

Scattered in a line seven miles long, the Farallon Islands lie 26 miles off San Francisco's Golden Gate.

They comprise 120 acres of granite sculptured by wind and waves into inlets, ridges, stacks and cliffs that descend precipitously to the sea. To early Spanish explorers and the sailors of the Manila Galleons these islands were known as *Los Farallones de los Frayles*. To Sir Francis Drake, who ventured ashore in the summer of 1579, they were the islands of St. James. Today's charts and maps mark them the Farallones.

Local fishermen and the seamen who crew the great ships bound for San Francisco find these barren, jumbled crags forbidding. One mariner, contemplating the menace of the islands, saw them as "rotten teeth" thrust up from the ocean's floor. A U.S. Navy chaplain observed

that "God has done less for it and with it than any other place." But an artist or a naturalist sees the Farallones with an entirely different eye. There is a wild beauty in the jagged peaks and great sea arches. There is beauty in the turbulent sea as swells race against the island, curling spindrift on approach and disappear in white fans against the rocky face. There is also beauty in the wildlife that abounds on the shore and teems on the steep cliffs; for the Farallones serve as the breeding and resting place for thousands of seals and sea lions and tens of thousands of birds. In the spring the islands host the largest seabird breeding colony in the contiguous United States when auklets, petrels, gulls, murrets and cormorants nest on the island's rock faces, slopes and flats. It was the wildlife that came to define the island history.

The Farallones

by Peter White

"During storms the islands shake and one can hear a...moaning against the breaking waves...persons who stay there have difficulty sustaining themselves."

K.T. Khlebnikov,
Russian Commander at Fort
Ross comments on life on
the Farallones.

In 1812, Alexander Baranov, leader of the Russian colony in Alaska extended the reach of the Czar to California with the founding of Fort Ross, a settlement 70 miles north of a small Spanish hamlet that would become known as San Francisco. Shortly after the founding of Fort Ross the Russians established an outpost on the largest of the Farallon Islands. The purpose of this station was to furnish the California and Alaska Russian communities with foodstuffs and other products derived from the island's wildlife. Each year, during this period, more than 5,000 pounds of salted sea lion meat were prepared and sent to the mainland for consumption. Blubber as taken for oil and marine mammal hides and intestines were used in the manufacture of boats and garments. It was on the Farallones that the vast Russian Empire reached the limit of its expansion.

By 1850 the Russian flag had been lowered in California. There was a new influx of adventures due to the discovery of gold. Thousands of '49'ers sailed to California from eastern cities and from the ports of other nations seeking their fortunes. The rapidly expanding population quickly depleted the meager agricultural industry of the region. Many commodities, among them chicken eggs, were not generally available and became highly prized.



common murre

The author, Peter White, works for the IRS and is a USLHS Board member. He has spent thousands of volunteer hours assisting the naturalists on Southeast Farallon Island and is an expert on the history of the islands.

Among the species of seabird nesting on the Farallones at this time was a colony of common murre whose numbers exceeded 400,000. The murre is a stocky, sharp billed diving bird nearly 17 inches in length. It's dark brown with a gleaming white breast and belly. Of importance to the entrepreneurs of that day was the fact that this bird produces an egg twice the size of a chicken egg and, according to many, just as palatable. In the 1870's a consumer of these eggs commented, "They are rich, delicate and altogether desirable, dropped, fried, boiled or cooked in any of the hundred ways known to Frenchmen."



Mystical Southeast Farallon Island circa 1859
Official U.S. Coast Guard photo.

Enterprising individuals and groups set sail for the Farallones to gather eggs for sale in the markets of San Francisco. In 1851 three egg hunters formed the Pacific Egg Company (later known as the Farallones Egg Company). Each year at the beginning of the nesting season the company would transport ten to fifteen "egg pickers" to the islands. This crew was under contract for the season and were paid on the basis of the number of eggs gathered from the breeding cliffs. Egg picking was dangerous business; in addition to numerous injuries at least two men fell to their deaths. But the dangers were not only from the narrow ledges and slippery rocks. The value of the eggs caused, at times, heated competition among rival groups. The 'company' claimed exclusive rights to gather the eggs and had, on several occasions, moved to legitimize the claim; but in the rough and tumble of early San Francisco, its assertions were ignored by those who coveted the profits to be made by "egg picking." As a result the company was forced to protect itself from invaders who attempted to dispossess it with the force of arms. The conflict for the rights to the eggs was to outlive the egg company and become the dominant factor in Farallon life until the turn of the century.

