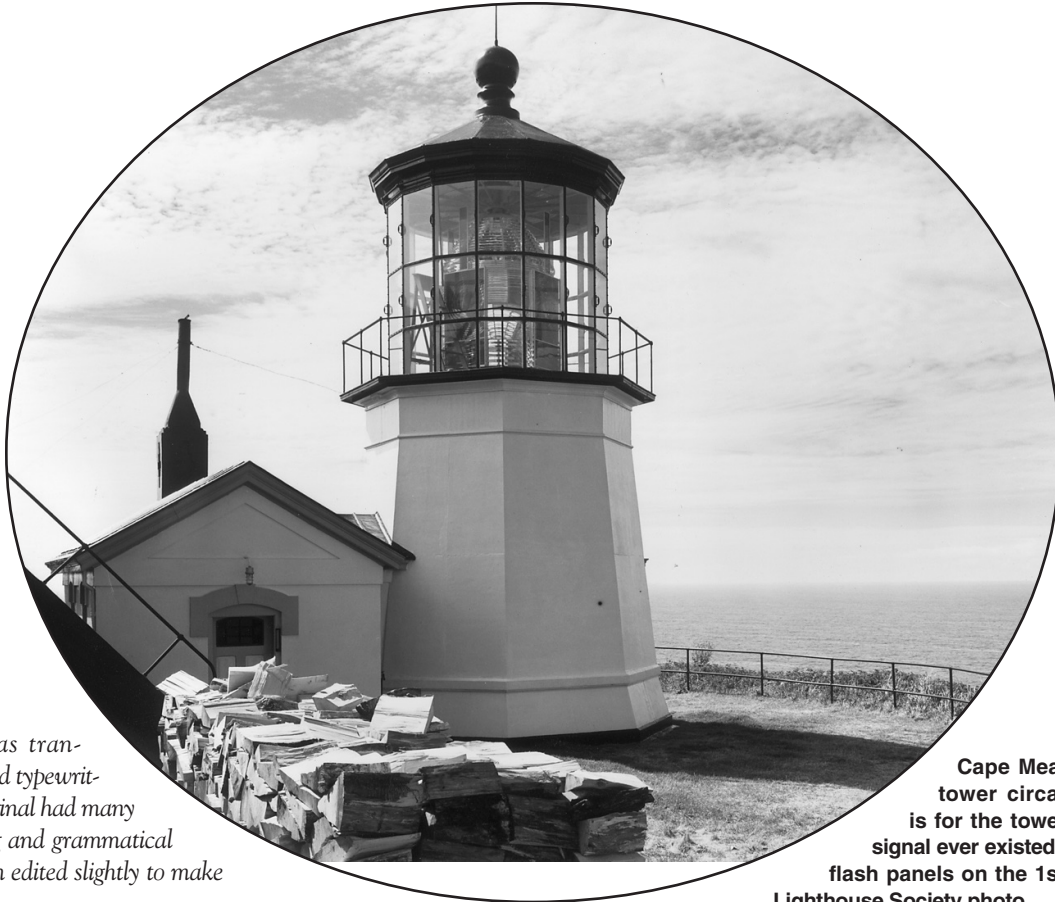


Pages from the Past



This memoir was transcribed from an old typewritten copy. The original had many colloquial spelling and grammatical errors. It has been edited slightly to make it easier to read.

Cape Meares Light Station tower circa 1930. The wood is for the tower stove as no fog signal ever existed here. Note the red flash panels on the 1st order lens. U. S. Lighthouse Society photo.

Transcript of a talk given by Edward Aubry Brooks to a First Baptist Church men's class about 1940, in the Everett, Washington area.

Mr. Chairman, [and] Members of the Bible Class.

Mr. Fred Kent and Mr. McCallister asked, if I could tell this Bible class, about some of my life work as a lighthouse keeper.

