

Condensed from Bob Llewellyn and Ed Beechart's interview with and Bob Stone, Coast Guard Lighthouse Keeper at Point Pinos, from 1953 / 1956, taken on March 6, 1995.

RELIEF DUTY

I was first sent to Point Pinos July 15, 1953 for six months as a relief keeper for Mr. Ray Davis, 2nd assistant keeper, who was on sick leave. I was billeted with Mr. Henderson in the spare bedroom in his six room bungalow. Mr. Henderson's wife and son George had moved to Salinas to raise chinchillas. Mr. George Peterson position as 1st assistant keeper had been taken by another Coast Guardsman, 2CSM Randall Rankin of the "Gresham". Mr. Davis returned to duty and I returned to Yerba Buena Island. When Rankin retired six months later I returned to Point Pinos to fill his position as 1st assistant keeper.

PERMINANT ASSIGNMENT

I took up quarters in the lighthouse downstairs bed room, the one with the fireplace. The old Coast Guard barracks on the west side of the lighthouse was converted into three two bedroom apartments.. 2CSM Ray Davis lived in one unit and the Chief of Ship, Mr. Elliot lived in the other and a 1CL Carpenters mate lived in the middle unit. They converted the old dog kennel into a washing facility. There was a barn for Mr. Davis's cow and chickens down the hill near where the Navy NOAA building now stands. There were remains of coast defense gun placements in the sand dunes all around the point. I believe the guns were Army 155mm coast artillery guns. We used to hike over the dunes and see the caved in sand bagged emplacements and ammunition bunkers. Mr. Henderson said the General Marshall made an inspection of the emplacements during World War II.

CATTLE

Tom Henderson raised beef cattle. Tom knew a retired butcher from the 11th cavalry in the Monterey Presido who would come down and skin out a steer hoisted up in a large eucalyptus tree. Tom would always see that I got a great big roast. A lot of the beef went to his wife and son George in Salinas, the rest ended up in Tom's freezer.

DUTIES

I received a \$4.50 per day food sustenance allowance. I had to pick up the mail, in the Coast Guard pickup, at the Pacific Grove Post Office every morning. I would drop my wife to work at the Bank Of America and run on over to Monterey to shop for food at Safeway. We didn't shop much at the PX at Fort Ord because it wasn't convenient and we wouldn't save that much. Mr. Henderson and Mr. Davis were getting along in years so Randall and I would do a lot of painting. Mr. Henderson was rather thorny. He didn't talk to Mr. Davis. When he wanted something done he would have me relay the order to Mr. Davis. We started with the fog signal building, painting it inside and out. I remember having to paint the roof of the lantern room. We placed a ladder from the walkway to the roof and I would climb up with the black paint. You wouldn't catch me

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doing it to day, I can't stand heights. To clean the storm pains we only needed a small step ladder. We didn't hand wash them very often because there was a hose bib up there and we would hose them off. A squeegee would finish the job. We were back far enough from the ocean so we wouldn't get any salt spray. There were no hand holds required like at Point Sur. We would let visitors up into the lantern room and would roll up the curtains so they could see the view. Open house was Saturdays and Sundays, two to four. During the week school kids would come in bus loads. They would climb into the tower and I would close the trap door so they wouldn't fall down the tower ladder, it was very steep. Mr. Wilkerson was sent down as the principal keeper when Mr. Henderson retired on July 3, 1955. Mr. Wilkerson came from the Stockton Channel where he was responsible for all the aides to navigation on the river. He would service the channel markers from a 36- ft tugboat. He brought his son and wife along, I remember that she made darn good fried chicken.

STANDING WATCH

The main watch was from midnight to 8 in the morning. The light signal was ten seconds off and twenty seconds on. There were pull down roller shades around the lantern room which we had to pull down at dawn. They claimed that the sunlight would change the lens from clear glass to purple. I have a brass lens polishing container marked U. S. Lighthouse Service, it had a folding lid which contained polish. We didn't use polish but were told to use white gasoline. This would be considered a very dangerous practice today. One of the storm pains got broken, they are held in place by 1-1/4 " long custom made brass screws. I sent a sample up to BI (Yerba Buena Island) where they machined a replacement set of screws so we could replace the storm pain. We had to place towels at the base of the trap door to the observation walk to keep the rain from flooding the lantern room. The log books were kept in the watch room (front porch) and we would record the barometric pressure, fog, and other events. We also had a ships clock in this room. We would watch for fog and when we couldn't see the light on the buoy off the point we would turn on the signal from a switch in the watch room. There was also a switch in the principal keepers house. It could be controlled from either place. If we missed the fog coming in, a little old lady in Pacific Grove would always call up and scold us and we would hurry to turn it on. She never slept, she would call at one, two or three in the morning. We suggested that the Coast Guard give her a medal for patriotic duty. The fog signal was run by a 5-hp electric, opposed piston compressor. The back up unit was a gasoline driven, air cooled, Wisconsin compressor.