In early 1853 the ship *Oriole* dropped anchor in Tower Bay (now known as Fishermen's Bay), a small cove on the north side of the Southeast Farallon Island, the largest of the group. On board was a crew of the Baltimore construction firm of Gibbons & Kelley. This company had won the bid to construct the first eight lighthouses along the Pacific Coast. The construction crew was confronted by the egg company foreman who informed the newcomers that they were trespassers and ordered them away. But the workmen were not intimidated and the company did not want a confrontation with the United States government; so a sullen truce was observed as each party went about its business.

The construction contract called for all eight of the west coast lighthouses to have a story and a half keepers' quarters with a round tower thrust through the



Running the Rookeries—gathering murre eggs

center. But it soon became apparent that this design was not suitable for the Farallones (in fact the design for the Point Bonita lighthouse also had to be modified). In a letter to government officials, Gibbons & Kelley wrote:

"The only spot where a light can be placed...is...on the summit of a precipitous mass of rock...rising in the form of a pyramid...with a narrow ridge. The summit is so narrow that it is impossible to obtain a base for a dwelling house...though this spot is the only one on the island where a light can be put with advantage, it would be great folly to erect a dwelling house...[even] if it were possible to do so."

As a result the planned design was modified with the tower erected on the summit and the keepers' house at the base of the hill. Once the revised plans were authorized, work began under the guidance of Major Hartman Bache of the U.S. Topographical Engineers [Ed.—Major Bache surveyed the west coast and selected the sites for the first lighthouses on the Pacific]. Bache was a distinguished

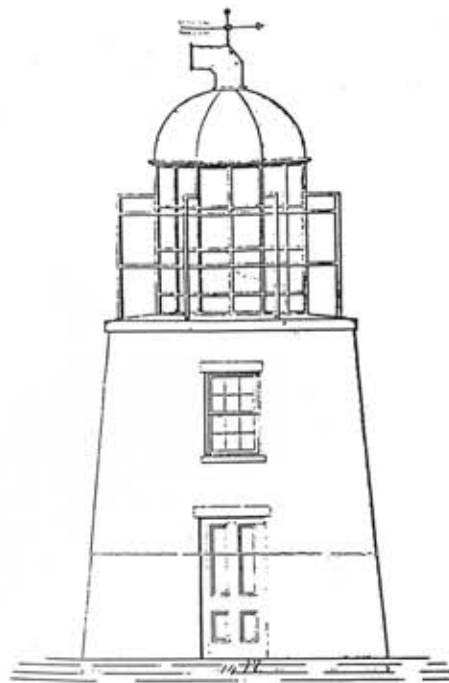
veteran of the Mexican War and a man experienced in the construction of lighthouses. In fact he, and two of his relatives, played an important role in the development of lighthouses in this country. In assuming responsibility for the Farallon Lighthouse he was embarking on one of the most difficult tasks of his career. The site's isolation and its sharp relief posed difficulties that he had not previously experienced. To begin with, there was no suitable anchorage at the island and only two landing sites, each barely adequate even in calm weather. The construction of a dock was out of the question and landings were affected by scrambling from a small boat up rocky inclines. Equipment had to be laboriously taken on the island by hoist, snatching cargoes from a small boat as water wasn't sufficient to bring a large vessel close aboard. Even today a derrick plucks freight and visitors from a boat which must be carefully positioned just below the top of the boom.

Once on the island, materials were carried to the site selected for the tower which was located on the highest peak some 348 feet above the water. In a letter to the Lighthouse Board Bache described the difficulties encountered.

"The angle of the hill...for two thirds of this elevation [is] never less than 45 degrees, rises in places to 55 degrees and even 65 degrees. Few [workers], if any...can make it by use of feet alone—the hands must be brought into requisition, and even then a false step might precipitate the climber...to a depth of...200 feet...The bricks [must be] transported on men's backs by fours and fives...the operation is second only to impossible."

Finally, in November 1853, work on the tower and the keepers' quarters was completed. All that remained were the delivery and installation of the 1st Order Fresnel lens which had been ordered from a French manufacturer. For the next year the tower and quarters were deserted and dark. In December of 1854 the French clipper ship *St. Joseph*, out of Marseilles, docked in San Francisco with the long awaited lens. Bache quickly arranged transportation to the Farallones and within days 73 ponderous crates of metal and glass were wrestled ashore. It seemed that the long, arduous task was nearing completion. But Hartman Bache had a big and quite disappointing, surprise in store. As the parts of the lens were being uncrated and the plans studied it became all too apparent that the lens was too large for the lantern room. The original contract, written before the new Lighthouse Board assumed power, called for the installation of reflector systems in the West Coast Lighthouses. When the new lighthouse board displaced Stephen Pleasonton in 1852, it issued a 'change order' substituting Fresnel lenses for all reflector systems. However, nobody bothered to check the plans for the new structures to determine compatibility.

