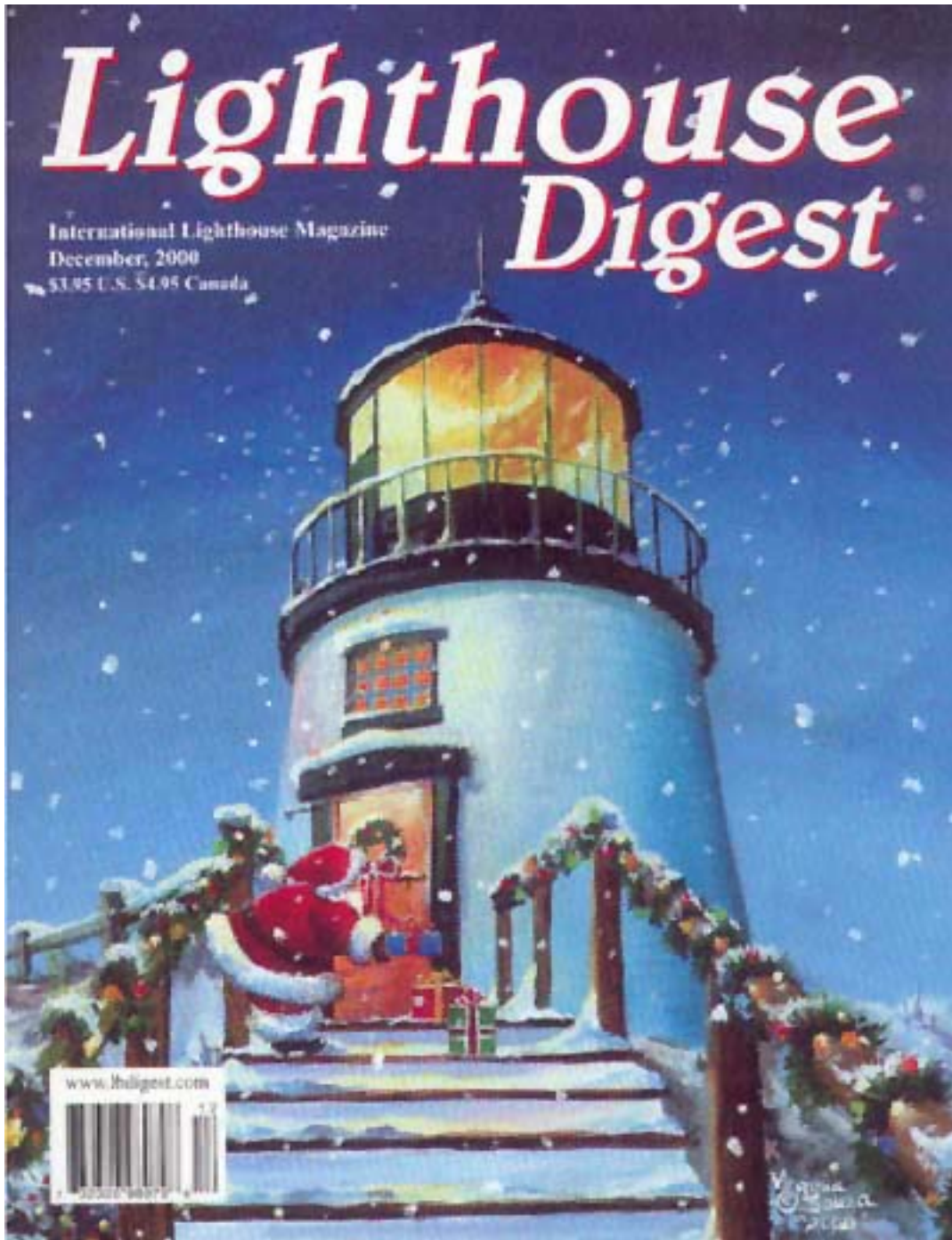


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Nash Island's Story is Jenny Cirone's Story

By Jeremy D'Entremont

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To the average person, Maine's Nash Island looks like a rugged, largely barren island, devoid of any particular interest except for its lonely lighthouse tower. But to those in the nearby area, it is the human history of the island that makes it fascinating. To most people alive today, the human history is largely entwined with the life of one woman, 88-year-old Genevieve "Jenny" Purington Cirone.



Nash Island Light in the late 19th century. (Photo by: National Archives)

Jenny Cirone's father, John Purington, was keeper from 1916 until his retirement in 1935. Jenny grew up on Nash Island and now owns half of the island, as well as nearby Big Nash Island. Jenny started raising sheep when she was a girl, and she still keeps sheep on her two islands. She also has been catching lobster, or "hauling traps," virtually all her life, even after two knee replacements, a hip replacement and a back operation.



