

HISTORY NOOK

Louise Mahler, The First Light Keeper's Wife on Patos Island

By Edrie and Terri Vinson

The first woman to live full time on Patos Island was Louise Mahler, wife of Harry D. Mahler, the first Keeper at the Patos Island Fog Signal Station. They lived there for a decade, 1893-1903. She was just 18, and they had no children, but since Louise was from Orcas Island, they had lots of company. Louise was the daughter of Robert and Sophia Rilling.



They and their other three children, Charles, Clara and Katie frequently visited each other. In fact, nearly every week one or several were visiting. Alice Hunter, a young girl raised by the Stowers family who grew up with Louise, also visited for a week at a time. Kate Gregg and Luther and Emogene Sutherland were also visitors of hers on Patos. Louise, herself, traveled frequently to Fairhaven and Bellingham.

Besides the Mahlers and their visitors, there were assistant keepers. The first, Edward Durgan moved there with Wife Estelle and three children, Next was Joseph Dunson and his family of at least four. Then Gustaf Anderson, a single man, and finally Albert A. Morgan and his wife

and three children. So there was little time for idleness or loneliness.

While she lived on Patos, she and Harry had three children; Howard D. (1896), Francis L. (1898), and K. Margaret (1899). The first two were born on Patos, but for the last one, Louise had gone to Eastsound. Harry rented a house for her on North Beach Road from the Issac Waldrips, and she had her mother

and sisters to help her out. When Margaret was born a huge bon fire on the north beach alerted Mahler that his baby had arrived.

In spite of all the children and guests to care for, Louise had time to make a crazy quilt nearly 6 feet square. The top pieces are of silk, and are lined with feed sacks, flour sacks, many bearing the names of local flour mills. Her skill is obvious, as the pieces are meticulously put together, and after over a hundred years it is in very good shape. Can't you just imagine the Mahlers all huddled together under this blanket while Harry strummed his guitar on some cold windy night at the lighthouse.

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