ISLESBORO SAILORS MEMORIAL MUSEUM AND GRINDLE POINT LIGHTHOUSE

Grindle Point Light is located on the north side of the entrance to Gilkey's Harbor, Islesboro. The structure was built in 1850 under the administration of Zachary Taylor. It was rebuilt in 1875 and became an automated harbor light in 1934. It is the 37th light station in Maine and the 39th light station to be built in the U.S. Lighthouse Establishment, Dist. 1 (Maine and New Hampshire). The square tower was one of four built in Maine as a prototype to be used on the Pacific coast. Today, only three remain. The most unique feature of Grindle Point Light is the fact that it was the only complete lighthouse complex owned by a municipality in the State of Maine. This complex includes the dwelling, covered walkway (from original building) and tower. Grindle Point Light is also unique because it is the only one of the early lighthouses in Maine to have incorporated a portion of its original structure in the present complex.

Gilkey's Harbor was named after John Gilkey, who came to "Long Island" (early name of Islesboro) in 1772. Serious commerce with the outside world did not commence until 1847. At this time, a steamboat line included Islesboro in its rounds. Three years later the government erected the lighthouse on the Island. There were not less than five locations considered as possible sites on the Island.

In 1849, Commander George Pearson,USN, was dispatched to report his findings as to the site location. The amount of $3,500. was appropriated for procurement of a suitable site, namely that of Grindle Point. On July 11, 1849, Francis Grindel deeded the site for purchase price of $105. The site included 3 acres of land with all rights-of-way.

The tower, built under the direction of the Dept. of Engineers, was finished in the late summer of 1850. When completed, the Grindle Point station proved to be the last "First District" light constructed by Stephen Pleasonton. Under Pleasonton's administration from 1820 to 1852, some 29 lights were erected along this coast. Pleasonton unquestionably did more than any other single person in our nation's history to put the coast of Maine on the lighthouse maps of the world.

Rufus Dunning was the earliest keeper of Grindle Point Light. His appointment took effect on August 20, 1850 and the light went into official service a week later. Keeper Dunning's stay to the light ended on April 8, 1853, when he was replaced by Francis Grindel, the same man who, four years previously, had sold Grindle Point to the government. This became the only instance on record of a keeper tending a light on property both formerly owned and bearing his name.

The first Grindle Point station consisted of a birch wood frame, one-and-a-half story-high lighthouse keeper's house, with the lantern room built into the gables on the roof. This design was frequently utilized in Maine during the first half of the 19th century. When completed, Grindle Point Light showed a fixed white light 28' above the ground and 39' above sea level. Its earliest lighting apparatus was a series of five patent lamps, each set before paraboloid reflectors 15" in diameter. The fuel for the lamps was sperm oil and the visibility was given as just under eleven miles. This first light and dwelling on Grindle Point is not the one seen at the site today.

Charles Nash was appointed lighthouse keeper on April 29, 1856. At that time, the first important change took place in the lantern room. The Lighthouse Board ordered the patent lamps in the tower replaced by Fresnal lens of the 5th order. At this time there was no fog signal equipment.

In 1875 in the annual report of the Lighthouse Board it was reported "that the Grindle Point Lighthouse was in such condition that it was determined advisable to rebuild instead of repairing it". A one-and-a-half-story building for the keeper's dwelling and a square brick tower for the light was therefore erected; the walls of the original house torn down to near the surface of the ground and the roof lowered. The original building thus changed will be used as a covered way between the new dwelling and the tower and for the storage of provisions, fuel, oil and supplies of various kinds. Coming out of an appropriation made June 23, 1874, this rebuilding was done by a Boston based contractor. Upon completion of the new tower, the lantern room was filled with a replacement lens newly refurbished at a machine shop in Portland, Maine.