It soon became apparent that the tower could not be modified to accept the new lens. The only course of action was to tear down the new tower and construct a larger one. A frustrated Hartman



Design of the first tower which had to be torn down and rebuilt to accommodate the 1st Order Fresnel lens.

Bache set out to do just that, but this time he was determined to do the job right. He proposed the construction of a road from the landing site to the base of the hill and the purchase of a mule to have tools and construction material.

When his superiors in Washington hesitated because of the additional cost and the delay that this would entail, Bache shot back that unless the road was constructed, "I do not hesitate to express the opinion that the light will never be exhibited." As to the costs he observed, "the dispersing officer may regret, but may not change the state of things." The remoteness of the station also preyed much on his mind and he argued for a substantial boat for the keepers. Bache wrote:

"Would it be prudent to light up without the means of communications with the mainland?...I know of no parallel case to the Farallones on the Atlantic seaboard...there is no communication between the...islands and the city except during traffic of the eggs...In which way will the keepers communicate with the main?"

Bache went on to inform his superiors, "I find it impossible to administer the light house establishment on this coast without assuming responsibilities unauthorized by the Board." In the end, Bache got his road, his mule and his boat. The Farallon lighthouse was ready for business in December of 1855.



This 1 & 1/2 story stone house, containing only four rooms, was home to the keeper and his two assistants. All 16 of the lighthouses constructed on the west coast in the 1850's were of this design—13 had the tower incorporated into the house. This building was razed in 1969.

"...I have never seen an inhabited spot which seemed so utterly desolate, so entirely separated from the world, whose people appear...to have such a slender hold on mankind!"

Charles Nordhoff reflects on his 1874 visit to the Farallones.

It was now the responsibility of the San Francisco Collector of Customs, the government official in charge of much of local federal administrative affairs, to hire a keeper and two assistants for the station. But this was not an easy task. In the mid 1850's the California gold rush was at full swing. The wealth of the diggings spilled into San Francisco and prices soared to astonishing levels. The head lighthouse keeper's salary, as fixed by Congress, was \$500 a year (assistants received less). This may have been appropriate in other sections of the country, in the new state of California it was hardly sufficient. The problem was described by the Collector of Customs to the Lighthouse Board in Washington:

"The salaries assigned to the...keepers are far too low. [This] may be imagined when it is considered that domestic servants in this city receive from \$50 to \$100 per month and upward besides their board and lodging. I have no hesitation in saying that unless the compensation of the keepers and assistants is increased, it would be impossible to keep the lighthouse illuminated...These islands are the resort of innumerable water fowl where they deposit their eggs. In this market these eggs bring \$1.50 per dozen and are...brought in by the thousands of dozens at once. The eggs are gathered and brought to market by a company of individuals who have located themselves on the island and some of whom reside there continually...being weeks without communication with the mainland. It is in the interest of the company not to have others, strangers to them and their business, located on the island, and I can therefore secure keepers from their number at the salaries fixed."

This solution played into the hands of the egg company and seems to have been born of desperation since contemporary writings portray the egg pickers in an unsavory light "...these are men with whom one might easily get into trouble."

The idea of egg pickers as lighthouse keepers was eventually rejected in favor of persuading Congress to increase the Farallon salaries sufficiently to entice qualified men to the islands. Once this was accomplished, keepers were recruited. However, during the earliest days of the station the keepers were more interested in the profit the egg picking would bring than in tending the light. Mr. Wines, keeper in 1857 was "...a stockholder in the [egg] company and as long as he received his dividend that was all he cared for." Amos Cliff, Wines' successor, wrote home to his brother in Mystic, Connecticut:

"The egg season is the month of May and June and the profit is...quite an item...I have the right to these eggs and I am vowed to try and gain it...if I could have the privilege of this egg business for one season, it is all I would ask [and] the government might then kiss my foot..."

