

**KEEPERS OF THE LIGHT:
A History of British Columbia's
Lighthouses and Their Keepers**

by Donald Graham
Harbour Publishing Co., Ltd.
Madeira Park, B.C., Canada, 1985
Hard cover, 270pp, 6" x 9",
25 maps, 25 drawings, 116 photos

So you think you would have liked to have been a lighthouse keeper during the romantic age of late sail and early steam navigation? Perhaps in some scenic and remote place like the Pacific coast of Vancouver Island? Then by all means get this book and read it. It will cure you once and for all of such foolish notions.

This is not a "nuts and bolts" book on the lighthouses of this region, although a lot of facts and figures are scattered through the text. It is the story of the people who kept the lights, told to a large degree by their own words as recorded in keepers' logs and official correspondence. The author, a historian by training and a keeper of several of the lights involved since 1976 had the advantage of access to these records in preparing this volume. In short, being a keeper at the various remote lights along this weather-battered coast was no fun at all. It was dangerous, lonely, demanding and difficult work which paid well below what might have been called

minimum wage. To say that the authorities in charge of the lights were economical in their use of funds would be akin to saying that the weather at Triangle Island, the most remote and exposed of the lights (where wind once blew a keeper's cow right off the island) was "merely unpleasant."

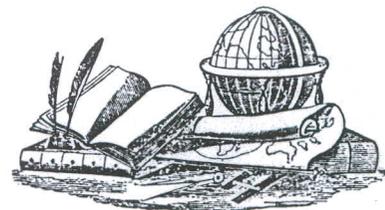
There's no better way to sum up the lives of these people than the author does in his foreword:

"This is the social history of a people who had no society and it is hard to make it believable to other lightkeepers, let alone readers in the real world. Sometimes as disaster and death piles so high, I pushed away from the table, angry and depressed, leaving as much venom on the paper as ink. To overcome disbelief (Lord, it couldn't have been that bad!) I have drawn on the rich reserves of the keepers' own experience. A man who writes, 'Would you please send someone up here at once as my wife has gone crazy and I want to get her to town at once' means business. There is an essay in terror written between those lines, and we have no better way to feel the tightening coils of tension inside at his island outpost, as it reeled against wind and waves that ugly September in 1919."

The book is broken into three major sections. The first, "The Imperial Lights" deals with the three lighthouses built between 1859 and British Columbia's joining the Canadian Confederation in 1871. "Safe Harbours" deals with 12 additional lights concentrated around the south end of Vancouver Island and the Strait of Juan de Fuca. "Pacific Graveyard" extends the story to eight lights farther out the south coast of the island, and adds a chapter on one particularly gruesome wreck, that of the steamer Valencia in January 1906. This wreck was instrumental in getting the authorities to spend some long overdue money on lifesaving stations and lights on this remote and hazardous coast.

Photo reproduction is not particularly good, even for recent photos let alone older work. Each chapter has its own small map locating that light with respect to the others nearby, but the map appears at the end of the chapter when it should be at the beginning. This is to be the first of two volumes, with the second to cover the lights on the north coast of British Columbia and the Inside Passage.

Despite its minor shortcomings, I recommend it to anyone interested in the human side of light keeping.



USLHS Has recently reviewed a set of nicely reprinted old U.S. Coast Survey charts covering representative seaports in New England states and New York.

Dating from the 1850s to 1870s, these historical documents show, in plain view, many then-existing land details such as towns, buildings, streets, railroad lines, topography, farm plats, etc., as well as the hydrographic delineations found on present-day navigational charts.

Specific town and harbor charts available at present include Camden/Rockport and Portland, ME; Portsmouth, NH; Lynn, Boston, Woods Hole and Nantucket, MA; New Haven, CT; Bristol and upper Narragansett Bay, RI; New York Bay and Harbor.

These are priced, depending on size, from \$12.50 to \$22, and are reproduced on heavy, non-acidic paper, suitable for framing. For illustrated description of any single location, send a stamp to Chartifacts, P.O. Box 8954, Richmond, VA 23225. Or, for a description of all charts, send \$1. A few original lithographs are available.

Lighthouse museums or preservation groups are invited to inquire about quantity discounts available for chart resale or fund-raising.