

## The O'Hagans of the St. Simons Lighthouse



The St. Simons Lighthouse has been an active Aid to Navigation for the last 150 years, but it has been many decades since a resident lighthouse keeper lived in the home attached to the iconic tower.

With automation of the light system in 1954, a full-time keeper was no longer needed to maintain the light. The last keeper was David O'Hagan, Sr., a man whose family had strong ties to lighthouse service.

From 1893-1905, David's father, Thomas O'Hagan, served as keeper at the Ponce Inlet Lighthouse in Daytona Beach, Florida. David was born there in 1904, one of 12 O'Hagan children. The brood became known as the "Lighthouse Bandits" for their boisterous ways.

David entered lighthouse service as a young adult and was stationed at Amelia Island and Ponce Inlet before coming to St. Simons Island in 1941. He began here as the first assistant and was eventually promoted to head keeper. David and his wife Caroline had three children: Marie; David, Jr.; and Patrick, who was born in Brunswick.

In an account given to the Coastal Georgia Historical Society, David, Jr., recalls playing on the beach in front of the lighthouse nearly every day. The children sometimes accompanied Keeper O'Hagan on his duties tending nearby



buoys. Other duties were too dangerous for them to help with, such as painting the exterior of the 104-foot-tall tower. Caroline O'Hagan would busy herself in Brunswick on those days, fearing that her husband might fall during that gravity-defying chore.

Space was tight in the keeper's house since it was home to both the O'Hagans and the assistant keeper and his family. David, Jr., and his brother Pat shared bunk beds situated in a hallway, having no bedroom to call their own.

David, Jr., also remembers that, though the space was confined, the solid construction of the lighthouse made it a shelter of choice for island residents during tropical storms and even when sirens blared during World War II, signaling blackouts or possible enemy activity.

Shown here are photographs donated to the Society by the O'Hagan family. In the large image, the family poses in front of the white brick tower. In the small photo, David, Jr. gives his father and brother a ride.