

# Point Pinos Light Keeper Will Retire

Myrtle Pen. Hld.

**Peter C. Nelson Rounds  
Out 45 Years of Service  
and Retires Jan. 1st**

By **TED DUREIN**

As the hour of midnight sweeps over Point Pinos this New Year's Eve leaving the new born 1938 in its wake, Peter Nelson will retire from his last vigil as lighthouse keeper for the United States government.

For 45 years "Pete" Nelson, as he is known in the service, has been tending the lights of Pacific Coast stations. And many another New Year's Eve has seen him at the watch window as a new year swept swiftly by and out into the west. Now he retires to take up residence in Pacific Grove, not so very far from the lighthouse where he has spent the last seven years.

### NATIVE OF GERMANY

A native of Germany, Nelson is one of the four oldest ranking lighthouse keepers in the United States in point of service and senior keeper on the Pacific Coast. Although retirement usually comes at the age of 65, he has served two years past that age limit.

He began service as third assistant keeper at Point Sur light in 1892. And both of his children were born atop the peak which is a landmark on the new coast highway almost midway between Carmel and Big Sur. The son, Ernest Nelson, is now a member of the state highway patrol, and the daughter is Mrs. Myrtle Wright of San Francisco.

### SAW FEW WRECKS

Both children were brought into the world by Dr. J. L. D. Roberts, famous old doctor who tended the coast people for many years prior to the turn of the century. The same Doctor Roberts who visioned and mapped the coast road which became a reality this summer.

Perhaps it has been the fine way that Nelson has kept his lights burnished and brightly shining, but he has seen few shipwrecks near the stations at which he was on duty. One of the few was at Point Sur when the Steamer Los Angeles went on the rocks near the peak. Six persons perished and the remainder saved largely through the efforts of Doctor Roberts who spent two days and nights ministering to the injured.

### AT GOLDEN GATE

Besides Point Sur and Point Pinos lights, Nelson has also served at Ballast Point and Lime Point, at the entrance to the Golden Gate, where he lived and tended the light for 27 years. That's where you really see the ships, says Nelson. The Pacific Grove lighthouse is the "cream" of the lighthouse crop on the Pacific Coast, however even if the keeper seldom sees a sea going vessel of any size. The Point Pinos light is a light of the third order, about 29,000 candlepower and can be seen approximately 15 miles at sea in clear weather.

# Lighthouse Keeper Nelson Retires After 45 Years

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LIGHTHOUSES

Peter Nelson, top ranking lighthouse keeper on the Pacific coast, retires on January 1 after 45 years in the service. For the past seven years he has been stationed at the Point Pinos lighthouse at Pacific Grove, shown above. This lighthouse is considered the "cream" of stations by keepers, being one of the least isolated. Mr. and Mrs. Nelson will continue to reside in Pacific Grove after his retirement. —Herald photos.

### LOTS OF CHANGES

In his time, Nelson has seen many innovations in the lights. The Point Sur light was a kerosene burner, and the kerosene had to be hauled up the side of the peak. But it wasn't so much the fuel but the task of watching the light that was tough in those days. The kerosene lights had a habit of going out, or getting ailments that would smoke up the lenses.

Now there is seldom a failure in the electrically operated lights. But there is always a chance that something may happen and so the keeper must be ever alert just the same.

The Point Sur light is a first order light, of a million candle power and might possibly be seen much farther out to sea. Tom Henderson, head keeper at Point Sur, will come to the Pacific Grove lighthouse to replace Nelson. The other keeper who will remain at Pacific Grove, there are two men on duty, is Charles Hellwig.

*is there a way to explain 3rd order?*

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