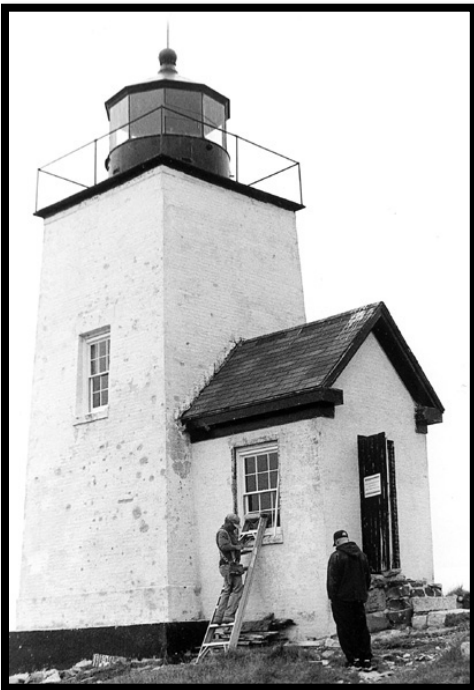
The first Nash Island Lighthouse, circa 1870. (Lighthouse Digest file photo)

The non-profit group now caring for the lighthouse, the Friends of Nash Island Light, has made Cirone its honorary chair. And the group has now made available a video documentary called “Jenny’s Island Life: The Story of Jenny Cirone and Nash Island Light.”



Jenny Cirone. (Photo by Barbara Hanania)

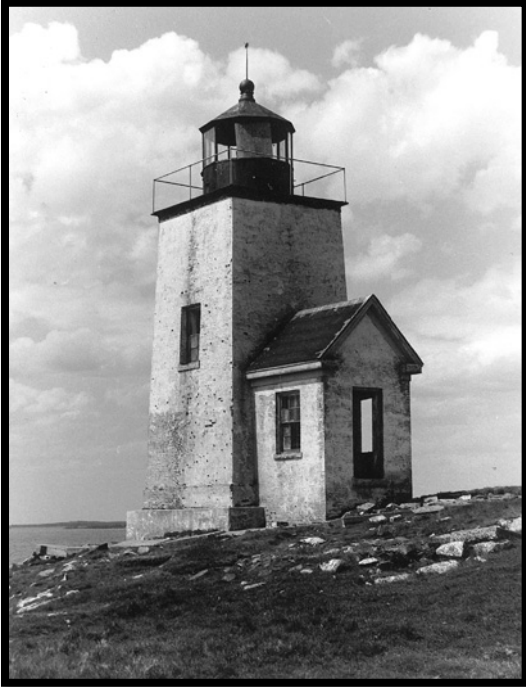
When Jenny was born in 1912 her father was keeper at Deer Island Thorofare Light on Mark Island, near Stonington, Maine. Purington had previously served at Maine’s Egg Rock and Great Duck Island lights. Jenny was three years old when the family, including seven children, traveled to Nash Island aboard the tender Hibiscus. Two more children were born to John and Ellen Purington during their years at Nash Island.



Carpenter Larry Nichols with his assistant Mathew Nichols. (Photo by Marilee Lovitt)

On both Mark Island and Nash Island, the family kept animals including cattle, pigs and chickens. “Everything he had, he fed it good,” says Jenny in Jenny’s Island Life. As a girl Jenny and her sister Mary would ride one of the family’s rams, and Jenny remembers that Mary once hitched the animal to a

toboggan. The family maintained 140 lobster traps around Nash Island. Mary and their father hauled half of the traps, while Jenny hauled the other half by herself.



Nash Island Lighthouse before its renovation. (Photo by Marilee Lovitt)

Jenny also did much work at the lighthouse station, whitewashing the tower and other buildings, winding the fog bell mechanism, and cleaning the brasswork. “Didn’t I hate that! You had to do it every other day!” she remembers. Thanks largely to the help of Jenny and her siblings, the inspection visits by the district superintendent always produced positive results.



Jenny as a teenager with her sheep on Nash Island.

Friends often visited the island, and as a teenager Jenny would often go ashore to visit friends or go to the movies. She grew close to a local boy named Stan Cirone. In the documentary, Jenny describes a conversation between Cirone and her father: “Don’t care if the old lady and I get married, do ya?” asked Cirone. John Purington answered “I don’t care — if that’s the way you want it.” Jenny and Stan were soon married.



Photo taken in August, 1999, during restoration of Nash Island Light. Left Ed Greaves, member of the Board of Directors of the Friends of Nash Island Light. Right, carpenter Larry Nichols. (Photo by Marlee Lovitt)

The lighthouse was discontinued in 1982 and was replaced by an offshore buoy. The Friends of Nash Island Light applied for the property under the Maine Lights Program, and in December 1997 the Maine Lighthouse Selection Committee announced the transfer of the lighthouse to the non-profit group. The Friends of Nash Island Light plan to improve landing capabilities on the island, which they hope to open for public tours.

Over the past two years the volunteer group has been restoring the exterior of the tower. The windows have been replaced, and much of the brickwork has been repositioned and remortared. The entire outer surface has been scraped and repainted.

The group hopes to have the interior restored by sometime in 2001. Ed Greaves of the Friends told the Bangor Daily News, "When you look out at Nash, there's something comforting about a light like that. It's part of a maritime tradition that people feel they own, and want to keep up."

"Jenny's Island Life: The Story of Jenny Cirone and Nash Island Light" is available in a number of stores in and around Addison, Maine. This engrossing and moving documentary by filmmakers Michel Chalufour and Barbara Hanania should be part of the video library of anyone interested in lighthouses or island life.

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