

Loxahatchee River Historical Society Quarterly

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The Loxahatchee River Historical Society (LRHS) is the 501(c)3 non-profit organization that operates Jupiter Inlet Lighthouse & Museum

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Jupiter Weather Bureau Station, 1907

Celebrating 160 Years

Jupiter Weather Bureau History

On February 9, 2020, the National Weather Service (NWS) turned 150 years old. The history of that great public service runs through many places, including Jupiter, Florida.

Created by a Congressional act in 1870, the NWS formally began as the “Division of Telegrams and Reports for the Benefit of Commerce” within the US Army Signal Corps. The Signal Corps itself was only seven years old at the time. Most of the weather stations were offices in rented commercial buildings rather than purpose-built structures. The first 24 stations began recording the weather on November 1, 1870. Among these was an office in Key West since an underwater telegraph line connected that port city to Havana, Cuba and the Florida Gulf Coast in 1867.

In January 1886, Rep. Egbert L. Viele of New York presented a petition from the Maritime Association of New York that requested a signal station at Jupiter. Similar maritime interests had been the first advocates for the Jupiter Inlet Lighthouse nearly four decades earlier. On February 17, 1887 an act of Congress provided funding for a government telegraph line to Jupiter, with the accompanying stations. 2nd Lt. B. M. Purssell surveyed the line and supervised its construction. He was commended by his superiors for “the energy and care exercised by him in locating and supervising the construction.”

The finished government telegraph line stretched 130 miles from Jupiter to Titusville, where it connected with a railroad-operated telegraph line. In addition to a new building at Jupiter on the lighthouse reservation, weather and signal offices were also established in Titusville and Micco, both in rented buildings. Not only did the station crews record the weather and operate the telegraph, but they also had to maintain the line itself. Construction of the line and Jupiter station cost \$16,117.59 and annual maintenance costs were expected to be over \$5,000 while revenue from commercial traffic on the sparsely populated Indian River was expected to only generate about \$600.

Jupiter Weather and Signal Station began operations on January 1, 1888. It was the first weather station or office in southeast Florida. In support of maritime interests, this station provided quick communication with the adjacent lighthouse and the lifesaving station less than a mile away. The two Observers were to report all passing vessels - vital information to shipping and insurance companies in the time before radio.

As of June 30, 1888, Jupiter was 1 of 180 government weather stations in operation. In 1890, a congressional act transferred the

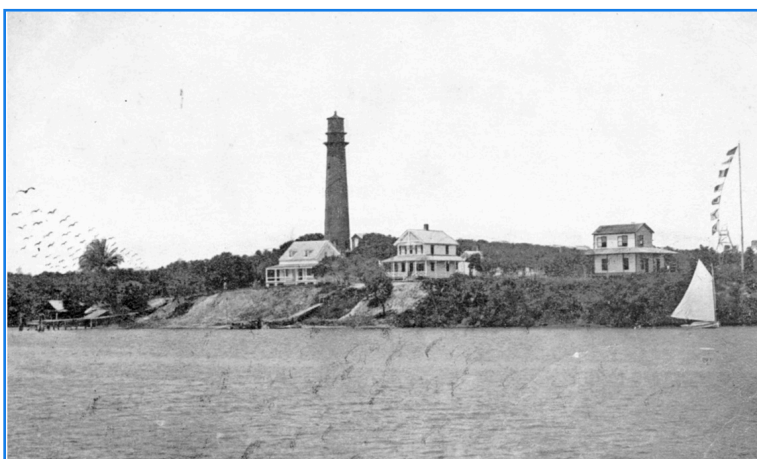


The original weather bureau building viewed from the lighthouse. (William Henry Jackson, Library of Congress)

Jupiter's Weather Bureau History

continued

weather service from the War Department to the Department of Agriculture and formally named it the Weather Bureau. This change went into effect at the start of the federal government's next fiscal year - July 1, 1891. Most weather personnel transferred along with the service, ending their Army enlistments and becoming civilian federal employees.

