

## Ida Lewis

by Ocean Lombard, Westerly

Heroism isn't reserved for the rich and famous. Ordinary women own the power to be heroes, using their strengths to uplift others, stepping up when it's not easy, and never giving up. By doing so, they can inspire others and make a meaningful impact on the world. There is no better example than Ida Lewis, a local Newport lighthouse keeper who inspires me daily.

As my parents named me "Ocean," inspired by the beautiful waters of Newport they lived on together, I wanted to highlight Ida's work as she influenced my name, making me the person I am today. Ida Lewis is regarded for her remarkable deeds as a lighthouse keeper, saving lives in the waters of Narragansett Bay.

Her determination in the face of danger and adversity inspired many women to pursue their passions and make a difference in their communities far and wide. The treacherous seas and a difficult family life shaped Ida into a relentless woman starting at a young age. Each day regardless of weather conditions, Ida rowed her three siblings to school about one-third of a mile to the mainland, then returned later to row them back home.

Ida sacrificed her own education to perform household duties, helping her mother take care of her ailing father, keeping watch of the harbor, and tending the lighthouse lantern.

Following her father's death, Ida's mother became the new lighthouse keeper. Soon after, however, Ida's mother developed an illness preventing her from fulfilling her responsibilities. Ida took charge as she had throughout her life. At just 12 years old, Ida assumed the strenuous role of a lighthouse keeper: aiding boaters on the water and preventing shipwrecks.

Ida's courage shone through immediately with a daring rescue of four men from a capsized ship. She is reported to have saved between 18 to 36 lives as a keeper—performing her last rescue at age 63. Her accomplishments gained national recognition even when most women in America were not in the workforce.

Her ability to become the official keeper of Lime Rock Lighthouse, a position she held until her death, overcame biases of the time through her skill. She could row a boat faster than any man in Newport, was known to be the fastest swimmer and became the most highly-regarded lighthouse keeper in the nation.

Lewis' individuality corrected many misconceptions about women. Her harrowing and heroic tenure as a lighthouse keeper, a job traditionally reserved for men, is a beacon to all women that they can accomplish anything, regardless of societal norms. She paved the way for women to pursue careers in fields that were made for men, proving gender should put no limitation on women's capabilities.

Her famous quote, "None— but a donkey would consider it 'un-feminine' to save lives," perfectly describes women's equality. Despite facing challenges, she remained dedicated to her work and was known for her selflessness. Ida Lewis demonstrated that ordinary women are strong and can rise to greatness through their noble actions in everyday life.