Coming here to-night, I feel a good deal like the little boy that went fishing on the end of the pier, and fell in, some kindly person pulled him out and asked the little boy, how did you come to fall in, and the boy said, I didn't come to fall in, I came here to fish. And I came here tonight to see, learn what I can, and have a good time.

My time in the Lighthouse Service was a little more than 40 years. I was retired on

my length of service over three years ago, and receive my retirement pay each month, which was enacted by Congress in 1918, paying three per cent of my wages for this fund.

My first station was at Cape Meares Lighthouse, on the Oregon coast, where I acted as 2nd Assistant Keeper for four years. I was promoted and transferred to Turn Point Lighthouse, and in this capacity I served four years as 1st Assistant Keeper. The next move I was transferred to Point-No-Point Light Station, a more desirable place. I served at Point-No-Point six months and was sent to New Dungeness Lighthouse as Keeper, where I remained for 20 years, and serving my last 12 years at Mukilteo Light Station, retiring from that station. Mukilteo, as you know, is an Indian name that means Happy Camping Grounds, and a very pleasant place it was.

The Lighthouse Service, as well as all other branches of the federal government, progressed very rapidly the last number of years. Old lard oil lampen oil vapor lamps, finally electric, and practically every lighthouse in the US is illuminated by electricity to-day. All island stations, where electric power cannot be obtained, are lighted by General Electric or Kohler plants.

I would like to tell you something about the old kerosene lamps we used in the 1st Order stations on the coast lights. These burners contained five round wicks, from 3" to 15", in circumference. These burners consumed one half-gallon of oil every hour and during the long nights, we used eight gallons of kerosene, or 2,165 gallons for the year, giving a 500-candle power. Then came into service the oil vapor lights, consuming 600 gallons per year, giving 1,200-candle power. The oil vapor lamps proved to be very successful as well as economical. However,

the Superintendent cautioned the keepers many times about handling the frail mantles, and some of these mantles burned 500 hours before breaking. When electricity was installed, the keepers were very happy, as the lamps required so much less work, and were far more dependable.

Now, during the very early days of the Lighthouse Service, the stations were manned mostly by retired sea captains from the old sail-

ring that fog-bell?" and one of the old keepers shouted back, "What are you doing so close in here? Plenty of room outside." These two old men, it was told, were playing cards on a beach log, forgetting all about the fog-bell.

The requirements of a lighthouse keeper now is much different, to be a keeper now, you must be efficient, to have some knowledge of engineering, boating, electricity and wireless. You must be able to keep a set of

books, as each station has its individual cost keeping system. A daily journal is also kept at each station, consisting of the weather, work done, and principal events, which happen. Temperature and barometer readings are recorded each day at 8 AM and 8 PM. I might say on the lightships the water temperature is taken twice each day 10 feet under the surface, showing a temperature of 52 to 54 degrees. This temperature has not changed or varied for years, however, it is claimed now, the temperature is changing as tuna and albacore are caught near the entrance of the Straits. All station records, daily journal, fog signal records, account books, when filled or completed, are sent to the archive for safe-keeping, and are frequently referred to. In one case, two years later a salvage suit was brought by a Seattle towboat company, where weather conditions were most important. The weather conditions for that day from our journal were given, and seldom questioned.

A small percentage of the people at large really know the duties required of a light keeper, which reminds you of the ad in the paper saying, "WANTED – a girl to do light house work," and the word comes back, "Where is your lighthouse situated, and can I have Thursday afternoon off?"

Furthermore to tell you how little the general public really knows about the duties of a lightkeeper, I was selected to take charge of the lighthouse exhibit, in the Government building at the Lewis and Clark Centennial



Above – Point No Point Lighthouse. Photographer unknown.

