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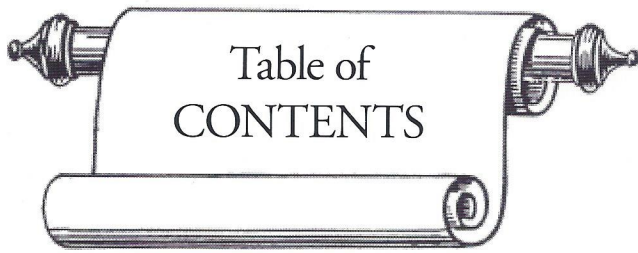
THE KEEPER'S

VOLUME XXXV

NUMBER FOUR, 2019



- The Lady of the Lighthouse: A Biography, Part 1
- Touring Flamborough Head Lighthouse
- Scituate Lighthouse
- The Back River Lighthouse



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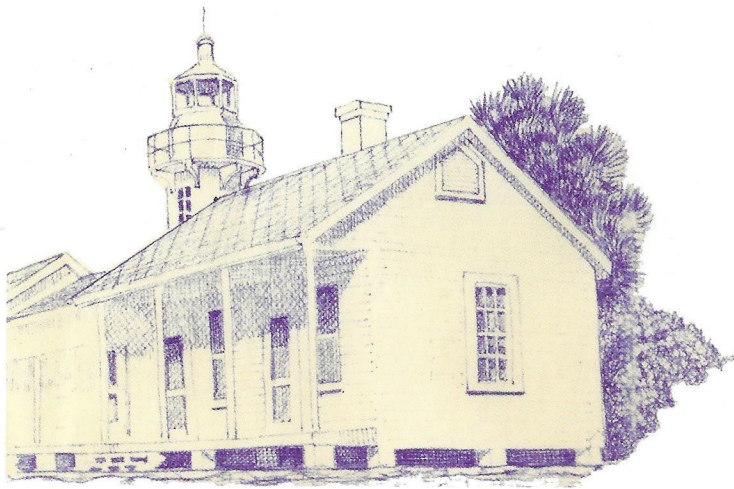
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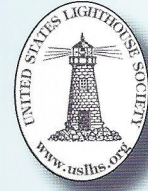
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Blueprint sketch of the Cedar Keys Lighthouse. USLHS archives.

Front cover – Cedar Keys Lighthouse, 1893. U.S. Coast Guard photo.
 Back cover – Scituate Lighthouse elevation. Library of Congress image.



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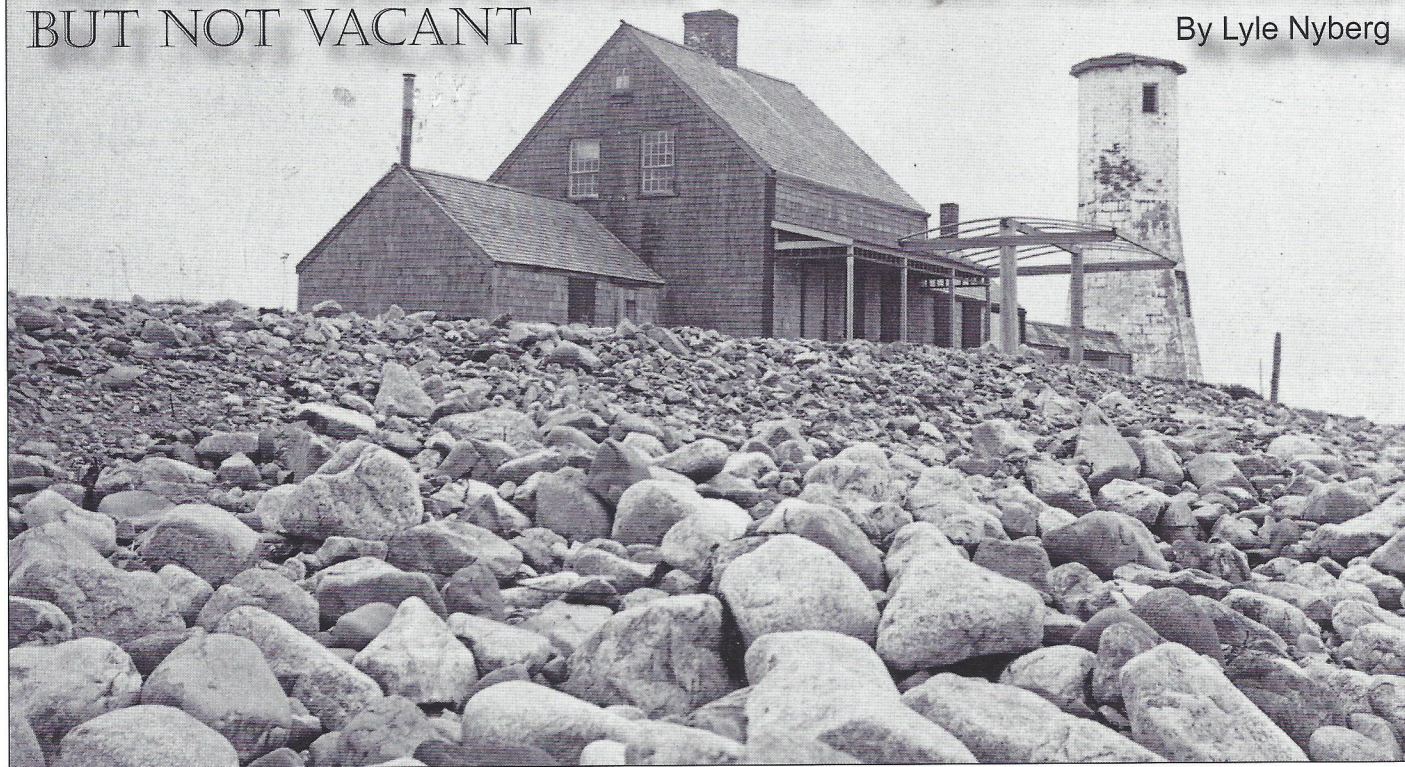
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SCITUATE LIGHTHOUSE WAS ONCE ABANDONED, BUT NOT VACANT