Cliff's clash with the egg company was ended when the Lighthouse Board removed him from the islands for "...the undue...assumption to monopolize and farm out the valuable privilege of collecting eggs." The eggs came to be a curse on the islands; the Amos Cliff dismissal was the opening of a protracted and tangled conflict that would appear and



An egg picker with his egg shirt bulging with murre eggs. Right—An armed egg picker.

reappear in fits and starts until the turn of the century. The struggle for the eggs was to set the lighthouse keepers against the egg company, the egg company against invading rivals, the keepers against each other and, at one time or another, the government against all of them.



The egg pickers, or "men with whom one might easily get into trouble," washing murre eggs prior to shipping them to San Francisco. Peter White photo.



"Accompanying this letter is the body of Edward Perkins who was shot...by a party of men...who attempted, by force of arms, to effect a landing on the island."

Thomas Tasker, keeper of the Farallones explains an Egg War Death.

The chronicle of this conflict, known locally as the Egg Wars, comes to us today in scattered and fragmented accounts in government documents, ships'



logs and news reports from that era. In 1859 the *Alta California* reported that rivals to the egg company had seized a portion of the islands, had been destroying government property and "have...warned the keepers [not to interfere] on pain of death." Strong words indeed!—but it does serve to illustrate the large sums of money realized from this lucrative business. The next year, opponents to the egg company again

forcibly landed and the *Alta* reported that the opposing groups were "armed to the teeth and breathing defiance at each other." Government officials sent to protect the keepers and restore order were forced to return to San Francisco for reinforcements. Nor was the conflict confirmed to the islands, as boats carrying eggs to the mainland were hijacked.

In March of 1863, Captain Charles Scammon, of the U.S. Revenue Cutter Service, received a dispatch from the lighthouse authorities informing him that "...a party of armed men have assumed to take possession [of the Farallones]...they have build a house...surrounding same by a stone wall and [they intend] to defend by force of arms." Scammon's orders were to evict the trespassers. With the help of a platoon of men the order was carried out without violence. This incident, however, set the stage for the most serious confrontation between the egg company and its rivals.

The trespassers were not as easily dissuaded as Scammon had hoped. Once on the mainland the group led by D.J. Batchelder, plotted a return to the islands. On June 3 three boats with 25 men armed with an assortment of shotguns, pistols and a four pound cannon, slipped out of San Francisco Bay bound for the Farallones. That after-



Egg gatherers, or possibly keepers, scaling the 45+ degree slope of the Southeast Farallon Island. It was up a slope like this that the workmen who constructed the lighthouse tower scrambled with five or six bricks strapped to their backs.

noon the little armada came to anchor in Fishermen's Bay where the egg company men waited along the shore. Isaac Harrington, the company foreman, warned off the would be invaders, to which Batchelder replied that he would come ashore "in spite of hell."

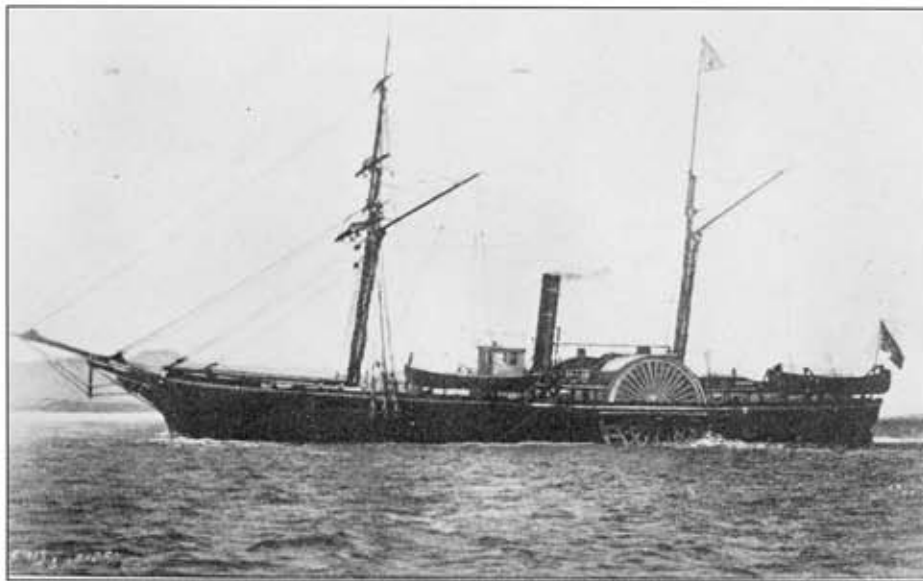
At dawn the next day the Batchelder group made their move. In the initial volley of fire Edward Perkins, a company employee, was shot dead. However, the men in the boats were the easier target and after a twenty minute battle Batchelder and his men were forced to withdraw. Five of his group were bleeding from wounds; one shot through the throat was to die within a few days.