Below – New Dungeness Light Station with 1910 keeper's dwelling in foreground. Photo taken in 1991 by Sandra Shanklin.

ing ships, and at that time the most required of lightkeepers, it seemed, was to strike a match at sunset, and blow out the light at sunrise. It was told, two of these old sea captains were sent to Ediz Hook Lighthouse, entrance to Port Angeles, requiring the services of both keepers to blow out the light at sunrise, as Mr. Berry's mouth was twisted to port, and Mr. Tucker's mouth was twisted to starboard, requiring a crossfire to blow out the light. It was said the Superintendent had to hire a boy to blow out the light, when one of these old keepers was on shore leave. Capt. Horn also tells a story of the same two men. He was crossing the Straits from Victoria to Port Angeles, on the old Steamer *Evangel*, which at that time made one round trip from Seattle, Victoria, Port Angeles and Port Townsend each week. The weather was calm but very foggy, and the Captain knew he was very close to the lighthouse and thought he heard someone talking, so he shouted, "Why don't you

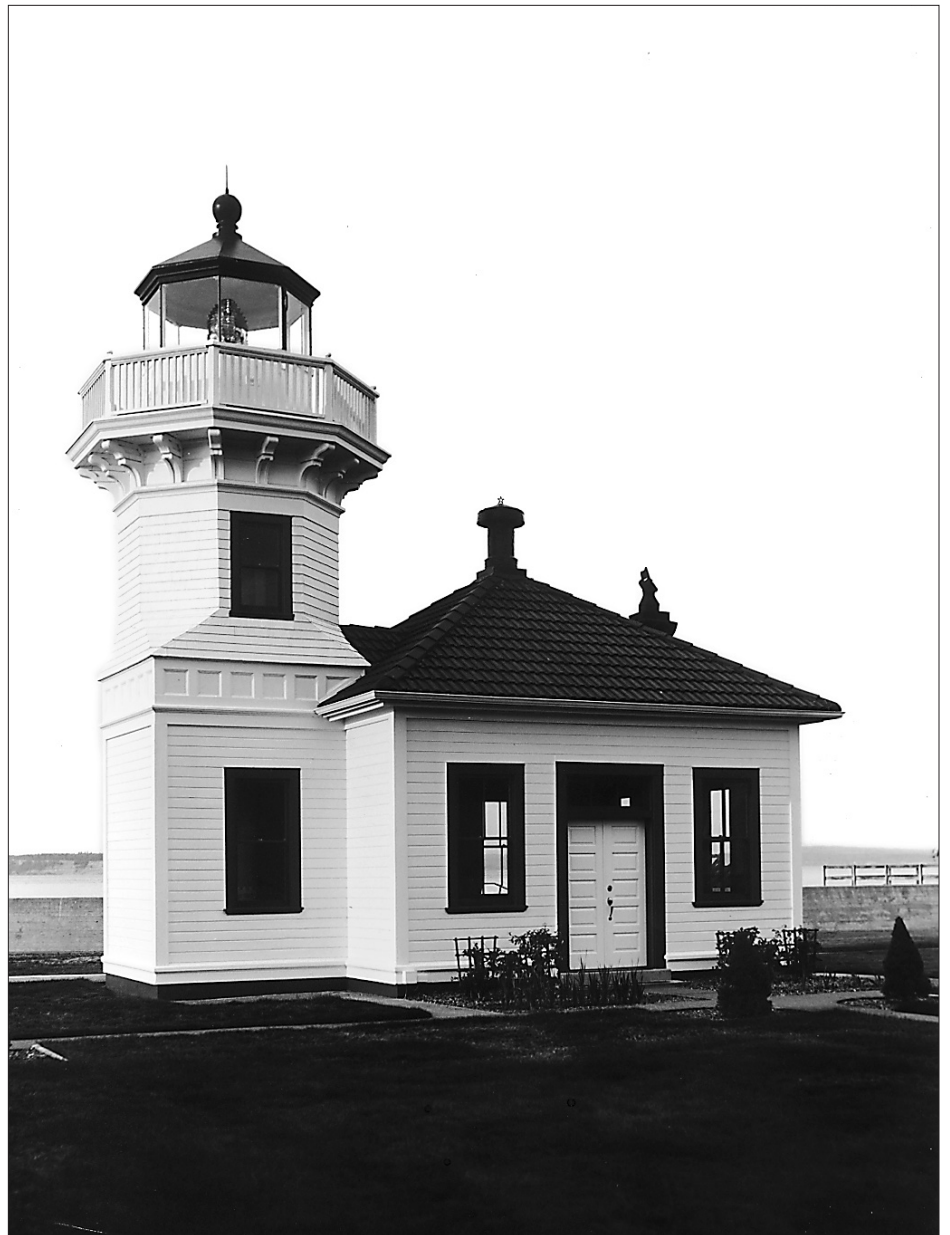


in Portland, Oregon. This was in the year of 1905, and the many foolish questions asked — you would not believe. One of the these foolish questions, asked by a lady, she said, “When you go up into the top of those tall towers, how long do you stay?” “Well,” I told her, “you know, we have to come down for air once in a while.”

A lighthouse keeper has plenty to do. He has his regular watch to stand, and to give his undivided attention to his light at all times, to operate the fog signal during foul or foggy weather, the light and lens must be cleaned and polished each day as well as all brass, and everything must be kept clean at all times. All repairs and parts of machinery must be kept up, and stations having radio beacons must be operated as well. Some keeper is on duty all the time, night or day, and visitors are courteously received during visiting hours, between sunrise and sunset. And positively no one is admitted in the light tower after sunset. All the coast lights or first order lights have three keepers and the inland lights or harbor lights have two men, however, Destruction Island and Cape Flattery have four men each — being island stations. Tillamook Rock has five men. All the light vessels have 14 men. I believe 13 were all the men required, but none of the sailors would stay aboard with the jinx number, and the Superintendent granted another man. All the Oregon and Washington coast stations, which at one time were considered isolated, are not so any more since Highway 101 has been constructed, and some of these stations are picturesque and nicely located, and you will notice in visiting any light station, a certain amount of neatness and upkeep is noticeable, and this work is done by the keepers.