By Lyle Nyberg



Edited photo of Scituate Lighthouse, March 7, 1902, showing posts and ribs for canopy (awning). Courtesy of National Archives.



The lighthouse at Cedar Point in Scituate, Massachusetts, long served as a beacon to sailors. A little-known fact is that it also served as home to a variety of tenants during a 30-year period in the late 1800s when the light was not operating. These residents included well-known shipbuilders and a prominent suffragist, Judith W. Smith. In this article, we explore the hidden history of the keeper's cottage.

The U.S. government abandoned Scituate Lighthouse late in 1860, when Minot's Lighthouse began operating. After this, there was no lighthouse keeper until 1891, when John E. Prouty became responsible for the light on the jetty that extended from the lighthouse into the mouth of Scituate Harbor. A succession of lighthouse keepers followed Prouty and continue today. For the 30 years without a keeper, one might think the place was vacant. That is not quite the case.¹

Historian Robert Fraser touched on this matter in his article about Scituate Lighthouse in the Winter 1987 edition of *The Keeper's Log*. Fraser was a 1951 graduate of Scituate High School and a descendant of Capt. Simeon Bates, first keeper of the light in 1811.² In a related paper on file in the Scituate Historical Society, Fraser reported:

Little is known of Scituate Light for the rest of the 19th century. The records [of the lighthouse] were destroyed in a fire at the Department of Commerce building in 1922. Remaining are index cards to these files covering from 1859 to 1875.

The Government allowed the old light to be rented. The first tenant was ex-keeper Alonzo Jones, now postmaster at Scituate Harbor Village and keeper of the Massachusetts Humane Society's lifeboat in the harbor. ... [An index] card, of December 3, 1870 mentions rent received.

In 1872, with the influx of beach cottages, the lighthouse land was resurveyed. That same year, hoodlums did considerable damage to the old light. Samuel Hall of East Boston was hired by the U. S. Government in April of 1873 to be the live-in caretaker. He remained until cold weather drove him out.

...The cards stop here [1875]. However, it is known that in the late 1880's, a Thomas Harris was living in the old lighthouse which was nearly in ruins.³

This account introduces two figures in the history of the lighthouse: Samuel Hall and Thomas Harris. Hall is discussed in more detail below. Harris requires consideration of a story of earlier tenants.

