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Maria Bray

In the summer of 1864, Alexander Bray and his wife Maria, moved to Thatcher Island, off Rockport Rockport on Massachusetts' Cape Anne. Bray, a Civil War veteran, had been appointed as the keeper of what were known as the Cape Anne lighthouses, two 124-foot towers that were 900 feet apart. On 21 December 1864 he decided to transport his assistant keeper, who had become seriously ill with a fever, to the mainland for treatment. Maria, with her two small infants, and her nephew, Sidney Haskell, remained on the island. While the weather did not look promising, the trip was a short one, and Alexander Bray felt that he was not taking a chance.

Despite Bray's best hopes the weather deteriorated to the point that he could not make the voyage from the mainland back to the island. On the island, Maria took stock of the situation. She realized what would happen if the Cape Anne lights failed to send out their beams on this stormy night. But how could she attend to the lights, with only her twelve-year-old nephew to assist her? There was not only the task of climbing up and down the two 124-foot towers, and gambling on her ability to light those lights and keep them running, there was also the 900-foot of wind-blown snow drifted distance that separated the two towers to cross. Each round trip would be a quarter mile of heavy weather. Would she have the endurance to do it?

Over the next three nights, the young woman and her nephew walked and climbed each tower, lighting each beacon every evening and making sure that they remained lit. As daybreak of Christmas Eve, 1864 arrived, Alexander Bray noticed a letup in the velocity of the winds, and decided to make a run for the island. It was still snowing, but despite the blinding storm, he made it; only because he had the Cape Anne lights, both of them, to guide him safely to the island.

The Coast Guard christened a Keeper Class buoy tender *Maria Bray* (WLM-562) in her honor.