

Onnie Pehrson
Ludington, MI 49431

Onnie, niece of Lewelyn Vannatter, the 2nd Assistant from March 8, 1912 to April 1, 1918 and 1st Assistant from April 1, 1918 through May 8, 1923 and Keeper from November 21, 1923 until June 30, 1936. Her sister is Dorothy Anderson.

My Interview with Onnie Pehrson took place at Big Sable Point Lighthouse on September 18, 2003 while she and her daughter-in-law, Carol Pehrson visited Big Sable Point Lighthouse.



I asked her why she hadn't been back for a visit prior to this date. She replied, "I am a busy woman! I have 4 children and enjoy spending time with my grandchildren at their sport events. I have lived in Ludington all my life, owned two restaurants and enjoy bowling very much at the age of 80 years. My grandchildren keep me young!"

It is sad to come back and see all the changes. All the exterior buildings are gone. I remember the boathouse, pump house and foghorn building and the outhouses behind the Lighthouse. When I was a little girl it was spooky to take our flashlights at night and go the outhouse. Uncle Lell gave us a top pot by the bed to use if we were too scared to out of doors.

In the late 30's we did come out to captain Rogan's son's birthday party.

There was a long walkway from the lighthouse to the lake with lots of grass for the lawn.

There were three families living here at the time. Carl Olson, the 2nd Assistant from August 28, 1927 until April 18, 1930, Arthur Fichtner, the 2nd Assistant from April 18 1930 until July 2 1949 and his wife, and Uncle Lewellyn Vannatter.

You were not allowed to have children while living in the lighthouse so when us kids would come to visit, we were treated very nicely.

The families would change off attending the light. When Uncle Lell would tend the midnight shift, I would go with him and we passed the time away by playing cards.

My mother and us kids would come out on weekends, plus summer vacations. My mother was a sister to Aunt Allie.

We would call the Lighthouse when we got to the Coast Guard Station and my uncle would come to Ludington to pick us up along with some supplies either by boat or a Model T Ford with hard rubber tires and we would travel by the beach to the Lighthouse, sometimes we would get stuck in the sand. When he came by boat, I would get sick every time. I was in the bottom of the boat most of the time. There was no road in at that time.

I do remember the first time the road was put in we rode in the back of the Model T Truck to the Lighthouse.

I remember how often they had to paint the whole interior of the Lighthouse for no one knew when the coast guard would be coming for inspection. We helped polish all the brass fixtures in the pump house until they were spotless and fingerprint free!

My Aunt Allie taught me how to embroidery and quilt then tie the quilt on a large wood frame. My mother would save our old clothes for material for quilting. Sometimes we would quilt by oil lamps in the evening. Aunt Allie gave a handmade quilt to each of us kids, and many of us still have and use them today.

We kept busy by jump roping, playing jacks, swimming and of course playing in the high dunes but we couldn't go too far for we would get lost.

The Life Saving Station was located about two miles south of the Lighthouse Howard and Joann (Rasmussen) lived there and we often played with them for hours at a time.

Onnie gave us a nice tour, full of information about the many fun memories while visiting the lighthouse as a youngster.

My bedroom was the upper northwest room and my sister Dorothy and I would sleep together in that room

There was no electricity at that time, and we heated by two potbelly stoves, one in the kitchen (north gift shop) and one in the living room northeast gift shop. We also heated by coal and the lighthouse was always very warm even in the winter.

There was a hand pump in the kitchen, which is now your north giftshop. Aunt Allie's quilting rooms was where your gift shop is on the west side.

Uncle Lell's office was in the room just north of the tower entrance, which is now your orientation room. I remember there are 130 steps to the top of the tower.

My most memorable times were when we played cards in the living area and every half hour, one of us would have to run out of doors to make sure the light was lit. We always kept company until we were forced to go to bed. When we were at the top of the tower, we used to throw pennies and nickels down on the sand then we would run down to see if we could find them.

I never thought I would be asked to tell about the lighthouse, but I am so happy to share with folks of my many fun times here at Big Sable Point Lighthouse

I really enjoyed Onnie's visit and hope she will come again soon for another visit along with some more memories.