

REEF LIGHTS

Seaswept Lighthouses of the Florida Keys

By Love Dean, 134 pages, paperback-published by the Key West Preservation Board-1982

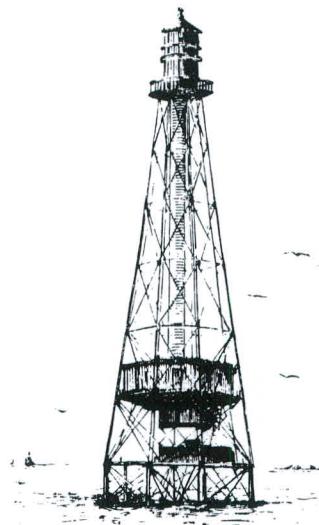
An interesting and fairly well written book that provides a broad brush history of the string of lighthouses that mark the Florida Reefs. Love Dean uses a ten page PROLOGUE to acquaint the reader with some early history of lighthouses (VERY broad brush) and the development of pile and screw pile lighthouse construction, which is the design used for most of the Reef Lights. She touches on the history of the area covering land acquisition, Indian uprisings, wreckers and salvors (sometimes one in the same) and the events that lead to the construction of the lighthouses that dot the reefs.

Following the prologue the author devotes a chapter to each of the first four steel pile lighthouses in order of construction and then inexplicably lumps the last two into one chapter almost as if she were nearing a deadline. A small paragraph of information on the Loggerhead Key Lighthouse and one sentence and two pictures concerning the Rebecca Shoal Lighthouse are dropped into the

chapter on the Sombrero Key structure. Other areas of the book contain pictures, plates and information that does not pertain to the tale at hand and is disturbing if not confusing to the reader.

However, overall the book is easy to read and of interest to those who thirst for knowledge of the Florida Reef Lights. It acquainted me with a chapter of American Lighthouses of which I had limited knowledge. A novice might be confused by the technical information, particularly that pertaining to optics.

REEF LIGHTS delves into how each reef acquired its name, usually after some ship that ground to a halt on the teeth of the coral and the cost and construction details of most of the lighthouses. The author also provides details of the more dramatic events that occurred at the individual stations. Of particular interest is the story of LT George Meads' involvement with the construction of the first three structures. And yes, he is the same gentleman who starred at Gettysburg as a General.



Judging from the first four chapters and bibliography it appears that author Dean conducted a considerable amount of research. However the remainder of the book is thin and stuffed with the standard plates that appear in most books on lighthouses.

Again, it appears that a deadline was responsible.

Aside from layout and scanty material on a few of the reef lighthouses the biggest drawback to the book is the unfortunate use of blue ink. The medium blue ink is easy enough to read but it effectively destroys the photographs. I also found the small "chartlet" that accompanied each section disturbingly small. It was difficult to discern just where each reef was located as the same symbol (*) was used, with no accompanying name, for each lighthouse.

Overall, the book reads easily and quickly and it does acquaint the reader with the lore of that area of American lighthouses. There are a few errors (spelling of Pleasanton's name) but really not many given the amount of fiction lying in the newspaper morgues of the country.

I would deem the book as a must for the library of the truly dedicated "lighthouse nut" and it will be of interest to those wishing to learn something of these unique seaswept structures. I would hope a second edition would be printed in black ink and possibly rearranged.

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