



Unit 2

Lighthouse keepers

Cross-curricular – American history

1 Read the text and choose a title for it.

- a The history of Lake Michigan b Famous women lighthouse keepers c The dangers of lighthouse keeping



BEFORE THE DAYS of satellite navigation, lighthouses used to show sailors where there were dangerous rocks or coastlines. In those days, lighthouse keepers were usually men. But by the time American women won the right to vote in 1920, women had held important positions as lighthouse keepers for a long time. There were many women in the United States who worked in the lighthouses, and often with great heroism. One of them was Elizabeth Whitney Williams.

Elizabeth had played with the lighthouse keeper's children at Beaver Island Harbor Point Light on Lake Michigan when she was a little girl. When she got married, she and her husband Clement went to live in the same lighthouse. Her husband was the keeper, but Elizabeth loved the work and helped him with his duties.

Elizabeth and Clement had been the keepers of the lighthouse for only three years when he

died during a rescue at sea. She was determined not to leave, so she officially became the keeper. Clement's death was not the only sadness in her life. She had also lost two brothers and three nephews at sea. She believed that her work was even more important now.

Elizabeth moved to the Little Traverse Lighthouse when she married again in 1875. Her life was less lonely from that time on. The Little Traverse was on the mainland so she had more visitors. Tourists were interested in Elizabeth's life as a lighthouse keeper, and she enjoyed showing them around the lighthouse and telling them her stories.

Elizabeth's remarkable life ended in 1913. At the age of 71, she had worked in lighthouses for 41 years. Very few women, or men, have served as lighthouse keepers for longer than that. The story of her life proves that a strong woman can run a lighthouse just as well as a man.

▶ WORD BOOSTER

Match the words and definitions.

- | | |
|--------------|--|
| 1 heroism | a somebody who is responsible for something |
| 2 keeper | b formal choice between people or issues (e.g. Government) |
| 3 remarkable | c very brave actions |
| 4 vote | d things that you have to do as part of your job |
| 5 duties | e the main part of a country (not an island) |
| 6 mainland | f unusual in a way that surprises and impresses you |

2 Read the text again and choose the correct alternative.

- The first American women keepers ran lighthouses before / after 1920.
- Elizabeth knew / didn't know the Beaver Island lighthouse before she lived there.
- Her husband was / was not the only member of her family to die at sea.
- Elizabeth could / could not run the lighthouse without her husband.
- Elizabeth married / never married again.
- The Little Traverse Light was also / was not on an island.

3 Answer the questions.

- When did Elizabeth move to the Beaver Island lighthouse?
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- When did she become the official keeper?
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- How did she know what to do as the official keeper?
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- How was life different on the mainland?
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- Why do you think the author calls Elizabeth's years of work "remarkable"?
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4 Answer the questions.

What do you think was remarkable about Elizabeth's life and work? Do you think she was heroic? Why?/Why not?

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