The decisive nature of the encounter and the fact that Batchelder (and certain others) were arrested on charges of murder secured, at least for a while, the company's position. But soon the company clashed with the government, which had never officially recognized its claim and had, until now, barely tolerated its presence.

The patience of the lighthouse authorities was severely tested when the company began taking sea lions for oil. Ten or more animals were killed each day. The lighthouse keepers complained of the stench of rotting carcasses and reported that the smoke from the try works obscured the light. The final arrogance occurred when a group of egg pickers attacked a light keeper whom they accused of gathering eggs for his domestic use. This high handed behavior was too much for the authorities. In May 1881 a U.S. Marshal and 21 soldiers landed at Tower Bay and evicted all non-government personnel from the island.

This was the last of the egg company. The way was now clear for the keepers, with the help of local fishermen, to engage in the egg business themselves. Egging was, by this time, illegal and the keepers' activity soon became an open secret, generally winked at by the authorities. In 1890, the San Francisco Chronicle noted:

"Just as soon as...May approaches, there is a stir among the small schooners



Above—the side wheel steamer *Shubrick*, first Lighthouse tender on the West Coast. This unique vessel was constructed in 1857 and served as supply ship, buoy tender and Revenue Cutter for 29 years. The 140 foot long ship was named for the first Chairman of the Lighthouse Board, Commodore W. B. Shubrick, USN.

Below—Egg gatherers in Tower, or Fisherman's, Bay. This bay was the site of the principal Egg War battle. Peter White photos.



and sailing craft in San Francisco, and silently, like a thief in the night, each skipper works his way out between the heads to the far Farallones. The crew mostly composed of Italians and Greeks with a liberal sprinkling of waterfront castaways, effect a quiet unperceived landing on South Farallon."

Even though the market for seabird eggs had diminished drastically, the money derived from this trade was

significant supplement to the keepers' salaries. The Lighthouse journal for May 1, 1888 reported, "We are working 8 to 10 hours a day so as to make time to gather eggs in season." The next year a conscientious keeper wrote on July 11, "...stopped the [assistant] keepers from egging on government time." The price of murre eggs continued to decline and after 1905 no reference to the business on the Farallones can be found.



A lighthouse keeper's life is often a lonely existence and there were few stations in the Service where this was more true than on the Farallones. In a letter home Amos Clift complained:

"I'm getting awful tired of this loneliness, it is almost as bad as the state prison...I'd rather live among society and be poorer than Job's turkey, than live where I am and have a fortune. This is the truth."

World traveler and writer Charles Nordhoff reflecting on a visit to the islands wrote:

"I have never seen an inhabited spot which seemed so utterly desolate, so entirely separated from the world, whose people appear...to have such slender hold on mankind...they live in what would seem to a landsman a perpetual storm; the ocean roars in their ears day and night; the boom of the surf is their constant and only music...their supply vessel...is sometimes unable to make a landing for weeks at a time...the commerce of San Francisco passes before their eyes, but so far away...the ships sail by them voiceless and without greeting; and of the events passing on the planet which they have so frail a social tie they learn only at long and irregular intervals..."

Until 1878 the principal keeper and his two assistants lived in a sturdy, one and one half story, four room house constructed of rock quarried on the island. Since Farallon spring water is neither sufficient in quantity nor suitable for consumption, the roof of the house was designed so that rain water would run off into a cistern buried at the rear of the house. A supply vessel visited every three months, but the keepers often relied on fishing boats and the egg company schooner to communicate with the mainland. The islanders raised much of what they ate by planting gardens (in soil hauled from the mainland) and maintaining a host of domestic animals such as pigs, goats and chickens.

In spite of the lighthouse, mariners continued to come to grief on the Farallon rocks. The reason was the thick and pervasive fogs that frequently abound along the California coast. Bache knew that the hazard could only be blunted by a sound warning device. His opinion was underscored by the wreck of the *Lucas*. The ship, with 170 passengers and crew, struck the Southeast Farallon on the night of November 12, 1858. As the ship began to sink it turned broadside to the island. Of the 23 who died that night most were crushed between the shore and the hull of the *Lucas* as she labored against the

rocks. Inspired by this tragedy Bache installed an ingenious sound device by affixing a train whistle over one of the island's blow holes. Charles Nordhoff describes it:

"One of the numerous eaves worn into the rocks by the surf had a hole at the top through which incoming breakers violently expelled the air they carried before them...This hole has been utilized by the ingenuity of man. The mouthpiece of the trumpet or fog whistle is fixed against the aperture in the rocks, and the breakers, dashing in with a venomous spite, or the huge bulging waves which would dash a ship to pieces and drown her crew in a single effort, now blows the fog whistle and warns the mariner off."

