

Hendricks Head – Legend of the Baby in Mattress

Written by: Keeper Charles L. Knight
February 20, 1932

Back in 1900, many years before Keeper Knight ever dreamed that he would see service as a lighthouse keeper, he saw in Berlin, New Hampshire a fine play entitled "Uncle Terry." It dealt with the Hendricks Head Light Station and later he read the book. Nowadays, summer visitors occasionally inquire if there was any foundation in fact to the story. Probably the author could answer that better. Then again as Napoleon is claimed to have said, "History is often but fiction well sworn to," it may not matter. But making off for about 300 yards southerly of this point is a dangerous reef, over which in severe southerly gales the breakers curl savagely. It is claimed that during the term of the first keeper, around Civil War time, a barque bringing passengers over from Norway got up in here during a very heavy winter storm and struck on that reef.

The keeper was awakened around midnight by the discharge of what he took to be a shotgun. He went to the door, opened it, was nearly blown back across the floor, and beheld rockets being sent up from a point just to the southerly. He could do nothing to help. The next morning wreckage was coming in here, in front of the window where this is being typed, and among other pieces was a mattress carefully rolled up and bound with stout rope. He pulled it in onto the rocks with a pole and opened it. Behold, there was a child about two years within, and alive.

This child he is said to have brought up as his own daughter and she was the Tilly of the story entitled "Uncle Terry," to be found at almost any public library nowadays. It is claimed by some who should know that this is perfectly true, yet others are skeptical. This Tilly, if she actually existed, was the sole survivor of that wreck. It is certain that there have been serious wrecks close by here, with loss of life, especially on or about the Cat Ledges, not quite a mile to the southerly.



Keeper Knight is not the only skeptic as this topic has been researched by local historians who have conducted interviews of Southport residents. They claim that it is a legend, while some descendants of the keeper claim it is true.

Keeper Jeruel Marr would've been in charge of the lighthouse in the 1870's, the period at which the wreck would've occurred and he and his wife had five children. The account written and made popular in Edward Rowe Snow's *Famous Lighthouses of New England*, states that the couple had just buried a child before the rescue occurred, while other accounts state that they were childless at the time so adopted the baby and named her Seaborne.