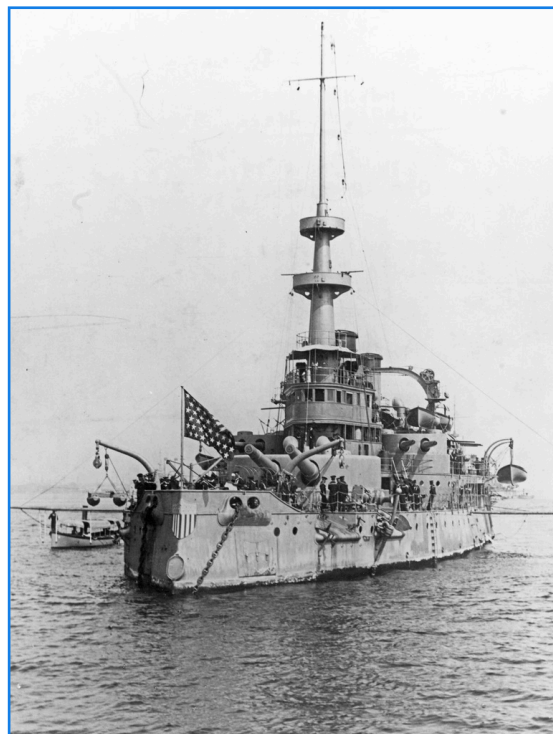


Jupiter Inlet Lighthouse and Weather Bureau ca. 1900
Note signal flags on right.

A Western Union telegraph line reached Jupiter in early 1892 via a more inland route and connected with a new underwater line to Nassau, Bahamas. The Assistant Observer position at Jupiter was discontinued in August 1893. The troublesome government telegraph line was badly damaged by a tropical storm on October 13, 1893. The Florida East Coast Railway, then under construction, repaired the line in exchange for being able to use it. When the FEC's own telegraph line reached Jupiter in 1894 the government line was discontinued entirely and auctioned off as government surplus.

The weather duties at Jupiter in the 1890s were as follows: record temperature, pressure, relative humidity, dewpoint, and river stage daily at 8AM and 8PM then transmit this information within 20 minutes. Submit weekly, monthly, quarterly, and annual reports. Fly signal flags at the station to indicate weather conditions. Post weather reports and warnings (such as hurricanes or frost) at the post office and railroad depot. And last but not least: "In addition to the foregoing, the observers perform other special and variable duties too numerous to classify." Monthly reports were also provided to the Tropical Sun and other local newspapers which printed them for public interest. The Tropical Sun also posted weather reports from Jupiter and flew the corresponding storm flags from their building in Juno (and later West Palm Beach).

It was the Weather Bureau Station that brought the battleship USS Oregon to Jupiter Inlet in May 1898 after its famous journey around South America at the outbreak of the Spanish-American War. The battleship's captain knew Jupiter was the nearest government telegraph line he could reach and report to the Navy Department for instructions.



USS Oregon, 1898.
(U.S. Naval History and Heritage Command)

Jupiter's Weather Bureau History

continued

In 1902, the original 1.5-story weather bureau building was substantially expanded for the benefit of Observer Hal Hardin and his growing family. The enlarged structure took on the form most people now recognize: 3 stories, with an observation platform on the roof (widow's walk), wraparound veranda, and attached kitchen in the back. The first two floors were living quarters with the upper story serving as an office. A dock, boathouse, and rail fence were also added to the weather station.



The Jupiter Weather Bureau Station as it looked from 1903 to 1928.

By 1911, the Weather Bureau had 200 stations and 600 employees. The Jupiter Weather Bureau Station closed in April of that year due to the opening of the first Miami Weather Bureau Office. Starting with only a two-man crew, the Miami office grew over time to become the National Hurricane Center. The National Weather Service recognizes the Jupiter Weather Bureau Station as Miami's "ancestor."

The former weather building was used as housing for Navy radiomen, and during World War I by Navy signalmen. The building had just been repurposed as a lighthouse keeper dwelling in 1928 when it was wrecked by the Okeechobee Hurricane. LRHS has exciting plans, supported by the NOAA and Bureau of Land Management, to build a full-size replica of the weather bureau station, based off the original architectural drawings. This will serve as a STEM center and interpretive exhibit about the weather service.

Jupiter's Weather Bureau Observers

Eight different observers were stationed at the Jupiter Weather Bureau Station between January 1888 and April 1911. For the first three and half years the observers were enlisted members of the US Army Signal Corps, holding ranks between Private and Sergeant. Most observers stayed with the weather service when it became a civilian organization in 1891. Until 1893, the station had an Assistant Observer in addition to the Head Observer. Six of the eight observers who served at Jupiter made a career in the weather service. Sadly, all six career meteorologists effectively gave their lives to their careers: two died while still in the weather service and the other four died within five years of their retirement.