This contraption did have its drawbacks. On a clear but windy day,

"The cries and groans of the sufferers were most pitious."

The *San Francisco Bulletin*, describes the death of the crew and passengers of the ship *Lucas*.

when not needed, the whistle would blare incessantly. When it was calm and foggy and the danger greatest, it would make no sound at all, and it never worked during the two hours of lowest tide. Finally the device was destroyed one night during a wild storm.



The Liberty Ship *Henry Bergh* breaking up on the north side of West End (Southeast Farallon Island). Returning from the Pacific theater she struck the island and broke in half on May 31, 1944.

The destruction of the wave actuated fog signal was to herald a new chapter in the story of the Farallon light station. It resulted in the decision to build a modern, steam operated fog siren, powerful enough to do justice to what many believed to be the most important light station on the Pacific coast. Along with the new signal would come a narrow gauge (and mule powered) railway to move the coal from the landing to the signal house. Two large cisterns and an adjoining rain catchment basin were constructed behind the fog signal. But the most important improvement to the habitability of the island was the construction of two Victorian duplexes. Up to this time space had been so limited that only the principle keeper's family was authorized on the island. After the addition of the Victorians all the assistant keepers could have their families accompany them. By 1897 the Farallon community had ten children; enough to justify the establishment of a school with sessions conducted in the original keeper's house and presided over by a teacher appointed by the authorities in San Francisco.



The addition of a steam powered fog signal in 1880 required more keepers and thus, the construction of these Victorian duplexes. The house on the left, presently used by U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service personnel, was constructed in 1878. The house on the right, now used by Coast Guard servicing personnel, was built in 1880. The original keepers' house can be seen at far left. Each family also had a small house (far right) which was used as a laundry and for storage. U.S. Coast Guard photo.

In spite of the changes one aspect of life on the islands was not affected; the little community remained as solitary as ever. The isolation brought with it a self sufficiency not frequently found among people on the mainland. But there were times when self-sufficiency was difficult and this was most evident during times of medical emergencies. Epidemics would occasionally sweep the island, usually typhoid and diphtheria. The worst of these outbreaks occurred in 1901 when some of the children became desperately ill. For several days the island residents sounded the fog signal during clear weather and lit bonfires at night in an attempt to obtain help. Finally help did arrive, but too late to save two of the sons of Keeper Cyrus Cain. The Cains had experienced family death on the island eleven years earlier when another of their children fell from the landing and drowned.

The Cains were not the only family to experience tragedy. Royal Beeman, son of Assistant William Beeman, became seriously ill on Christmas eve 1898. Two days later the child's desperate parents loaded Royal into a small boat and set out for San Francisco. The Keeper's Log for that day noted the weather with one ominous word: "windy."



An overview of 'Farallon City' as seen from the hill. Water tanks are at the right foreground. The large white area at left is the rain catchment basin which directed water to the two cisterns located just in front of the fog signal building. The peaked roof building to the right of the fog signal structure was constructed circa 1910. It was used as storage and later as a fog signal building. U.S. Coast Guard photo.



It's a long switch back hike from the keeper's house to the tower. The telephone type poles carried wires that linked the tower, fog signal building and all quarters with "call bells." USLHS photo.

After braving heavy seas for several harrowing hours the family was taken aboard the Pilot boat stationed at the entrance to the San Francisco Bar Channel. The Pilot boat rushed for San Francisco, but for Royal Beeman it was late as he died shortly after reaching the city.

The same year that Royal Beeman died was also the year of the first birth, on April 8, a girl named Farallone Cain was born. It would be another 29 years, February 17, 1927, before another child, Delpha Atkinson, was born on the Farallones.

It is common to read stories of light keepers' dedication, courage and sacrifice and at times the keepers on the Farallones exhibited these virtues in full measure. In March 1871 Assistant Keeper Frank Roper lost his life while attempting to rescue a shipwrecked sailor. In another remarkable display of courage the keepers fought gale force winds to row to the North Farallon Island (some seven miles) to rescue the crew of the ship *Morning Light*, hard aground and breaking up. Notwithstanding these events, there was often a dark side to Farallon life reflected in some of the logs and



Third Assistant Keeper Kaneen and his family on the Farallones in 1904. Photo from the Peter White collection.

hinted at in official correspondence. Conflict between the keepers often marred the harmony of island life. There were accusations of theft, inattention to duty and drunkenness, made not only by the authorities of the lighthouse establishment but by the keepers pointing fingers at each other. When the British bark *Bremen* went ashore on a foggy night in 1882 it struck rocks less than 200 yards from the fog signal. A signal that had not been activated, some said due to the negligence of the keepers.

