

# Charity Island Excursions Newsletter

Updates on Charity Island's  
History – Wildlife – Lighthouse Restoration Efforts

November 2013

VOL. # ISSUE #



**First Charity Island Lightkeeper & Wife**

*Colin and Catherine Graham NO DATE*

## First Charity Island Lightkeeper & Spouse Photo Discovered

Back in 2011, *Ellen Creager* of the Detroit Free Press ran a story on my wife and I and our Charity Island Dinner Cruise operation.

A few days later I received an email from a Ed Lindsey who saw the Free Press Story telling me his Great Grandfather **Colin Graham** was the first lightkeeper on Charity Island.

I couldn't believe it! And the stories he had!

Mr. Lindsey shared that Colin Graham's marriage records listed his occupation as a *mariner*. He married Catherine Graham on May 14, 1832 in Scotland.

The two emigrated from Scotland to Ontario where they tried their hand at homestead farming for a few years.

But Colin longed for his life on the water and joined the lightkeeper service in America sometime after his attempt at homestead farming and became the first lightkeeper on Charity Island in May 1857.

Colin and Catherine arrived on the Island in 1857 with their 12 Children.



## Lightkeepers Quarters for Colin's Family of 14

Mr. Lindsey wrote that the boys were old enough when they arrived on the island that when they spotted ships coming into Saginaw Bay they would row out to the shipping channel to fish out wet newspapers tossed into the bay by the passing sailors.

The boy's father would then dry the wet newspapers in front of the fireplace. That is how they got news on how the Civil War was going.

In addition to those great stories Mr. Lindsey also sent me The photo of Colin Graham and His wife above.

**What a treasure!**



## Lightning Strikes Twice

### Another Early Lightkeeper Photo

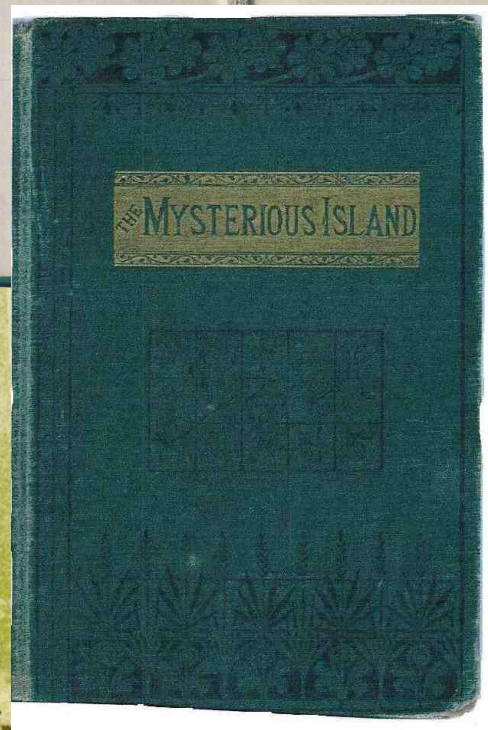
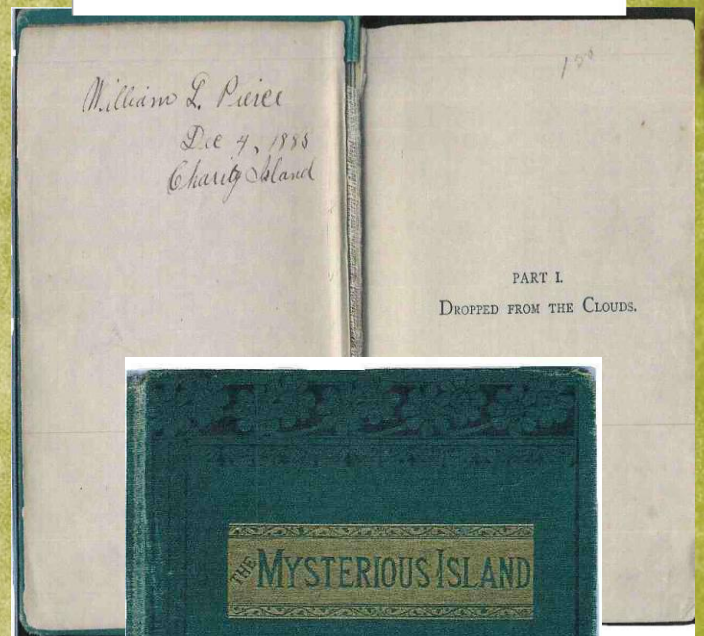
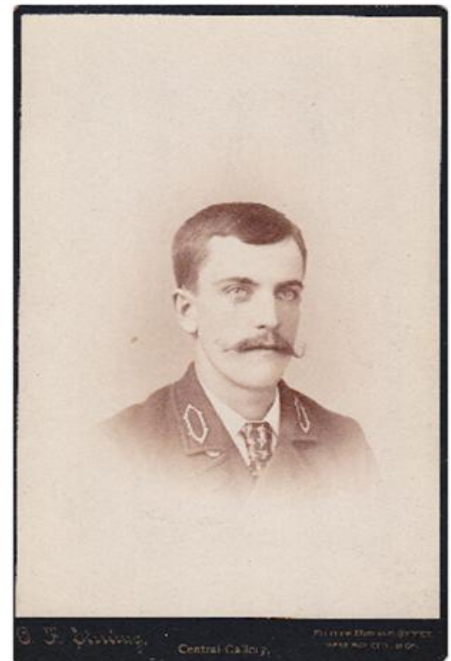
Those who have been on the Dinner Cruise may recall this story. Back in 2007, I was bullied by an 85 year old WWII Navy veteran (Mr. Ellison) into taking he & family of 11 members to Charity Island on a very cold, rainy, windy day to see the lighthouse because his wife's Grandfather, William L. Pierce, had been the 1<sup>st</sup> Assistant Lightkeeper on Charity Island from 1885-1889.

