

# **INSTRUCTIONS TO LIGHT-KEEPERS**

**July 1881**

*(Having recently acquired a partial copy of the instruction manual for lighthouse and lightship keepers issued in 1881, I was most interested in how the rules and regulations may have effected everyday life at Point Pinos at that time. The manual is 99 pages long. The following are the highlights. Allen Luce was the keeper in 1881.)*

## **HISTORY**

The ninth act of the newly formed congress, signed into law by George Washington, was the assumption of responsibility for all of the thirteen colony's lighthouses by the federal government.

Management of the lighthouses was assigned to the treasury under Alexander Hamilton and there it stayed for nearly 75 years. In the early part of the 19th century, responsibility for the lighthouses became the duty of a treasury employee named Pleasanton. Mr. Pleasanton was not one to waste money on upgrading the lights, so that by the late 1840's the U.S. lighthouses were thirty years behind the rest of the world. (Some historians suggest that the fact that one of Pleasanton's good friends was the supplier of the crude reflection devices used in the U.S. lights and that may have had some influence upon his decisions.)

Eventually the shippers, vessel owners and crews of the ships that had been lost or damaged because of the substandard level of U.S. lighthouses approached congress and requested a "new management program". The result was a lighthouse board made up principally of naval officers and other professionals from the field whose task was to upgrade and expand the U.S. lighthouse program. They, and their successors, were to continue to run the U.S. lighthouse program until responsibility was assumed by the Coast Guard in 1939.

## **FIRST CHANGE**

The first change implemented by the new management team was to insist that all keepers be literate. Since communication from headquarters could only be in written form this did make some degree of sense. Up to that time, a major qualification for employment as a keeper was having local political connections (the local customs collector appointed the keepers) not your skills at maintaining a lighthouse.

## **RULES AND REGULATIONS**

The rules and regulations laid out in the 1881 manual were apparently intended to serve as both a guide line for what to do and not do as well as an instruction manual for the maintenance of the light and the supporting infrastructure.

### **Tending the Light**

The light, after being lit at dusk, was to be visited at least twice between 8:PM and dawn on calm nights and in stormy weather constantly supervised.

### **Absence**

There were only three circumstances which justified the keepers absence from the light; attending religious services, procuring supplies and attending special events. Special events are not defined but based on some of Allen Luce's log entries they were often political in nature.

### **Guests**

Guests were to be welcomed and even allowed to enter the lantern gallery if accompanied by the keeper. Inebriated guests were to be escorted off the property.

### **Log**

Keepers were required to keep a daily log of the events at their station. They were furnished a book with lined pages. Instructions were to write neatly in ink each day and to have each entry flow directly across facing pages of an open journal. If these instructions were followed it was hoped that only two pages would be needed for each month.

### **Lighting and Extinguishing the Lamp**

Lighting the lantern was not a simple procedure and if done properly would take a half hour. Lanterns in use in 1881 were predominately fueled with lard oil but their design and peculiarities varied from lighthouse to lighthouse so the manual covers a number of different types and how to maintain them. One major disadvantage of lard oil was that it had to be heated to between 90 and 100 degrees prior to lighting.

To light the lamp a device called a *lucerne* was to be used, not a match because some of the burnt match stick might fall into the lantern's workings (unable to find a description of exactly what a *lucerne* was)

Lighting was to be done slowly with the wick at its lowest level and the flame was to be increased gradually over a half hour so as not to heat shock the glass chimney and cause it to fracture. The same was true when extinguishing the light at dawn. Slowly turn the flame down and when extinguished wrap the glass chimney in a muslin blanket to allow it to cool slowly.

Two types of wick were used. The ribbon version which we see in kerosene lanterns today and the concentric circle type which looked like the top of a number of socks of increasing size inserted within one another. (Look at the burner on an electric kitchen stove to get an idea of what the concentric circle looked like.) The more fuel the lamp was able to burn the brighter the light so the multi wick types were used at first order installations. The down side to the brighter light, from the keeper's point of view, was that a lower level of light like Point Pinos might only burn a gallon of fuel per night

Interview  
Lighthouse  
Sunday, April 14, 2002

The Lantern room was refurbished about 1990. By that time, four of the gargoyles had been taken by vandals and had to be replaced. The contractor worked with Monterey Sculpture to have them recast in bronze. The rest of the copper dome and the ventilation ball were in good condition and nothing had to be done about them. There is a little copper trumpet which feeds from the double gutter behind the gargoyles and it had to be replaced.

At that time the flooring of the balcony outside the lantern room was wood with a metal supporting structure. The floor was replaced with metal.

The railing around the balcony was also replaced. The posts which held up the rail (top rail) were thinner than a pencil and were replaced with stainless steel. The knobs on the tops of the posts were also replaced out of a milled stainless steel.

The vent slots below the windows were repaired so that they all were restored to working order.

Interview  
March 31, 2002  
Coastguardsman in 1972-3  
Watchkeeper at Pt. Pinos

1. Worked 8-hour shift at night, appears to be only one man at a time.
2. Stayed in barracks down in Monterey detachment.
3. Turned on light at start of shift.
4. Mostly stayed in kitchen
5. Kitchen outfitted with desk where new furnace is. Sink and TV where books are.
6. Going to college so studied on desk at night.
7. Did not do bulb maintenance; others did that.
8. Did turn on foghorn. If could not see the lights of Santa Cruz (Seaside) would turn on foghorn. Note switch on frame on front door. Then would have to walk down every half hour to foghorn building and clock in with watchman's clock.
9. Pool table in docent room.
10. The only room the public was allowed in was the Emily Fish parlor room. This room was pretty bare, but did have the old shipwreck and photo exhibit carousel with pictures in the panels.
11. Directed to turn on the foghorn if lots of people were parking down at ocean's edge.
12. When interviewed on March 31, 2002 it was a gray day with fog just beyond the red marker buoy. I asked if he would have turned on the foghorn and he said, "You had better have turned on the foghorn a long time ago. We tried to keep a three mile range."