

AT SAUNDERSTOWN

No More Flags Aflaying

By JOHN WARD

THE U.S. Weather Bureau's storm warning station at Saunderstown has doused its red and white night lights and lowered its flag signals, ending a continual service by one family since 1897.


Retired with a commendation from Ralph E. Carlson, meteorologist in charge at the Providence Weather Bureau, are Mrs. Florence Eaton Fuderer and her brother, Chauncey T. Eaton.

They got \$12 a month from the government for their storm signal service to mariners.

Their father, Capt. Joseph L. Eaton, a dashing figure in Van Dyke beard, winged collar and pilot's cap, had manned the first signal tower in the yard of his home on Willett Road, overlooking the lower West Passage of Narragansett Bay. The tower was visible far at sea.

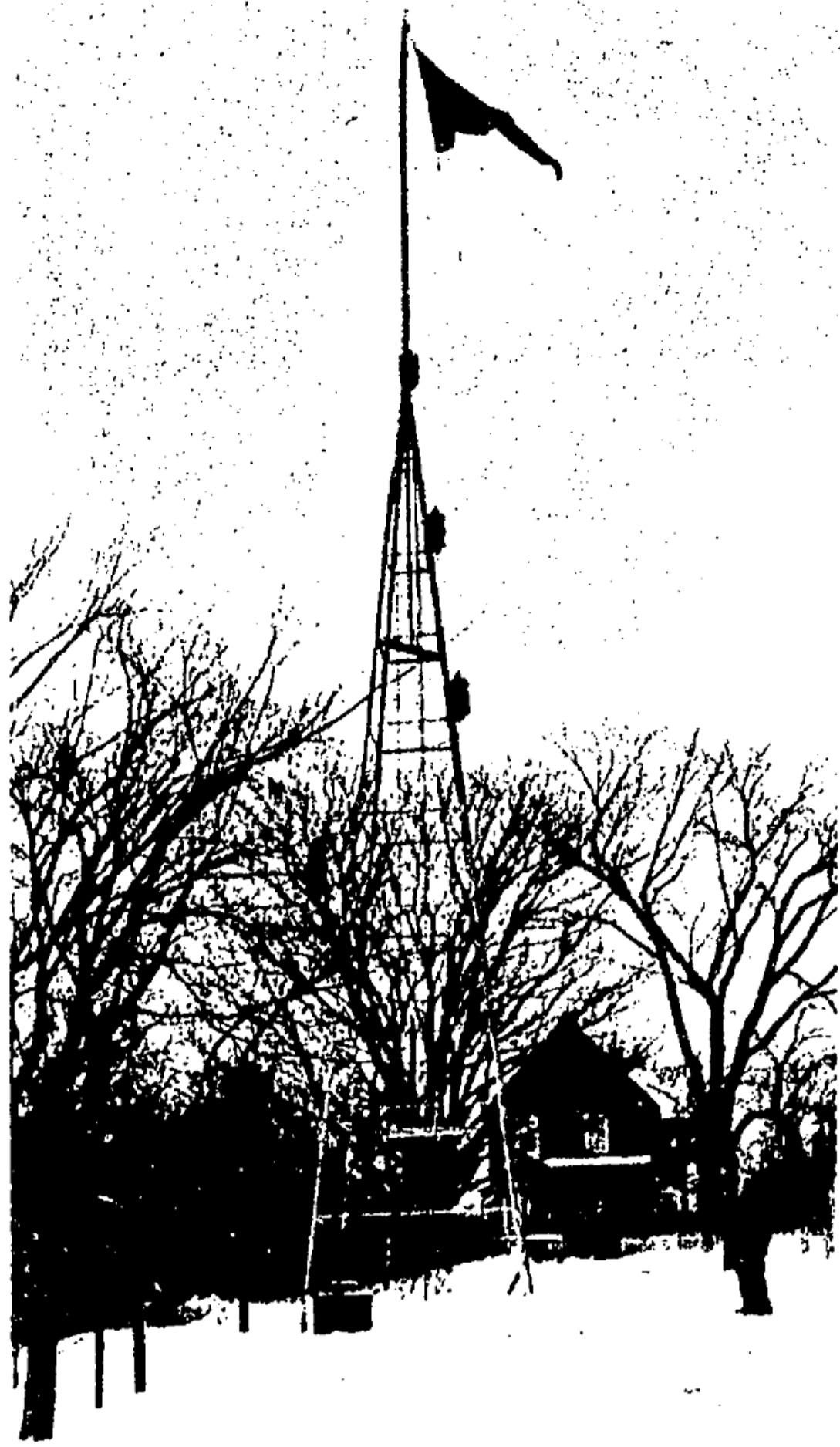
Before that, Captain Eaton had continued a practice, started by his father, of burning a strong white light in a second floor window of his ship chandlery at South Ferry, two or three miles south of Saunderstown. The light was an aid to mariners, as was the spire of the nearby South Ferry church. He also ran a ferry service to Newport and was a pilot.

