



## The Death of Noah Alexander Clark, Assistant Keeper of the Patos Light

By: Edrie and Terri Vinson

Noah Alexander Clark served as assistant Keeper of the Patos Light Station from April 1909 until his death on December 23, 1911. Noah had worked under Edward Durgan, his father-in-law. Noah was married to Mary Adelia Durgan, Edward and Estelle's oldest daughter.

"Mr. Clark, his young son, his wife and his wife's sister, started for Blaine in the launch Sea Pigeon to visit Ed Durgin [sic] a former light keeper at Patos, also to do some Christmas shopping. They reached Blaine safely, and were returning to Patos Island, when the engine of the launch broke down and the boat was carried upon a reef and wrecked shortly after dark. The outline of the shore could be seen, and Mr. Clark seeing little hope for rescue, decided to make an attempt to swim ashore and get a boat. He plunged into the icy waters, and that was the last seen of him. The two women and boy were left upon the reef through the bitter cold night but managed to survive the ordeal. In the morning at low tide they were able to wade ashore." The San Juan Islander, December 29, 1911.

George Lonholt was the keeper when the incident occurred, and the following day when Noah's brother Daniel Webster Clark arrived, Lonholt wrote in the Log Book: "Act-

ing Assistant D. Clark and I searched the beach hoping to find Mr. Clark; but found no sign of him. Keeper left for Eastsound to send telegrams at 10 am returned at 4:30 pm."

We know that their young son was Noel, about 3 years old at the time, but we do not know which sister was with Mary. The following day Edward and his wife arrived from the Semiahmoo Harbor Light in Blaine with daughters Estelle and Clara. Daniel stayed to help tend to the lighthouse for a week until a replacement could be named. That replacement was the ill-famed William H. Stark.

Clarence, his wife, and sister Lulu returned to Patos in February and helped Mary pack up her young family's things and move to the mainland. On May 19, 1912, Mary came back to Patos to reach closure with eight of Noah's family members and to see where he had lived out the last years of his life.

Noah comes to life as "Uncle Al" in Helene Glidden's *The Light on the Island*. We think of him fondly today as the man who tried to keep Edward from swearing, and who gave the Durgan children their religious education, which ultimately led to "Spanish John" playing the role of "God" to young "Angie."

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