The coast lights have a reflector or lens, weighing three tons or more, and cost 20 to 30 thousand dollars, all these lights revolve and have a visibility of 20 to 30 miles, depending on the heights of the location. Most of the larger lights are the French make.

Now many of you wonder how light keepers pass away their spare time. They go boating, fishing, hunting and horseback riding and various other things. Getting our mail and supplies was a big item at one time, but not so much anymore. The Government furnishes a circulating library to all the stations, and hundred of magazines are sent to the most isolated stations each year, collected in the



Mukilteo Lighthouse circa 1930. U. S. Lighthouse Society photo.

larger cities. One assistant with me read Blackstone and was admitted to the practice of law, another assistant. wrote several books, one entitled *Dead Mans Shoes*. I always felt this book was written for me, for every time we painted the 100-foot tower each year, he always said, "You are going to kill some men here." Of course where stations have fog signals, the keepers have much more to do. The fog machinery must be kept up, and during the foggy season you frequently have a run from 100 to 200 hours of fog. At the New Dungeness Light Station our average consumption was 5,000 gallons of kerosene a year using three gallons per hour in the 25-horsepower engines. These large engines run a compressor, furnishing air to operate a 6-inch siren or diaphone. Before oil engines, steam plants were used instead, but as shipping increased, steam plants became obsolete requiring to long to raise steam.

Now everything is operated by electricity, the government running an electric cable three miles across the Bay carrying 2,800 volts, operating a 35-horsepower motor. The government is very careful with the men, as no one is allowed to throw a switch at this heavy voltage without rubber gloves and standing on a rubber mat. When I was stationed at New Dungeness I received a letter from the office, stating two recording gauges were expressed to my station with recording charts. The letter said, "Report to this office when recording gauges are connected." I felt somewhat hurt, at the time, thinking I was not trusted, therefore, I wrote to the Superintendent complaining about the charts, "Its more red tape, and pinning more work on the keepers." The Superintendent said they were trying out the charts, and wanted them tried out at my station. Two months after that time, a Standard oil tanker reported my station for not operating the fog signal during heavy fog, passing two chains from the station, or two miles. Investigation started and the recording charts showed the fog signal was operating at regular intervals, all during this period questioned. These charts are not questioned, as they are perforated stamped for each day of the year and the keepers found. They are a protection for good keepers, but a telltale for poor ones. The charts on the light shows the intensity of the light at all times, the time of lighting and extinguishing. When President Harding visited this Coast when he made a

