

Guidebook For
Pottawatomie Lighthouse
Resident Docents

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Pottawatomie Lighthouse Docent's Guide
Updated 2017

Presented by
The Friends of Rock Island
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The State of Wisconsin
Department of Natural Resources

Introduction:

Journey to the Lighthouse
Lighthouse Rules
Preparing for your Arrival
Necessary Provisions
Food and Kitchen Supplies
Duties of the Keepers
Work Schedule
Emergencies and First Aid
Presenting Tours
Valuable Resources to Enhance Tours

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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.

You need to be aware that there is no indoor plumbing, no indoor water and no electricity in the Lighthouse. There is an outhouse in the yard, water available at the solar well in the yard and battery powered lanterns provided for light after sunset. There are beds with mattresses and pillows, but you must bring your own bedding and other linens. There is no food or beverages available on Rock Island. If you don’t bring it, you have to get along without it for your week. Please read this guide thoroughly to answer any questions you may have about being a docent.

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 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 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, except service animals.

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. There is a bedroom on the first floor with a full-size bed. There are 3 bedrooms on the second floor, one with a full-size bed, one with two full-size beds and one with a twin-size bed.
- 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 solar well in the yard. Someone in your group needs to be able to gather water and bring it in the house for use. 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. You do need to bring your own linens for dish washing.
- 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. Bring some small flashlights for moving about at night as needed.
- There is a propane gas heater in the first floor parlor to take the chill off. It is sized to only heat that room and not to be used to try to heat the whole 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 and organized for the next docent's arrival.
- Pack entertainment for the evenings (books, games and such). Some games, cards etc. are available in the china hutch in the first floor kitchen along with books in the Lighthouse library box in the front hallway.
- 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***. You will not be able to use other appliances or hair dryers at this outlet. Be aware that cell phone coverage is poor on this remote island and cannot be relied upon. 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 at 10am on Sunday morning (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 to begin your tours as soon as possible that day.

Questions on Ferry Schedules? Both the Washington Island Ferry and the Rock Island Karfi Ferry can be reached at 800-223-2094 or check out their web site, <http://wisferry.com>.

How to Get to the Lighthouse:

The park staff will provide *one trip* up to the Lighthouse to haul gear on Sunday when you arrive. They will pick you up at the Lighthouse for a return trip down to the boat dock the following Sunday morning. There is only room for 2 docents and your gear on the park UTV, so the rest of your group will have to walk to the Lighthouse. The walk is about 2 miles with hills. Wear appropriate footwear and attire for hiking through the woods.

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

Once You Get to the Lighthouse:

Upon arrival at the Lighthouse, the departing docents will give you an introduction to the Lighthouse, show you how to lock the doors, how to sell merchandise, where the cash from sales and donations goes and review the rules with you. Any questions can be addressed at that time.

- 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. Also write these communications in the comments section on the back page of the Weekly Docent Summary Sheet. 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 tours from 10 a.m. to 4p.m. each day. 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 doors 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.
- Many docents post a sign on the screen door when tours are in progress and the door is locked. Let additional visitors know that if they wait, they will be part of the next tour group.

Your Day as a Docent:

- Arise, have breakfast, take care of personal needs.
- All personal items need to be stowed. Dressers and closets are for your use for all of your personal belongings. The built-in summer kitchen cabinets can be used for cameras, electronic equipment and outdoor supplies. (Note: The summer kitchen needs to be occupied when tours are given, unless door is locked. But keep in mind as people exit, they will unlock the screen door so be alert.)
- Be sure everything is out of sight. ***Please do not leave water containers on the sink.*** Plastic jugs weren't used in 1910. :~)
- Sweep, mop, and dust the Lighthouse before daily tours.
- The outhouse must be cleaned and swept daily as well. Cleaning supplies and equipment are provided in the kitchen closet.
- 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 flag (pennant) second. The flags are kept in the front hallway.
- Lower the flags for the night anytime after 4p.m. Fold them properly and return them to the front hallway.
- Enter interesting experiences in the Docent Log Book found in the drawer of the china hutch in the kitchen. Read previous entries to learn other stories you can incorporate into your tours.