Chauncey Eaton recalls that his father moved to Willett Road in 1894, and that



DOWN FOR THE LAST TIME, a weather signal is unsnapped by Chauncey T. Eaton whose family has operated storm warning station at Saunderstown for nearly 70 years. Meteorologist Ralph E. Carlson assists in the informal ceremony.

Pictures by Edward C. Hanson and
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LAST FLAG to fly from the steel tower that is visible for miles at sea is about to come down. Station is being deactivated because property is being sold by Eaton family.



CAPT. JOSEPH L. EATON was first of his family to operate weather station at his Saunderstown home.



FAMILY HOME of the Eatons is now occupied by daughter, Mrs. Florence Eaton Fuderer. She helped brother operate station.



he raised a tall wooden mast as the first weather tower in 1897.

"We had the first telephone around there. At that time, the weather station was under the Boston Weather Bureau. The orders to hoist or lower signals would come into the telegraph office at Narragansett Pier, and Mrs. Conway, the operator, would relay them by telephone. We also handled telegrams.

"Father had many boats, including the sloop *Isaac*, in which he carried cattle, freight, passengers and mail to Newport. He had attended East Greenwich Academy and Moses Brown. Father used to go out and 'speak the ships'; when they came into the lower bay, anchored at Dutch Island Harbor and off Plum Beach. He got their name, cargo and destination. He supplied these ship arrivals to the Journal. He also sent the Baltimore Line information about its own ships, and reported arrival of barges to the railroads. He also notified the Providence office of the steamboat company if its New York boats were late."

Chauncey, his sister and brothers, Joseph L. Jr. and Harold Eaton, all helped hoist signals at the weather station until they left home. Captain Eaton carried on alone for several decades and, in late life, served as ferry dockmaster at Saunderstown where he also operated a fish market. Chauncey Eaton, meanwhile, moved to California, where he was a chauffeur for

movie actress Mary Miles Minter, and later for Judge F. T. Hughes, grandfather of Howard Hughes.

Mrs. Fuderer had followed a career as a surgical nurse in Providence, but, in 1930, she returned home to help her widowed father. He died in 1947, at the age of 90. Chauncey also had returned to Saunderstown and, together, the brother and sister kept the weather signal station operating.

In recent years, Chauncey, a retired state division of fish and game employe, has lived a half dozen miles to the west of the station, in Shermantown. His sister lives alone at the family home.

As late as this winter, she has been known to telephone Chauncey's home and report: "I've got small craft warnings flying." This meant she singlehandedly, in spite of her advanced years, hoisted the heavy red signal flags up the high steel tower on the back lawn of her yard.

Mr. Carlson says that the tower has been abolished because the Eaton property is being sold. The Weather Bureau believes the cost of dismantling and moving it elsewhere is not justified, in view of modern aids now available to mariners. And the West Passage marine traffic is a mere trickle now, compared to the volume Captain Eaton "spoke" so many years.

LIGHT TO GUIDE mariners was at first placed in second floor window of the Eatons ship chandlery at South Ferry. It was later replaced by a wooden mast.