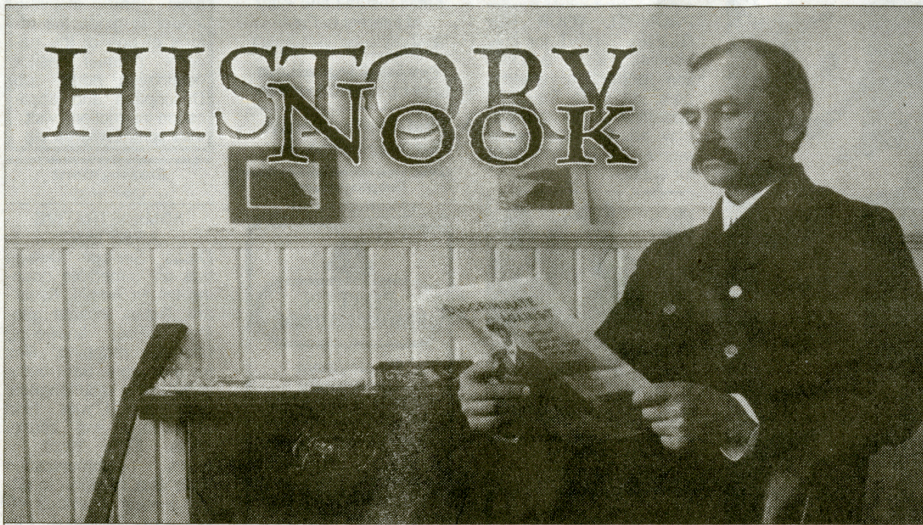


HISTORY NOOK



Harry D. Mahler Keeper of the Patos Light

By: Edrie and Terri Vinson

As the first keeper of the new Patos Island Fog Signal Station, 28 year old Harry Mahler had a lot of work to do to get the station up and running. He arrived on August 2, 1893, just a week after his assistant, 35 year old Edward Durgan arrived with his wife Estelle, 6 year old daughter Mary, 4 year old son Clarence, and 6 month old Clara. It was December before they got enough equipment in order to first light the lantern to aid in navigation.

Mahler's wife, Louise, made up the total population of the island at 7 that first year. Besides lighting the lantern, they kept working on the fog signal, a problematic piece of equipment that was difficult at best. And they made trips in a row boat to Eastsound for mail and groceries, and to visit Louise's family and friends.

The Durgan's stayed only until June the following year, and Joseph Dunson took his place, along with his wife Eleanor, and sons Ray, age 11, and Claude, age 8. They stayed a little over a year, when Gustaf Anderson, an unmarried man, took the assistant's job. By that time the Mahlers had three children of their own, Howard (1896), Francis (1898) and Margaret (1899). The first two were

born on the island, but for the last one, Louise had gone to Eastsound. Harry rented a house for her there from the Waldrips, and she had her mother, Sophia Rilling, to help her out. When Margaret was born a huge bon fire on the north beach alerted Mahler that his baby had arrived.



So while the fog horn failed to work at times, the island was never very quiet. There were sounds of their cow mooing, new born babies crying, pitter patter of tiny feet, and laughter of playing children. The calming agent for all of them was the melodious sound of Harry Mahler's guitar. Shown here leaning against his desk, it was handy for a strum at moments' notice.

Besides taking care of her family and a garden,

Louise had time to piece a colorful crazy quilt of taffeta.

The Mahler's loved their island home as well as the lighthouse work. They stayed on Patos for a decade, leaving only to give Howard a school he could enroll in. The Visitors Register shows that the Mahlers returned to the island at least three times to visit. This helps demonstrate the close relationships forged among light keepers and their families.

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