

Joyce (Mortensen) Oosterhart
Muskegon, MI

My Interview with Joyce Oosterhart took place on September 17, 2005 on our final day at Big Sable Point Lighthouse.

Joyce is the great niece of Mr. Lewelyn Vannatter serving as 1st and 2nd assistant and keeper from 1912-1936.

Joyce feels it is important for the volunteers of the lighthouse to know some of the genealogical history of the Vannatter family.

Lewelyn Vannatter's father was Jacob Vannatter and his mother was Harriett (Sandford). Jacob was serving in the Civil war when he was captured by the southern armies and was marched to the sea and became a prisoner of war somewhere in the Carolinas.

After the war, Lewelyn's parents were married in New York before coming to Northport, MI. Jacob then became the Sea captain for the Great Lakes.

Joyce remembers that uncle Lewelyn and his wife Aunt Allie came to her home for visits. Joyce's mother's name was Gladys and her Uncle always called her *Gladness*. They often went fishing in Bass Lake for bullheads and then her mother would cook them. She was very close with her Uncle Lewelyn Vannatter.

Three sons were born to Jacob Vannatter; Arthur, Chester, and Lewelyn. Arthur was employed by the Post Office in Travers City, Chester owned and lived in a hotel in Northport, Michigan, and Lewelyn served at Big Sable Point Lighthouse from 1912-1936. He had a daughter Ardella who was Joyce's grandmother.

Some of my most memorable times spent here were on Thanksgiving Day. My mother always prepared the chicken and pies for the special holiday.

Three separate families were living in the lighthouse. The men folk built a dune buggy to escort visitors from the river up to Big Sable Point. One time the dune buggy would not run and they all had to walk through the river charring all the food supplies to the Lighthouse.



We were never allowed to play on the stairs, but it was very exciting to climb the tower stairs every night about 5 pm to light the light with Uncle Lewelyn. I don't remember how they lit the light but it was a very bright light.

Joyce took a walking tour of the entire Lighthouse and vividly remembers the lower apartment for that was her Uncle's living quarters.

I remember exactly where the china cabinet was located and the round oak kitchen table where we ate all of our meals. I believe a generator produced our electricity.

The water of Lake Michigan would leave wave traces on the sand and often ships would get stuck on a sandbar and my Uncle had to take the boat out and help them escape back into the waters.

Life at Big Sable Point was a very exciting place for us kids. I now can associate so much more with my personal photos since I have come back for a visit. I dearly love the photos of my Uncle in his uniform.

I have wanted to return to the Lighthouse for many years to view the restoration and take photos to share with my family members.

The Vannatters retired in 1936 and moved to the town of Ludington residing on Brother Street. I have a cousin who is gathering a lot of genealogy on the Vannatter family and I will see that you get a copy of this history.

I enjoyed meeting and documenting Joyce's memories and hopefully she will share with our association in the near future about new genealogy of the Vannatter families.