

Rolling casks of oil to Ciboux Island Lighthouse
Credit: Nova Scotia Archives



Carrying sacks of coal to Cape North Lighthouse
Credit: Nova Scotia Archives

Before the use of helicopters in the 1960s, many lightkeepers depended on ships to get supplies for their lighthouse. The lightkeeper was to greet the arrival of any supply ship and note the quantity and condition of boxes, barrels and sacks brought ashore. These notes were to be written up into the Quarterly Return Book that would be inspected by the regional Superintendent of Lighthouses and in turn forwarded to Ottawa.

Any damaged item found when unpacking the supplies was to be put aside to give to the Superintendent upon his next visit to the lighthouse. This pile of rejects also included worn out bits that the lightkeeper had replaced with a new part. The lightkeeper was to keep precise records as any shortages found upon inspection would come off his salary!

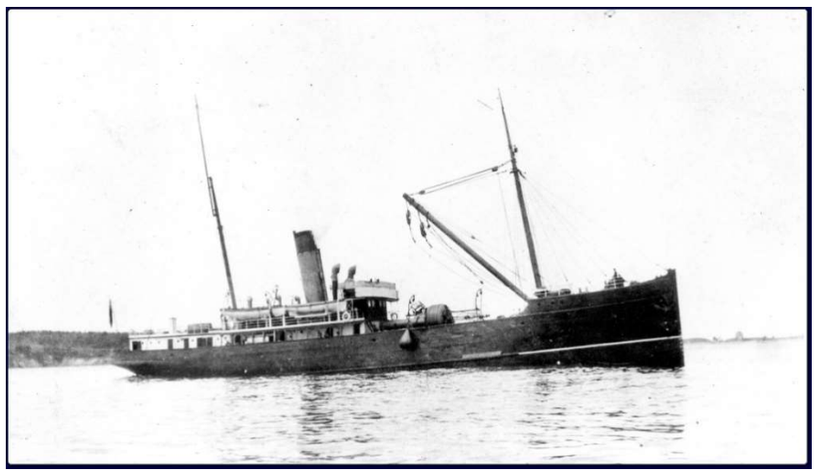
If a critical item such as oil ran low before the next scheduled resupply, the lightkeeper was to notify the Superintendent by mail or telegram immediately. How this was done when the lightkeeper was on an island before the arrival of telephone or marine radio would have been challenging. It is said one put his letters into sealed cans flying a pennant in the hope that wave action would get them to shore!

The Canadian Government Ship, CGS Aberdeen, was built in 1894 to deliver lighthouse supplies and maintain buoys on the East Coast before it was wrecked off Seal Island on October 13 1923. Luckily no one was killed and most of its cargo was salvaged. Yet there is no mention of how quickly the ship was replaced or what happened to those lighthouses that didn't get their supplies as scheduled.

Not having today's convenience of online purchases, speedy couriers and easy return policies, lightkeepers dealt with a very time-consuming manual supply system to keep the light in their lighthouse shining.



Cupboard of polishing gear Cape Spear NL
Credit: NSLPS - DPC



CGS Aberdeen Supply ship
Credit: Library and Archives Canada