The Harris family sailed into Scituate from Cape Breton and occupied the lighthouse starting in 1861, according to a family descendant. Five children were born to the Harris family at the lighthouse,

according to the granddaughter of George E. Harris who was one of those reportedly born there. Duncan Bates Todd recorded the story in her book *The Fourteenth Lot*. The book's chapter "What Took Place After 1860?" says:

In 1861, John and Elizabeth Harris, along with their four children, David, Thomas, John, and Esther, sailed into Scituate Harbor to join others in the mossing industry. [Harvesting Irish moss, a kind of seaweed, was a big industry in town.] Five more children, Hattie, Aurela, Mary, George E., and Lottie, were born while living in the Keeper's Cottage at the Lighthouse.⁴

Vital records confirm details of this story, but they do not record the exact place of birth. In the 1800s, records listed births in town, including the child's name, parents' names, parents' places of birth, and the father's occupation. They show the following Harris births:

- Hettie Elizabeth, 1868
- Aurelia Whiting, 1870, June 6, parents John, mariner, born in Cape Breton, and Elizabeth (Haines), born in Ireland
- Mary, 1872
- Ellen Margaret, 1874, June 29, parents Thomas, fisherman, born Magdalen Islands [near Cape Breton], and Nellie Frances Duffy, born in Holyoke; Todd's book says Thomas was a son of John and Elizabeth who married in 1873, and drowned off Lighthouse Point at age 26 (in 1879)
- George Ellsworth, 1875, January 11, parents John and Elizabeth
- Lottie, 1878, July 24, parents John, laborer, born in British Province [which could include Cape Breton at the time], and Elizabeth (Haines), born in British Province [which could include Ireland at the time]⁵

If the story is true, the lighthouse keeper's cottage would have been busy with Harris children from the 1860s to at least the end of the 1870s. Samuel Hall would



Sylvanus Smith (center?), Judith Smith, and Duxbury party, under canopy with striped awning at Scituate Lighthouse, with First Cliff in background, 1890. E. F. Smith photo (edited). Courtesy of the Duxbury Rural and Historical Society.

have had lots of company during his caretaker duties in 1873 and perhaps later.

Samuel Hall is mentioned in connection with the Scituate Lighthouse in family records of his friends, Sylvanus and Judith Smith. They are in the Smith McLauthlin Collection, Drew Archival Library of the Duxbury Rural and Historical Society.

Here we must provide some background of the persons involved. Judith (McLauthlin) Winsor Smith (1821-1921) was born in Marshfield and became a prominent suffragist. Her husband Sylvanus Smith (1817-1901) of Duxbury was an important shipbuilder in East Boston and a strong supporter of the woman suffragist movement. Sylvanus at one time worked for the noted shipbuilder Samuel Hall (1800-1870) of Marshfield, Duxbury and East Boston. Samuel Hall had a son named Samuel Hall (born 1833, died before 1897) who worked at his father's shipyard and lived near it in East Boston. The son was almost certainly the caretaker of the lighthouse in 1873 and a friend of Sylvanus and Judith Smith. Not only that, but the families were connected in other ways, including by marriage: a daughter of the Smiths married a grandson of the brother of the senior Samuel Hall.⁶

A Smith family chronicle describes the use of the lighthouse about 1890:

Mr. [Sylvanus] Smith was a member of the gunning club established by Mr. Samuel Hall, then custodian for the United States of the lighthouse property at Scituate. It gradually became the custom for each member to take his family there for a month.

These photographs taken by E. F. Smith [Erasmus, son of Sylvanus and Judith], in 1890, show (1) Mr. Smith shingling the roof at the old light, and (2) under the awning he had put up, a party of friends such as he liked to gather about him there. This party was from Duxbury. [The back of the second photo names those in the photo, including Sylvanus and Judith.]⁷

The rectangular awning was a short distance to the south of the keeper's cottage. It was supported by two posts, perhaps made from tree trunks. They are shown in another early photo, from 1902, in which the posts (absent the awning) are located closer to the keeper's cottage. Since the photo was taken in March 1902, when the keeper would not have lived there, it makes sense that the first story door and windows are boarded up in the photo. It is interesting that the



Scituate Lighthouse today. USLHS archive photo.

awning's structure was still there 12 years after the photo in the family chronicle.⁸

This family chronicle confirms Samuel Hall's official presence at the lighthouse. Given the record of his service in 1873, it appears Hall and his friends used the property for some or maybe all 17 years afterwards. In addition, the chronicle shows that even without an official keeper, people lived in and took care of the lighthouse property.