Currently, LRHS only has a photo of one of the eight observers. The other images accompanying this article come from newspaper articles. Any help locating photographs of the other observers is greatly appreciated.

Henry Wade Pennywitt (1851-1926)

Weather Service: 1874-1923

Longest Assignment: Pittsburgh (1906-1923)

Jupiter: Construction Supervisor, 1887; Head Observer, 1888

Pennywitt supervised construction of the Jupiter Weather Bureau Station and stayed on to run the station during its first few months of operation.



Henry Pennywitt,
(Pittsburgh Daily
Post, 1923)

Martin Weaver Lichty (1865-1920)

Weather Service: 1886-1892?

Jupiter: Head Observer, 1888-1889

At Jupiter, Martin was noted as an avid hunter. After leaving the weather service, he became a doctor and even briefly worked for Flager's FEC Railway.

His father was a Union Army veteran and longtime War Department clerk.

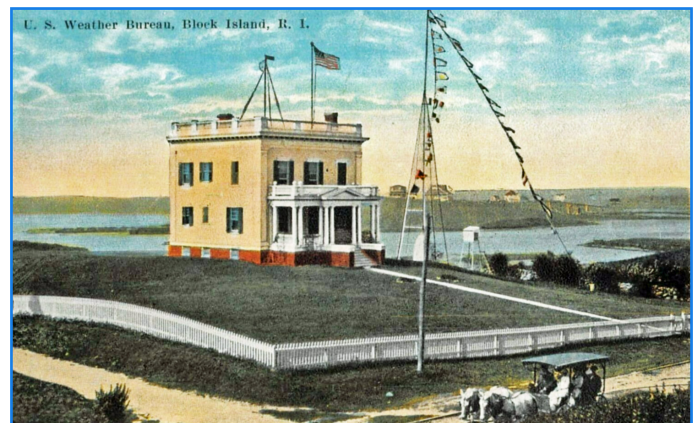
George Washington Eddey (1862-1928)

Weather Service: 1887-1926

Longest Assignment: Block Island (1912-1926)

Jupiter: Assistant Observer, 1889-1890

George's wife, Nellie Ball Eddey, started the first Sunday School at Jupiter.



Block Island Weather Bureau Station, built 1903

Jupiter's Weather Bureau Observers

continued

Alexander Jordan "A.J." Mitchell (1862-1937)

Weather Service: 1882-1932

Longest Assignment: Jacksonville (1895-1932)

Jupiter: Head Observer, 1889-1893

Mitchell was supervisor of Jupiter's one-room Octagon School and superintendent of the Sunday School that met there. He also served one year on the school board of Dade County, which at the time extended from Stuart to the upper Keys. According to his obituary, Mitchell was "widely known in meteorological circles for his writings on scientific subjects."

Thomas Joseph O'Brien (1854-1926)

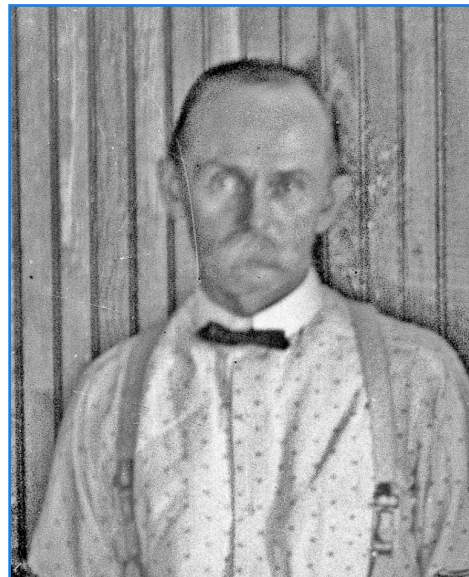
Weather Service: 1880-1894

Jupiter: Asst. Observer, 1888-1889 & 1891-1893; Head Observer, 1893-1894

O'Brien was born in Ireland, the only foreign-born observer to serve at Jupiter. He served continuously in Florida from 1887, when he helped establish the original Titusville-Jupiter telegraph line, until his resignation in 1894. After leaving the weather service, O'Brien was a farmer and fisherman in Jupiter and apparently served as temporary 2nd Assistant Keeper at the lighthouse in 1896. He settled in Fort Pierce, the only Jupiter observer to become a permanent Florida resident.