An assistant keeper, Charles Bjorling, was dismissed when it was suspected that at his previous station, Tillamook Rock, he had attempted to murder the head keeper by putting ground glass in his food. At one time the entire Farallon crew was dismissed when it was discovered that they were stealing oil intended for the light and selling it for their own profit. One can imagine what life may sometime have been like, on an isolated island, when one had reason to believe that one or more of his fellow keepers was a thief or could not be trusted to properly discharge his duties.

In 1939 another change came to the islands. It was in that year that the Coast

Guard assumed charge of our nation's lighthouses and the character of the Farallon community was changed to that of a military installation. Other changes followed rapidly. In the late 1960's families were removed from the station as an economy measure. After this crews would alternate between the mainland and the island. Finally in 1972 the station was automated and the last keeper, Brent Franze, left the island.



ARCH, WEST END, SOUTHEAST FARALLON



Paddy, the second Farallon mule, giving a couple of the keeper's kids a ride. The T shaped structure in the background carried signal bell wires between various buildings on the island. Peter White photo.

Jerry, the mule purchased by Hartman Bache, continued to live on the island even after construction was finished. Jerry hauled supplies from the landing and oil to the lighthouse until he died on Christmas night 1874. At the time of his death he had the distinction of being on the island longer than any other resident. Jerry's replacement was Paddy, a mule also destined to live a long and productive life. To the annoyance of the keepers Paddy learned that "boat day" meant work day. On boat day Paddy was required to haul supplies, so when the tender's whistle was heard, Paddy would run off and hide among the rocks until she was brought back to do her duty.

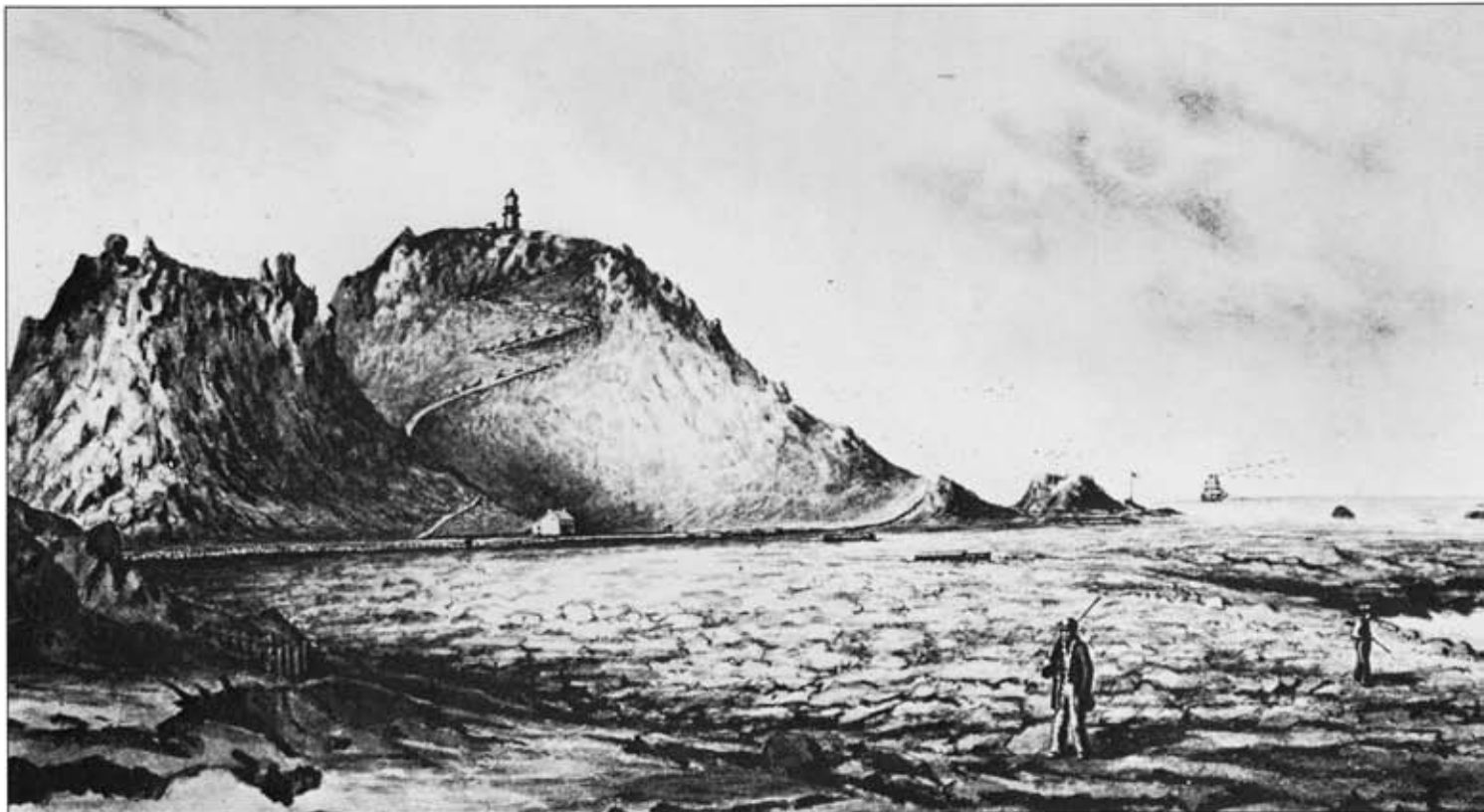
Right—Cargo being lifted aboard the east landing of Southeast Farallon Island. The tender Lupine is hove to in the distance and both of the ship's boats are in view. The tender called once a month, weather permitting, to deliver food, mail, coal and other supplies. USLHS photo.