The gunning club would have shot shorebirds, a popular sport of the time. The club was called, or may have led to, the Cedar Point Club. Samuel Hall was president. Members included Sylvanus Smith, who, according to his son Sidney, "was a boat builder and a member of the old Cedar Point Club, which met in the lighthouse."⁹

The Smiths continued to use the lighthouse property even after Prouty became keeper of the jetty light in 1891. *The Boston Globe* of July 31, 1892, reported: "Mrs. Emma McLaughlin, late of Paris, is the guest of Mrs. Sylvanus Smith of Boston at the old lighthouse on Cedar Point."¹⁰

The Smiths' summer occupancy of the lighthouse ended in 1896. In a letter of July 19, 1896, published in the suffragist *Woman's Journal*, Judith reported "The lighthouse where we always stayed was occupied ..." and the family decided to build a cottage there.¹¹

The Smiths built their cottage, just steps away from the lighthouse, on Lighthouse Road. It is still there. Their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren enjoyed their summers at the cottage. Son Sidney Smith eventually moved to a cottage on Lighthouse Road. A card created for his 90th birthday in 1936 featured a drawing of the Scituate Lighthouse and keeper's cottage, with a sailboat in the harbor. It was a fitting reminder of the summers spent at Scituate Light during its abandonment by the federal government.¹²

Footnotes

¹Jeremy D'Entremont, "History of Scituate Light, Massachusetts," New England Lighthouses: A Virtual Guide website, accessed July 14, 2019, <http://www.newenglandlighthouses.net/scituate-light-history.html>.

²Mila Dixon, "Worth mentioning ...," *Scituate Mariner*, June 18, 1987.

³Robert Fraser, "Scituate Lighthouse," typed manuscript, undated, 4, on file, Scituate Historical Society; Robert Fraser, "Scituate Lighthouse," *The Keeper's Log* (Winter 1987), 5, on file, Scituate Historical Society; Robert Fraser, "Scituate Lighthouse Stood Sentinel Duty for 49 Years; Fourteenth Oldest in the U.S.," *South Shore News*, July 6, 1961, 4 (30 confusing index cards remained) (substantially identical to the typed manuscript).

⁴Duncan Bates Todd, *The Fourteenth Lot* (Scituate: by author, 2004), 146-147.

⁵*Town Records, vol. 19, Births, 1861-1903, Marriages, 1862-1904*, various pages including 8, 15, 17, 24, Town Archives; "Search Vital Records (1841-1910)" website of Massachusetts Secretary of State. Town Reports listed only total numbers of births until the late 1860s, and many of the Harris births are listed in Town Reports several years after the birth, reflecting their late recording in the Town Records. The Thomas Harris mentioned in Fraser's paper may be

the one who drowned in 1879, or another Thomas Harris, listed as a mosser in *Directory of Cohasset, Scituate, Marshfield, Duxbury and Norwell* (Quincy, MA: J. H. Hogan Co., 1894), 136.

“Sad Death of William Hall,” *Boston Globe*, July 30, 1875, 2 (“was brother to the late Samuel Hall, the famous ship-builder”); Briggs, *History of Ship-building on North River* (1889), 356-357 (Hall), 197-198 (Smith); Sidney Smith, “The Varied Career of Silvanus Smith 1817-1901, by his Son, Sidney Smith,” August 26, 1926, revised 1939, third page (“foreman”) and fourth page (Samuel Hall d. 1870), Smith McLauthlin Collection, Drew Archival Library; Plymouth Archaeological Rediscovery Project, “Site Examination Fieldwork at the Second Meeting House Site in Duxbury, Massachusetts” (April 2009), 24-25, accessed July 19, 2019, <http://www.plymoutharch.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/49705059-Report-on-the-Archaeological-Investigations-at-the-Site-of-the-Second-Meeting-House-in-Duxbury-Massachusetts.pdf>; Sydney [Sidney] Smith, “In a Gale off Cape Cod 1863,” 1934, Smith McLauthlin Collection, Drew Archival Library; Hall family file, Scituate Historical Society; Daniel T. Rogers, “Daniel T. Rogers(b. 1943) - all my relatives,” (Luke born 1797 begat Luke born 1830 begat Luke born 1854 who married Mary Hathaway Smith), accessed July 21, 2019, <https://sites.rootsweb.com/~dantrogers/pafg3924.htm>; D. Hamilton Hurd, “Samuel Hall,” *History of Plymouth County, Massachusetts, with Biographical Sketches of Many of its Pioneers and Prominent Men*, part 2 (Philadelphia: J. W. Lewis & Co., 1884), 1169, accessed July 21, 2019, <https://archive.org/details/historyofplymout01hurd/page/n775>; *The Boston Directory for the Year Commencing July 1, 1868* (Boston: Sampson, Davenport, & Co., 1868), 277, accessed July 26, 2019, https://books.google.com/books?id=SFw-JAQAIAAJ&source=gbs_navlinks_s;



Scituate Lighthouse, 1909. USLHS archive photo.