Assistant Keeper believed to be
Thomas O'Brien in 1896



Thomas O'Brien, 1905.
(St. Lucie County
History Center)

Jupiter's Weather Bureau Observers

continued

James William Cronk (1867-1940)

Weather Service: 1887-1937

Longest Assignment: Shreveport, LA (1902-1935)

Jupiter: Observer, 1894-1899

The Jupiter correspondent for the *Tropical Sun* newspaper praised Cronk only a couple weeks on duty. "People of this community have the impression that he is the right man in the right place, and by his easy and pleasant address he is fast gaining their respect and esteem." While assigned to Jupiter, Cronk married the widowed Lucy Doster Miller, whose niece wrote a well-known memoir of her Jupiter childhood ("Life Along The Loxahatchee"). By marriage, James Cronk became owner of the Miller homestead comprising the land north of Center Street and west of the railroad. Although the Cronks platted their property for a townsite in 1904, shortly thereafter they sold the land to the Pennock family of Philadelphia. The Pennocks used the land to open Pennock Plantation fernery and donated lots for a 1911 school and a 1922 church. James' brother, Corydon P. Cronk, was also a weather bureau observer, from 1887 until his death in 1903.



James Cronk, 1930s
(Shreveport Journal
1940)

Cornelius Jefferson Doherty (1870-1935)

Weather Service: 1889-1935

Longest Assignment: Reading, PA (1912-1931)

Jupiter: Observer, Sep-Dec 1899

Doherty was in charge of the weather bureau exhibit at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. He was commended by Congress for his work during the 1909 and 1910 hurricane seasons while chief of the Key West Weather Bureau Office. He died in New Haven, CT while still working for the weather bureau.

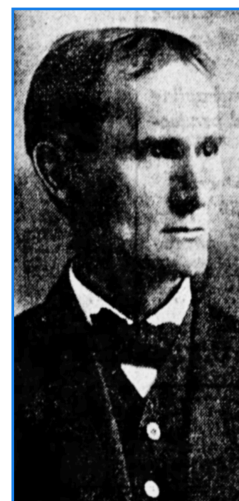
Hal Palmer Hardin (1866-1922)

Weather Service: 1887-1922

Longest Assignment: Jupiter (1899-1911)

Jupiter: Asst. Observer, 1890-1891; Observer, 1899-1911

Hardin was by far the longest-serving observer at Jupiter. He and his wife had six children, five of them born at Jupiter – probably in the weather bureau station. He was a weather service meteorologist in Charles City, IA at the time of his death. Hal's eldest son, also called Hal, worked for many years as a structural engineer in Miami.



Hal Hardin
(Wichita Beacon
1913)

Of-Fish-All

The First Jupiter Fish Story?

The following story appeared in the Florida Star newspaper on October 23, 1889. It was signed “Matthew Walker”¹ and datelined Jupiter – Oct 11, 1889.

George W. Eddey of the Signal Service caught a large red bass at Jupiter Inlet on Oct 7 with a mullet-baited hook and gave it to the Life Saving Station. He thought it was 25 lbs and inquired of Capt. Fitzgerald² if he'd ever caught one as large. Fitzgerald said he once caught one of 32 lbs off the lighthouse wharf.

Encountering John Grant³ at the [Celestial] railroad wharf, Eddey declared he had caught a 38 lbs bass. Grant claimed he caught a 43 1/4 lb bass at the inlet last winter.

Returning to the weather station, Eddey telegraphed “Brieny”⁴ at Micco about his 40 lbs bass. Charlie Carlin stopped by to telegraph an order to Peter Cobb⁵ for a bar of soap and can of tomatoes. “Mr. Eddey, with one hand upon his instrument, the other holding an imaginary fish-line, with disheveled hair and a general aspect of oblivion to everything except the matter in hand, glared at Charlie and stammered: 'I have a fish! I have a fish! I have official matter on the line!’”

Mr. [A. J.] Mitchell, Eddey's fellow Observer, came in to ask if a pound of tobacco could last Eddey a week then inquired about the message he was sending.

“With eyes and every muscle of his face rigid and denoting the expression of a man whose mother-in-law has just died, in a voice which came with jerks and resonant sound of the telegraphic instrument, Mr. Eddey murmured: 'It is of-fish! It is of-fish! It is suf-fish-ient!’”

Charlie Carlin: “Do you think you are able to catch another big bass?”

Eddey: “I feel de-fish, I feel de-fish, I feel de-fish-ient.”