trip to Alaska, you may remember he was eight hours late on returning to Seattle on account of the dense fog, which prevailed in the Strait and Port Townsend. It is needless to say, our fog signal charts were checked and rechecked at various stations to see if any were the cause of this delay.

Lighthouse keepers are always expecting something to happen and it generally does. On one dark night, to change the regular routine, four wild ducks struck the lantern of the light, and broke one of the big plate glass panes, falling inside dead. All hands were out at once putting in a storm pane, and getting the light in operation again, and this always happens in bad weather. One stormy night a flock of wild geese got lost in their flight and hovered around the light for some time. During my time on the coast lights, two sailing vessels were driven ashore in a storm and wrecked. One of the lumber schooners was lumber laden. These vessels were so badly broken up on the rocky shores, it was difficult to get their [the ships'] names, so they could be reported as lost. Then at the entrance to the Straits, the Pacific Coast Steamer *Valencia* was wrecked and 103 lives were lost. I think that was the saddest of my experiences, not forgetting the Steamer *Clallam*, which was built here in Everett, and went down a few miles off Dungeness Light, with a loss of 72 lives. We patrolled the beach for many days for bodies.

Inspections of stations are made twice each year, one by the Superintendent and one by the Assistant Superintendent.. Sometimes their inspections are made early in the year, and then again later in the year, and the keepers never know just when they will be made, therefore everything must be kept in first class shape, when they do come.

One efficiency gold star is awarded each year for the best-kept station in the district. The district comprises the Oregon and Washington coastlines, the Columbia River and Puget Sound — about 50 stations. This gold star is awarded on neatness, cleanliness, a place for everything and everything in its place. I am happy to say my station was awarded the Efficiency Star a number of times.

I might say something about the radio directing stations. The Navy first installed the radio compass station giving bearing and position to any boat requesting it. The ships

would call the station by letter, and ask for a bearing.

The compass station would tune in and then give the bearing to the ship. Young wireless students mostly manned those compass stations and it was claimed a wrong bearing was given when seven US Torpedo Boats ran on the rocks at Point Hoonan [near Point Arguello at the entrance to the Santa Barbara Channel], California and were lost. After that time the larger boats installed their own Loop Compass and took their own bearings from the radio directing beacons at the different lighthouses. Each station has its own letter and its time of broadcasting. Dungeness was given the letter "Q" and correct time was given the station once in 24 hours.

Going down to San Francisco on the *H. F. Alexander*, I spent a good deal of my time in the wireless room. Bearings were taken on all the radio directing stations, and a ship can be operated now by wireless as well as by compass, in fact more correctly by wireless in foggy weather.

I have told you much about the duties of the keepers, but hardly mentioned about the magnifying power of the big lights. The Navesink Light, entrance to New York Harbor, is one of the strongest, its candlepower is unestimated. Barnegat Light, on the Jersey coast, is unestimated also. Minots Ledge Light, entrance to Boston, is very powerful and many others.

During my first year of service when I was showing visitors through the lighthouse one day, a lady asked if I could recommend the Light House Service to her son. I told her, "No, madam, if it was the road to Heaven, I could not recommend it." Since that time, and with all the improvements in the service, I feel that I could now recommend [the Service] to any good steady young man. And so the duties of a lighthouse keeper goes on, with its ups and downs, its pleasant hours, its trials and responsibility, red tape and iron rule. The duties of a lightkeeper are never done.