G. M. Hopkins, *Atlas of the County of Suffolk, Massachusetts, vol. 4: including East Boston, City of Chelsea, Revere and Winthrop* (Philadelphia: G. M. Hopkins & Co., 1874), plates I, K, & L. See Glenn A. Knoblock, *The American Clipper Ship, 1845-1920: A Comprehensive History, with a Listing of Builders and Their Ships* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2014), 282 (Hall), 285 (Smith), preview accessed July 14, 2019, https://books.google.com/books?id=k3lkAgAAQBAJ&source=gbs_navlinks_s.

⁷Typewritten manuscript with photos from 1890, Smith McLauthlin Collection, Drew Archival Library.

⁸“Scituate Breakwater Light Station, Massachusetts. Date: March 7, 1902 District: 2,” photo, National Archives, website accessed August 1, 2019, https://catalog.archives.gov/OpaAPI/media/45692249/content/stillpix/026-1g/Box_9/26-LG-9-1A.jpg. Thanks to Kraig Anderson at Lighthousefriends.com for mentioning the National Archives scan.

⁹Emails from David Ball, July 15-17, 2019, including text of framed document entitled “Cedar Point Club” listing officers, directors, and members; “Scituate Boys Aid Aged Man in Building ‘Friendship House,’” *Boston Globe*, November 13, 1935, 3 (source of quote).

¹⁰“Where the Breezes Are; Many are the City People at Scituate,” *Boston Globe*, July 31, 1892, 9. Perhaps Emma

McLaughlin was a relative of Judith (McLauthlin) Smith.

¹¹“Playing Peggotty,” *Woman's Journal*, vol. 27, no. 30, July 25, 1896, 236 (source of quote), seq. 242, courtesy of Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, accessed June 29, 2019, <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:RAD.SCHL:12639120?n=242>.

¹²“Smith, Sylvanus House,” 82 Lighthouse Road, SCI.519 [update in process], MACRIS, <http://mhc-macris.net/Details.aspx?MhcId=SCI.519>, and inventory form SCI.V (Cedar Point), <http://mhc-macris.net/Details.aspx?MhcId=SCI.V>; David Ball, *To the Point: The Story of Scituate Light and Cedar Point* (n.p.: David Ball, 1994, 6th printing, 2000).

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- Duncan Bates Todd, *The Fourteenth Lot* (Scituate: by author, 2004)
- Smith McLauthlin Collection, Drew Archival Library of the Duxbury Rural and Historical Society
- “Playing Peggotty,” *Woman's Journal*, vol. 27, no. 30, July 25, 1896, 236, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA
- “Smith, Sylvanus House,” 82 Lighthouse Road, SCI.519 [update in process], Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System (MACRIS), online
- David Ball, *To the Point: The Story of Scituate Light and Cedar Point* (n.p.: by author, 1994, 6th printing, 2000)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
 OFFICE OF NATIONAL PARKS BUILDINGS AND RESERVATIONS
 BRANCH OF PLANS AND DESIGN

EL JORDAN-DEL EAST ELEVATION.
 BUILT 1810.
 DISCONTINUED - 1860.

NAME OF STRUCTURE
 LIGHTHOUSE SITUATE HARBOR PLYMOUTH COUNTY MASS.
 SURVEY NO. 222
 HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY SHEET 1 OF 5 SHEETS
 INDEX NO. MASS. 12-5171

SCALE IN FEET
 SECTION LOOKING WEST.

DOOR ON BATTER OF TOWER.
 SEAT
 LINE OF TOWER AT TOP OF DOOR.
 BRICK LINE ABOVE
 COVERED WALK
 SEAT

DATTER, J.
 APPROX. 18
 TO THE FOOT.