Charlie: “Mr. O'Brien caught one that weighed 50 lbs when he was here.” (which is untrue)

Eddey: “He is a fish, he is ef-fish-ient.”

1. Local correspondents who submitted the community columns to the *Florida Star*, *Tropical Sun*, and *East Coast Advocate / Indian River Advocate* usually used pseudonyms. “Matthew Walker” contributed columns irregularly to the *Florida Star* from 1887 to 1889. Published in Titusville, the *Star* was the closest newspaper to Jupiter in the 1880s.

2. Capt. John Fitzgerald, proprietor of the steamboat-hotel *Chattahoochee*.

3. John H. Grant, Surfman at the Jupiter Life Saving Station.

4. Thomas J. O'Brien, Weather Bureau Observer (see page 6).

5. Peter Porter Cobb opened Fort Pierce's P. P. Cobb General Store in 1896, but was a merchant prior to that time (possibly operating a tradeboat). The Cobb Store is still open today in the original building.

Scenes From Our 160th Anniversary

Thanks to Florida Power & Light for sponsoring lighthouse admissions on July 10.



The lighthouse was decked out with a special banner for the 160th anniversary on July 10. Our site partner, the Bureau of Land Management, conducted a ground-penetrating radar (GPR) survey which can be seen in foreground of the photo on the left. The results of this survey will help improve historic interpretation, identify the locations of past historic structures and locations for potential archaeological digs, and help future site improvements from impacting any sensitive locations.



We received a surprise visit from some of our dedicated docents on July 10th.
We've missed our volunteers!



Another visitor was this Caribbean land hermit crab (*Coenobita cylpeatus*). We're always happy to see new native wildlife at the Outstanding Natural Area.

Keeper's Update

Weather forecasting has never been more critical than a busy hurricane season like 2020. Continuing the legacy of the weather service and lighthouse keepers on our site, we have a weather station on the roof of our museum. You can [check out the live weather conditions online](#). You can also see live conditions at Jupiter Inlet [from our webcam](#) at the top of Jupiter Inlet Lighthouse.

Staff secured Jupiter Inlet Lighthouse & Museum against Hurricane Isaias, which fortunately weakened back to a tropical storm before reaching Florida and most of the storm's force stayed offshore.

A keeper's work is never done. Jupiter Inlet Lighthouse & Museum will be closed September 1 to September 22 for maintenance projects. Evening programs, like Twilight Yoga and Sunset/Moonrise tours, will still be offered during this time.

Lighthouse admission will resume September 23 and the Gift Shop will reopen October 1. Our fall hours will be 10AM to 2PM Wednesday through Sunday, with last admission at 1PM. Masks will still be required. Please check our website www.jupiterlighthouse.org for the latest details before visiting.

Community support is more important than ever to our non-profit historical society! Here are some ways you can celebrate the 160th Lighthouse Anniversary while supporting our mission.

Our **Anniversary Membership Special** means new and renewed memberships get an extra three months free! Donations and membership payments can be [made through our website](#).



Unique [160th Anniversary Engraved Pathway Bricks at the Lighthouse](#) are available until September 18. Single bricks are \$100 and double bricks have the special price of \$160 each. These bricks will be installed before the holidays. What a historic gift!

Visit our new online Gift Shop for mailed items or easy pickup, including the beautiful new edition of *Five Thousand Years on the Loxahatchee*: <https://jupiterlighthousestore.square.site/>

Stay connected with us through your social media outlet of choice:
<https://www.facebook.com/jupiterinletlighthousemuseum/>
https://www.instagram.com/jupiter_lighthouse/
<https://twitter.com/JupiterLH>

Keeper's Update

continued

We are deeply grateful to our special summer staff Joe, Niko, Erika, Maddy, Steven, and Tristan (all former interns) who were instrumental in allowing us to reopen this summer. Joe has graduated and will continue to provide weekend assistance through the end of the year. The others have returned to their university studies for the fall. In August, we began slowly welcoming back our regular volunteers.



Behind the Scenes:

Amanda Dixon, Program Director, and Kelsey Côté, Social Media Specialist, work an episode of Lighthouse Story Time & Crafts for Kids. New programs are posted monthly to our YouTube channel.

<https://bit.ly/JILMYouTube>

Please subscribe.

Check out the view from the lighthouse webcam:
<https://www.jupiterlighthouse.org/live-camera/>

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