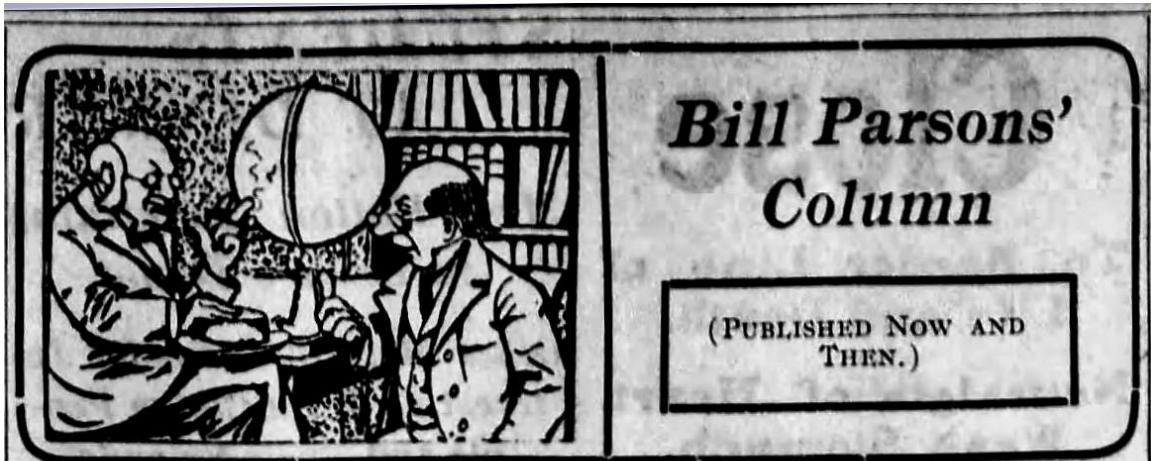


Where to Find Snow in August - The Great Sand Bank at Lewes

The following column by Bill Parsons in the June 6, 1903 issue of *The Evening Journal* (Wilmington, Delaware) discusses the Cape Henlopen lighthouse and its keeper Dagworthy Derrickson Joseph.



WHERE TO FIND SNOW IN AUGUST THE GREAT SAND BANK AT LEWES

"Did you ever go snowballing in August?" asked my friend as we sauntered across the Lewes marshes in the direction of the Cape Henlopen lighthouse.

"No," said I, "but I have seen snow on Pike's Peak in the summer, although I wasn't very near to it."

"But did you ever see snow right here in Delaware in midsummer?" he persisted.

I acknowledged that I had not seen such a phenomenon, and added that I doubted whether anybody else had. "Oh, yes," he persisted, "there is plenty of it now within a few hundred yards of where we are walking, only it is difficult to get at."

We walked on in silence for a time until finally I asked him whether they kept it in an icehouse or only in memory. Then he told me, and that is a part of what I am going to set down, only I must go back and explain, or as an artist would say, prepare the foreground of my picture.

had their camps on the banks of the stream, and took much of their food from it. Among these piles of shells many relics of the primitive race have been found, and I was delighted to discover some fragments of pottery that was apparently of the same workmanship of specimens I had found on Blennerhassett Island in the Ohio.

Walking along on the great bank my friend finally told me about the phenomenon of snow in August. He said that in winter the snow drifts just as the sand does. When it falls the winds sweep it across the bank until it drops into the woods beyond, and the sand drifting along covers it up many feet deep, and there it lies without the possibility of evaporation.

I must admit that I was skeptical, not because I did not believe my friend, but because it is difficult for one to credit what he has not seen. Consequently during the next day I casually asked at least a half dozen persons if they had

The Cape Henlopen lighthouse stands about three miles and a half, almost due east, from the town of Lewes. About a half mile from the town in walking towards the cape one encounters a great bank of sand, and this extends to the lighthouse and drops over into the ocean. Its dimensions roughly estimated, are three miles in length, a half mile wide and from thirty to sixty feet in depth. Some clear day when standing on the beach at Cape May looking across to the opposite shore you will see this immense pile rising apparently out of the ocean, and you will be told that that is Delaware. Well this bank of sand is a curious phenomenon, and is one of the world's curiosities.