FURNISHINGS

All the furniture was government issue except for the television which I purchased from the ex-mayor of Pacific Grove , Don Grafton. He strapped the antenna to the south chimney and we could pick up all three stations from San Francisco, # 4, 5 and 7. We were sleeping in the north bed room and when we forgot to lock the front door visitors would walk in and wake us up. This happened several times. The kitchen was in

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the lean-to addition along the back. We had a washing machine (no dryer) and hot water heater in the basement. We hung our cloths out to dry. There was a small room in the tower where we kept our direction radio transmitters. We switched between the two every Friday afternoon. The two furnished upstairs bedrooms were reserved for visitors. The lighthouse was a romantic location, we had tons of visitors. We had seven honeymoon couples stay in our guest room, during my service. A friend of mine Richard L. Myers honeymooned here right out of high school. He joined the Navy ROTC at Fresno State and went on to become a three star Admiral and commander of the "Kennedy". My parents came over to visit often along with my two sisters. My dad liked the south bedroom the one with the sink where he could get a drink of water. He used to use a coffee can in the middle of the night and I suspect also the sink.

CLOCKWORK

There was a clockwork mechanism in the lamp room. We only used it once while I was stationed at Point Pinos. The power failed and we removed the electric light fixture and placed a Coleman lantern in the center of the lens. The clock work rotated the brass shutter around the light. We would crank up the weights which hung down the column in the center of the winding staircase all the way to the basement. The weights were not very heavy because I lifted the cable with all the weights.

PAINT LOCKER

The Coast Guard told us to clean out the paint locker (oil house) and throw every thing out. I uncovered a wooden box filled with saw dust and kerosene lamp chimneys. They were too nice to throw away so I gave my mom two and hung on to the rest. There was also a Geodesic Survey map of the coast from Bodega Head to Point Pinos dated 1883. It is now framed on my rumpus room wall. There were a lot of log books which I turned over to the Coast Guard which they were supposed to sent back to the archives in Washington DC. I remember logging my daughters birth in the log book.,
"Daughter Sandra born 10-PM October 13, 1955 to Seaman Robert and Viva Stone".

GARDEN

Point Pinos was a garden spot, really beautiful. We planted a lot of flowers including roses. We brought the old lawns back, and planted a new lawn in the back of the lighthouse. Our work was really made easier when the Coast Guard supplied us a Toro gas powered lawn mower. There was a beautiful cypress hedge which completely circled the Lighthouse.

POINT SUR TRIPS

I started taking trips to the Point Sur Lightstation with the First Class Carpenters Mate who lived in the center unit in the old barracks building. He was serving at the Monterey Life Boat Station. We were taking building supplies down in a old GM 2-1/2 ton flat bed truck. We were delivering sand and cement to the light tower I never did know what they were building. The road was very narrow and I got very scared when the rear dual

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tiers hung over the edge of the road. I had him stop the truck and I climbed out of the passenger window, crawled across the hood and walked to the light tower. I loved to go down and beach comb for drift wood along the north beach. One of the Coast Guard wives was pregnant so I volunteered to go down and stand by while her husband took her to the hospital. She had her baby but I didn't have to stand watch because a keeper on leave had returned. Cattle were grazing inside the gate, the gate was locked all the time with a combination lock to keep the cattle off the highway. There were some barns down near were the Navy Surveillance Station now stands. The School House was near the cypress trees at the highway gate but it wasn't being used, at that time.

ADMIRAL'S INSPECTION

Chickens were running all around the station when the Admiral came for inspection. He kept asking who they belonged to. He wanted to see the barn, and wanted to know who owned the cow and cattle,. He was very inquisitive, we weren't sure about animal regulations so he never found out who owned the animals. He kept commenting about how beautiful the station was. Three weeks later when I was returning from getting the Sunday paper the Admirals car was in the drive way. He had brought his wife down to see the station and they were sitting at our old chrome kitchen dinette having coffee with my wife. I was so nervous that my coffee cup was shaking in the saucer and the Admiral kept saying son relax, relax I just wanted to show my wife your beautiful home. He took my wife and I out to a wonderful lunch. It was very unusual for a Admiral to socialize with a lowly seaman.