This trip was on his wife's Bucket list to see the lighthouse her Grandfather was responsible for, so many years ago.

Mrs. Ellison had a very old book with her that day. It was a novel written by Jules Verne, "Mysterious Island," that her Grandfather had taken to Charity Island in 1885. Now it was brought out there for the second time. Ironically, he signed and dated the inside of the cover of that old book the night he finished reading it – December 4, 1885.

Months later I discovered a story published in the NY Times dated December 13<sup>th</sup> 1885.

The story reported that the wooden steamboat *Oconto*, which had gone missing, was reported wrecked just off Charity Island after being caught in a winter gale the night of December 4, 1885. The *Times* article relates how the *lightkeeper and the assistant* assisted all that next day as the storm raged helping the crew and passengers off the *Oconto* safely onto the Island. I determined later that unnamed Assistant Lightkeeper was none other than Mrs. Ellisons Grand father... What a coincidence! Six years later, Mrs. Ellison returned with the only other photo we have of a Charity Island Lightkeeper... William Pierce at 18 years old and in his Lightkeepers uniform.





**A portion of the Article on the wreck of the Oconto follows below.**

**[For the complete online Times story click here](#)**



**WRECKED IN SAGINAW BAY; THE  
OCONTO DRIVEN ASHORE ON  
CHARITY ISLAND.**

**NO LIVES LOST AND THE PASSENGERS  
SUPPLIED WITH PROVISIONS TO LAST  
UNTIL RELIEF REACHES THEM.**

DETROIT, Mich., Dec. 12.--The steamer Oconto left Oscoda on Friday, Dec. 4, at 4 P.M., and soon encountered a terrible gale. When the storm set in it became impossible to see and the lights went out. There were 22 passengers and 25 members of the crew on board. At 12 o'clock Friday night Charity Island light was sighted, and within 15 minutes the Oconto struck bottom at the southeast point of the island. Frank Peiper, first assistant engineer, who arrived here yesterday, describes the wreck as follows: Our starboard bulwarks were stove in and all the upper railings. Two life boats and all the light freight on the hurricane deck were washed away. We were in a gale of wind and a

blinding snowstorm. The Sea was so heavy that

For the rest of the story Cut and paste the link below into your browser.

<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=FA0F12FD395B10738DDDA0994DA415B8584F0D3>

## **Transfer of Light tower on Charity Island Moves A Step Closer!**

Finally, after years of anticipation Karen and I are very happy to report that we are only months away from having the Charity Island Light tower transferred to a Non Profit Entity.

Once that step is completed serious efforts can begin to raise funds to get the tower restored.

I will send out an update to all our newsletter subscribers as soon as the transfer is complete.

**Charity Island Excursions  
Offering Dinner Cruise Gift Certificates  
at the Malls this Holiday Season**

**We will be at the Midland, Saginaw  
Fashion Sq, and Bay City Malls through  
December 31, 2013**

**Call Karen for Details at 989 254 7710**



November 2013



A Dining Adventure...

**CharityIsland.com**

*Holiday Gift Certificates* 989 254 7710

The central banner features a scenic sunset over a body of water. In the foreground, two wine glasses filled with red wine sit on a wooden ledge. To the right, a lighthouse is silhouetted against the orange and yellow sky. The banner is framed by a decorative border with floral motifs on the left and right sides.

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