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 staff at (920)559-0232**. **You may also call the Camp Host cell phone at (920)559-6397 before 9am or after 5pm. If no one else can be reached, please call the park ranger's cell phone at (920)421-0036.** Reception can be spotty on the island so be prepared to send a messenger to contact park staff or the campground host when phones fail to work for you.

Walking up the trail to the top of the hill sometimes helps with cell phone reception. Phones left on will roam for signal and wear down your battery quickly. We suggest you turn your phones off until you need to use them.

A word about 911 calls – calling 911 does not work on Rock Island. In the past, some docents called 911 and it was answered by Delta County, Michigan which is across Green Bay near Escanaba. They cannot help you. Contacting the park staff as described above is your best option.

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. Be aware that as people finish their tour and exit the screen door will be unlocked and new visitors will come in.

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 do 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 of Tours

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 both restored with 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 before entering the main house.

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. The cemetery is at the back of the yard and to the east on the Thordarson trail.

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. Because of the hand pump, we chose to restore the Lighthouse to the 1910 era. Everything in the house is appropriate to that period.

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 when 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 thickness of the stone walls that have stood the test of time for more than 150 years.

Mention that none of the furniture is original to this Lighthouse except the wood stove in the second floor kitchen and that the keeper's chair on the 3rd level is from the St. Martin's Lighthouse. All of the other antiques were acquired by FORI with a grant or donations.

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. The fireplaces were bricked up and wood stoves were brought into the house to replace them.

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 new infants warm as we do now in incubators.

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 dishes in the china hutch are replicas of the original Lighthouse Service dinnerware used at lighthouses across the country. (Replica mugs are for sale in the summer kitchen store.)

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 special details to point out:

- Note the massive doorway to the exterior.
- Point out the oil house through the east bedroom window.
- Also the Cliffside fence that looks like the original was restored in 2005 as an Eagle scout project with funding for materials provided 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 three stories 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. Lift the top off to show a sample pane and how it is stored. (Imagine carrying a large pane up the steep steps to the lantern room to replace a broken one 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 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 a 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 since there was no temple on the island.

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

All federal buildings are required to display a photo of the current U.S. president. President Taft is displayed in the parlor because he 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 be 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 keeper's wages. Corbin and several after him received less than a dollar per day. Of course they had a nice house to live in, yet in 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. 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 have pegs for hanging clothes, and are original from 1858.

Museum Room Tour:

The right window with the wires protruding from it 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. Chester Thordarson came up to the Lighthouse in the early 1900's to use the phone when he needed to call Chicago or anywhere else.

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.

Information boards on the walls describe life at the Lighthouse and Lighthouse Service activities.

Lantern Room Tour:

Tell you visitors that if they are severely afraid of heights then they should 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, tell them to watch their step. Treat the stairs like a ladder and face the steps going up and backing down. Watch their heads. Many people do bang theirs. It's O.K. to take a camera or binoculars with you but leave all other bags, backpacks etc. at the bottom of the ladder 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.

The watch room is on the first landing. The keeper looked through the watch window for ships passing in the Rock Island Passage and kept a log here. There is a sample of the original log on the desk. There is a replica of a keeper's hat and a fog horn 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 is 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 invaluable resources in the Lighthouse Library Box:

- 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
- The Lightkeeper’s Legacy by Kathleen Ernst by Midnight Ink, Woodbury, MN

Other resources:

- Thordarson and Rock Island by Richard Purinton from Island Bayou Press, Washington Island, WI
- Words on Water - A Ferryman’s Journal – Washington Island, WI by Richard Purinton from Cross+Roads Press, Ellison Bay, WI
- The Docent Log Book in the china hutch in the kitchen

**Acknowledgement of Reading and Understanding Docent Duties
at the Pottawatomie Lighthouse**

It is a great privilege to live in the Pottawatomie Lighthouse for this week serving as a docent to our visitors. 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 may result in opportunities for future docent positions.