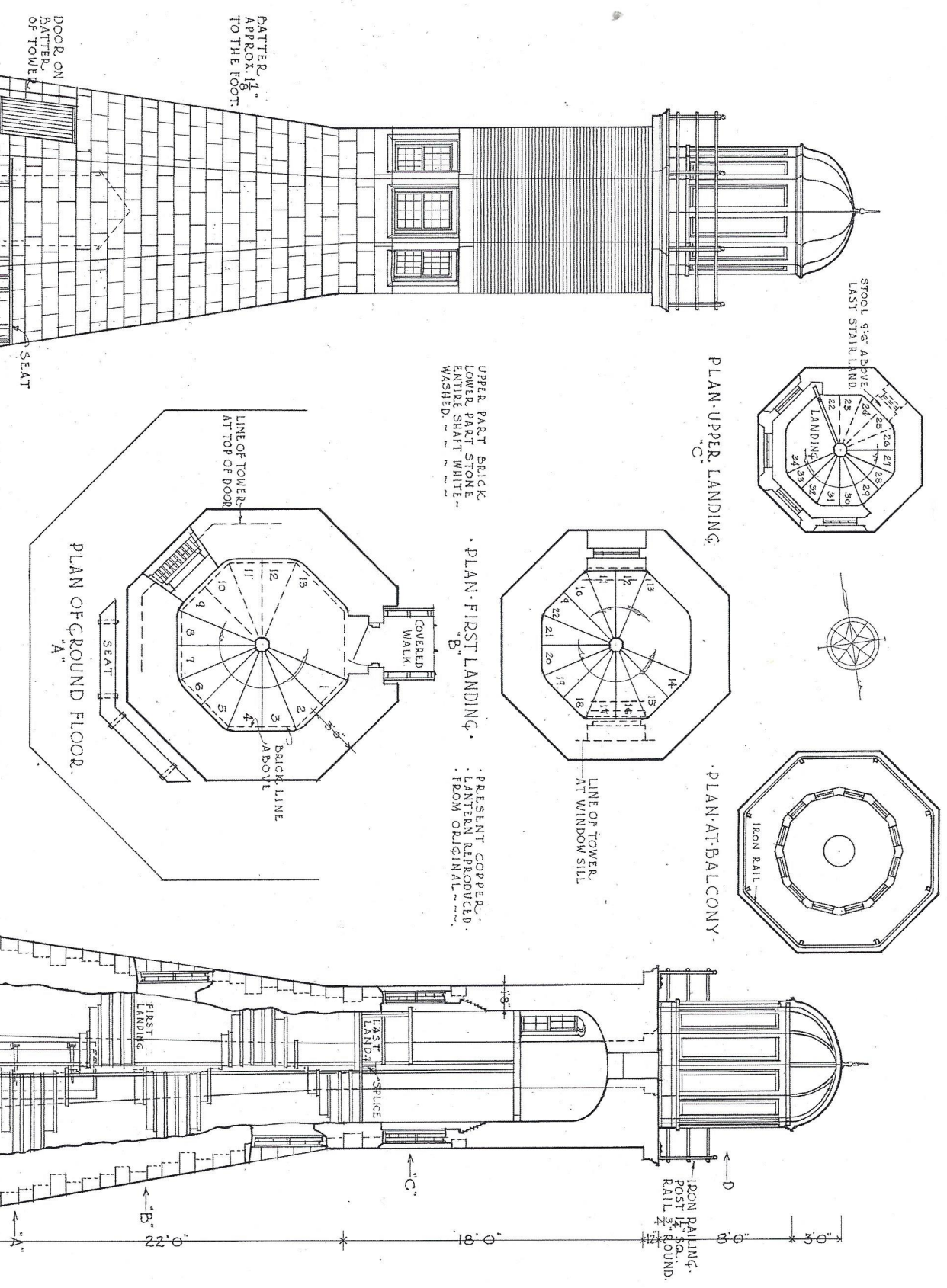
PLAN UPPER LANDING.
 C
 UPPER PART BRICK LOWER PART STONE ENTIRE SHAFT WHITE WASHED.

PLAN FIRST LANDING.
 D
 PRESENT COPPER LANTERN REPRODUCED FROM ORIGINAL.

PLAN AT BALCONY.
 IRON RAIL

STOOL 9'-6" A BUIE LAST STAIR LANDING

IRON RAILING POST 1/2" DIA. ROUND. RAIL 1/2" DIA.



PLAN OF GROUND FLOOR.
 A
 LINE OF TOWER AT WINDOW SILL