One astonishing thing about it is that it is constantly moving, and the rate of travel has been pretty accurately calculated at thirty feet a year. Captain D. D. Joseph, the keeper of the light, will point out the spot where the seaward bank rested thirty years ago, and it has now passed three hundred yards to the south. This statement will be corroborated by any old citizen of Lewes. So the sand pile, like the sun, "do move."

But the best evidence of that fact is not from the lips of men, but from the silent testimony of nature. The great bank of sand has passed through a forest, and in many places the topmost branches of the trees are yet sticking out as though mutely holding up their hands to proclaim their entombment. As it passes along, the skeletons of its victims are uncovered, after having been buried in the sand perhaps for a century or two.

ever seen snow in August, and they all informed that they had dug it out of the sand bank many a time when the thermometer registered nearly a hundred degrees! So I believe it, since there is nothing else to do.

Three miles we trudged along the bank, and then we came to a bluff that dipped suddenly down and met the waters of the ocean. Before us was the sea restless and stretching away on either side and behind us was an ocean of sand; it, too, breaking into billows, its waves moving by centuries instead of seconds. And what a wild place it seems—sand on one side and water on the other. Not a blade of grass, not a shrub. The sand has whiffled about the house and piled itself in the porch. "Why don't you clear it out?" we ask. "It would be back in a half hour," was the answer. We noticed sand in the rain pipes, and were told that it blew on the roof, and that a rain washed it down.

"How long has this house been built?" we asked Captain Joseph.

"Well," said he, "this house was built some time in the seventies, but I don't know when the old house was built. It was of stone, and lies just back there entirely covered up by the sand." Some day the bank will pass clear of that old house, and then maybe somebody will think he has discovered a prehistoric ruin.

The keeper invites us inside, and in looking around we find in a dingy frame a document in this out-of-the-way place what the keeper doubtless regards as priceless. It is a piece of parchment

This immense heap of sand has been blown up from the ocean, and the grains are selected as to size as thoroughly as though the whole had been run through a fine seive. There is not a pebble, not a grain as large as a pea, but the purest finest bed of sand in the world. Walk along the ridge on its hard surface and you will not see a spear of grass, not a speck of moss, nothing but sand, as pure as though it had been manufactured yesterday. It has been washed by the ocean for ages, and then caught up by the winds and piled in a heap. To soil it by tobacco juice seems a desecration.

To the south it drops over into a forest of pines and scrub oaks. There the trees stand awaiting their doom. The pines along the edges are covered for a few feet; next year they will be half engulfed, and then they will be blotted out forever.

But, according to maps left by the early Dutch settlers, the sand bank has done more than to engulf the forest; it has filled up the chief branch of the Lewes creek. These maps show that the stream curved in towards the ocean, and about where the sand bank now lies there was then a sort of lagoon, and the old voyagers say that it was a famous place for oysters. But there is even better evidence than that left by the old chroniclers. To the north of the bank, the sands passing on, have left immense piles of shells that were thrown out by the Indians who

on which we read that Dagworthy D. Joseph was made major by brevet for gallant action at the battle of Five Forks, Virginia. It is signed by Andrew Johnson, and Edwin M. Stanton, and then we know that a brave and tried man is keeping the light.

The tower is of stone and brick, the walls six feet thick, but no man knows the builder or when its first stone was laid. The first mention of it reveals that it was standing there ten years prior to the Revolution, but how much longer there is no record to indicate. The iron superstructure was erected some years before the civil war, and George G. Meade, then a government engineer, but afterwards the hero of Gettysburg, superintended its construction.

In a room about the size of a large centre table sits the keeper through his watch, winter and summer, hearing the ocean eternally pounding on its sands, sending the great shaft of light twenty-five miles out to sea. Perhaps he loves its music, and perhaps it conveys a message which his ears are quick to understand. But Lewes is far away; night will soon be upon us, and we say good-bye to the brave, warm-hearted old keeper, take a last look at the ocean and retrace our steps over the sandbank, thinking not of the leaves that once rustled in the forest that now lies buried beneath.

Bill Parsons.