Harold McKinna (centre) with two other unidentified keepers. Goat hunting was an activity encouraged by the Marine Department.

Thomas Cairns

Rank: First Assistant Keeper.

Work Period: 29-05-18 to 30-01-20.

Postmaster: from the 29-05-18.

Family: nothing known.

Alfred Herbert Sanders

Rank: Principal Keeper.

Work Period: 05-02-19 to 18-01-22.

Postmaster: from the 05-02-19.

Family: Wife ~ Name unknown.

Children (1) ~ at least 1 daughter (Mollie).

Charles William Davis

Rank: Second Assistant Keeper.

Work Period: 23-09-19 to 24-05-21.

Postmaster: from the 23-09-19.

Family: Wife ~ Violet (nee Richardson).

Douglas James Grindlay

Rank: First Assistant Keeper.

Work Period: 30-01-20 to 24-09-21.

Postmaster: from the 30-01-20.

Family: nothing known.