

 Molson Island Lighthouse, 1896 (Williams Family Collection)

Excerpts of oral history interviews will form an important part of the upcoming book *Memphremagog: An Illustrated History*. Here's the opening of a chapter titled *Lighting the Way* (A short history of lighthouses on Lake Memphremagog by Louise Abbott.) Do you have any stories or pictures of lighthouses on the lake? Please contact us!

A steel rod and fragments of a concrete foundation are all that remain of a lighthouse that once stood on the southwestern shore of Molson Island. But Edna (Camber) McKelvey can still picture the white wooden tower with its natty red tin roof and the brilliant beam of light that shone through the three windows of the lantern room over the lake after nightfall.

Edna lived at Fern Hill, an estate established by the Molson family south of Georgeville, from her birth in 1927 until her departure for Montreal in 1949. My father [Erwin Camber] worked for Ella Molson—he was the foreman, she recalls. There were two or three hired men to keep the place going. They were the lightkeepers.

In those days there were no outboard motors, so they would row across from the Molson boathouse [on the mainland] to the island.

As teenagers, Edna and her older brother, Percy, were sometimes delegated to lighthouse duty when the waters were calm. We'd do some fishing on the way out and on the way back. Every time we went out there, we had to mark the date and time in a logbook. The kerosene lamp had to be lit before six o'clock at night, and it had to be out by eight o'clock in the morning. The wick had to be trimmed every day [to ensure that the lamp burned brightly and did not become blackened with soot]. An inspector would come periodically to see if the lighthouse was clean.

I don't know how much the government paid for lightkeeping. I think it was a piddly amount.

When it was raining or windy, it wasn't very nice for whoever went out to the lighthouse. But it was a job that had to be done seven days a week from the first of May to the first of November.

During the war, I think they had difficulty finding people to be lightkeepers. And there wasn't that much traffic on the lake at night. They put in buoys, and a few years later, they tore down the lighthouse.