

[Page 44 - Life on Bird Islands](#)ISSUE : [Issue 26](#)

Published by Ronald Caplan on 1980/8/1

fish right there. Take it in, usually North Sydney. You didn't sell very much those years--you traded for groceries. There'd be no women out there. Just the fishermen themselves. But they'd go home weekends. (So you weren't terribly cut off from the world.) Oh, no. In the wintertime quite often the older children, not me, walked ashore on the ice, into Cape Dauphin. They were in here going to school and they'd walk out to the island weekends. Go home visiting. Be no danger in it. The ice was very rough at times, of course. Only dan? ger would be in breaking an ankle. But the ice was solid. It'd be mainly the drift ice, jammed in solid. Be there nearly two months. Be like climbing up and down in rock quarries. Climbing over big ridges at times. Mother worried, yes. Father wasn't the worrying type. Taught us right from wrong and turned us loose. Survival of the fittest. We all survived. But Mother worried, no doubt. The wind out there was terrific. I often heard Father say--and Father sailed a lot-- the strongest wind he ever felt was on that island. He used to have a life line from the dwelling house to the lighthouse. Have to hang onto that line back and forth. Pretty heavy wind. The wind blew in the pantry window one time--northwest gale. The window came right in. Of course, every? thing went flying in the pantry. And Fa? ther took the hatch from the cellarway and couldn't find a hammer, so he took a hatch? et and managed to get around the corner of the house. He got the hatch over the open? ing where the window was. And he tried to drive a nail and he couldn't • the wind would turn the hatchet. That heavy. Got a couple nails in part way and bent them. Got one in but had to leave it. Strength of the wind held it there so it wouldn't drop down anyway. That's heavy wind. Marian Horton: I was a Christie from Eng- lishtown. I knew of Bird Islands, growing up, but I was never there. It wasn't the sort of place people would take a trip to. But I married John Horton from New Camp- bellton and I went out to Bird Island in 1933. He was already lightkeeper out there. His mother was out there with him. She used to go out and do the baking and wash? ing and what was to be done. He had an as? sistant lightkeeper at that time • so if John came ashore for a weekend or a few days, he'd attend to the light. (So when you met John Horton, you knew if you fell in love with him you were going to end up on Bird Islands too?) Yes, I knew that. And I never regretted it. I never minded living out there. Never. Well, just like anywhere else, you had your children to look after. Just like any? where else, you get used to it. Like we would never see anyone from about December until the drift ice would go in the spring. And the drift ice used to stay in an awful- long time then. Not like today. Oh my, T remember one time there were 28 days at a time we had drift ice in, jammed up solid. We didn't get any mail. We didn't see any? body. And we had no communication with any? body, no phone. We didn't have a radio un? til the war broke out, because then they would send messages over the radio--to light up the light or not to light it. But that radio, you couldn't talk to anyone on it. Just an ordinary radio. No way of com? municating with anyone on shore. I've stayed there alone with the 3 child? ren for 4 days one time. And I had to op? erate the light myself. But I did it. Just in the fall, when the weather would get rough. Once the war



started, everybody was gone. See before, any time we wanted to get ashore, we could get an assistant lightkeeper • would go out for a few days while we went ashore. But the last 3 years we were there, you couldn't get anybody. So when my husband would go ashore--and if there was a storm come up--well, we were just there till he'd get back. He'd maybe plan to just be in for the day, for supplies--and maybe by the evening there'd be such a sea on he couldn't land on the is? land. Might be able to get out but wouldn't have been able to land. Oh my dear, I can remember 2 or 3 times that happened. It was the old lighthouse. And you'd have to get up every 2 hours through the night. You had to wind this weight up to the top--and when it would hit the floor it would stop and your light would stand. Well, you couldn't permit that. And you had to pump air and carry oil up and do all this. Well, the children (44)