When the Steamer Came to the Farallones

by Milton Ray

It always was a month at least,
Till the steamer arrived from the shore, east,
And then the busiest days began
Of the uneventful, island year.
When, gladly acclaimed, the ship came at last,
With trail of smoke, and deafening blast
That far in the echoing caves would ring,
The sea lions swift to the surf would slide;
And out from many a lofty ledge,
Where sheer cliffs wall the harbor edge,
Would scatter far and wide in fear,
Ten thousand querulous birds a-wing.
And the lone, gray mule in the pasture drear,
Who had been staring out to sea,
Or munching wire grass leisurely,
Now, stiff-legged and stumbling ran,
From bitter tasks to vainly hide
'Neath the lowering roof of some cave mouth, near,—
Poor, old, gray mule, bony and slim,
The steamer brought no joy for him!
The ship's boat, loaded high and deep,
From the anchored craft to the landing plied,
Where a long-armed crane swung o'er the tide.
Then up the rock-rough tower trail,
Zigzag, narrow, long and steep,
Which climbs the dominant Tower Crag,
That laboring mule with its pack of oil,
Forced and slow would slaving toil.
Or an unwilling car he now would drag
On dull, unhappy, creaking wheel,—
Along the track of rusty steel,
That from the landing lazily led
Round beach-coves strewn with storm-tossed wood,
Through the high-walled pass with its whistling gale,
And then, with the gently sloping bed
That down the south slope slowly wound,
Across the isle to open ground.
Here, on the broad and stony turf,
Below the lone, wind-swept Tower Light,
And facing towards the southern surf,
The dwellings of the keepers stood,
Red-roofed and spotless white.





1859 drawing by Hartman Bache. Notice the keepers' house at the base of the hill and the switch back trail to the tower.



Censustaker Edward Gaffney (gentleman in the suit at right who resembles A. Hitler) visits the Farallones in 1940 to count the inhabitants—Coast Guard and Navy personnel. Although the Lighthouse Service was part of the Coast Guard in 1939, the keepers on the island wore USLHS uniforms. The 1950 census picture showed all Coast Guard uniforms. San Francisco Public Library photo.

Today the islands, a Wild Life sanctuary, are under the joint jurisdiction of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and U.S. Coast Guard. The only human residents are the scientists of the Point Reyes Bird Observatory charged with the protection and study of the seals, sea lions and seabirds. Hartman Bache's 1855 tower still stands, or at least the base of it does. The lantern room has been removed and an aero-beacon graces the top and a radiobeacon also assists the mariner. The fog signal building and the original keepers quarters have been razed. The 1878 Victorians still stand, one used by the scientists and the other to house Coast Guard personnel during their periodic servicing calls.

The years of abuse to the wildlife have ended and today the Farallones stand as one of the most important wildlife refuges in the United States. With the passing of each year, the recovery of the wildlife continues and man's contrivances are less and less in evidence.