INDIAN ARTAFACTS

We never found any Indian artifacts but I uncovered a pile of abalone shells while digging for top soil between the fog signal building and the city sewage plant. They were thoroughly mixed in with the loam soil, there must have been a huge pile there a long time ago.

LOVERS LANE

There was a chain link fence gate at each side of the lighthouse reservation. High school kids would drive in at night and place chains with combination, gym locker, locks on each gate. They had complete privacy until some one would complain to the Pacific Grove Police. The police could not touch government property so would call us to cut off the chain. It happened so often we got a large bolt cutter to speed up the process. One night we caught two MP's from Fort Ord who had discovered the lovers lane. Once we had a knock at the door at two in the morning. My wife invited a young lady in with a badly torn blouse. She had fought off a overly amours admirer and hiked though the sand dunes to the lighthouse. We offered to call the police but she didn't want that. She accepted a cup of coffee. She refused a offer for a ride home but accepted our offer to call a taxi.

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“GEORGE” THE CAT

We had a great big Persian cat named “George”. He would follow me around on patrol like a dog. He loved to chase and play with the small deer around the grounds. He was a messy eater so we would put his dish of food on the back porch, leaving the door open a crack so he could get back in. A terrible racket was heard one night and we saw George charging a skunk who was eating his food. The skunk lifted his tail and ducked into the back door and into the basement with George right behind. The basement stunk something awful, so we washed it down with tomato juice to no avail. George came out great, he didn’t catch the skunk, and didn’t get sprayed.

WILD ANIMALS

We had lots raccoons and a menagerie of possums which lived in our circle of cypress trees. Mr. Wilkerson spotted a animal out front and when we investigated a mountain lion bounded off. We found the remains of a young deer he had killed. There were lots of quail, we bought hundred pound bags of cracked corn to feed them. I noticed a blue jay at our kitchen window so I started feeding him bread. He would come at my whistle and sit on my finger to eat. The school kids were delighted they thought I was a wild animal trainer.

GHOSTS

Mr. Wilkerson believed in the super natural, he went to seances and he had quite a few books on the hereafter written by Mr. Edward Cache. While we were cleaning the storm pains one day, he looked at me over his glasses and ask if I had heard the baby cry in the middle of the night. I had heard noises which I believed the wind whistling through the scuppers but never a baby’s cry. Wilkerson said a baby died in the lighthouse and he could hear baby’s cry during the night.

PLATT BROTHERS

The Platt brothers were retired fishermen, who made scale ship models. One brother gave me a beautiful model of a ship in a bottle. They would hike out to visit us at the lighthouse dressed in sailor garb, white watch cap, pea coats, blue dungarees, and blue shirts. It was neat to have them visit, they gave me a complete list of ship wrecks of the peninsula along with photographs. I used to visit them in their beautiful old house in Pacific Grove and admire their collection of ship models.

SECRET PLACES

I found a trap door in the front bed room closet, with one with the fireplace. On lifting it I found an old water cistern just big enough to hold a man. I thought I would have some fun with my wife so I said give me a minute then come in and I bet you can’t find me .

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I took a flash light and climbed in and closed the trap door. I could hear her calling but she never did find my hiding place. In the upstairs north bed room closet there is a loose floor board which can be lifted out, the space beneath was between the floor joist. I believe the previous light keepers use to hide their valuables there.

RECREATION

When I was ask what I wanted for recreation gear I ordered a basket ball, hoop and a set of golf clubs. I used to sneak across the street and play holes #6, 7 and 8, and then cut over to 2 to miss the club house. Chief Elliott's 10 year son was a great player and he would go with me. Later on the City manager visited the station and wanted to know the name of the group commander, and 12th district commander. I obliged with the names of Mr. Springer and Mr. Wolf. I thought I was in trouble with the illegal golfing but he surprised me with a greens pass written on the back of one of his business cards. I didn't have to sneak around after that.

HISTORICAL PRESEVERATION

When I was stationed at the lighthouse there was a great old cast brass rain gauge on a post in the back yard. I have a picture painted by a lady showing the gauge. It appears that vandals have stolen it. The Coast Guard wanted CWO Bittler to replace the Fresnel lens with modern optics. He argued the historical significance of the lens and convinced them of its historical value. They relented and the Point Pinos Lighthouse is sill the oldest on the west coast with their original optics. The city has done a beautiful job restoring the parlor and bed room. I'm glad the city took over the lighthouse and will protect and preserve it for future generations.

Bob Stone retired from the Coast Guard service in 1956 to work with Pacific Telephone . He retired in 1988 and later became a treasured Point Pinos light house docent. He passed away in 1996.