

**Westport's Masterpiece  
Building the Grays Harbor Lighthouse  
1897-1898**

By Karen Nelson Groth  
Reviewed by Wayne Wheeler

**W**estport's *Masterpiece* has to be one of the most comprehensive and exhaustively researched books of the construction of a single light station that has ever been written.

And, it's about construction: where the various materials came from, how they were transported and by whom, building techniques employed at the end of the 19th century, and details about the men who were involved.

Author Groth spent 20 years on this 208-page book, a document really. Along the way, she reached far and wide to gather facts, dates,



Gray's Harbor Lighthouse, Westport, Washington. Undated USLHS archive photo.

and backgrounds. She used old phone books, censuses, newspaper accounts, personal visits, phone calls, historical societies, libraries, and experts in all manner of disciplines.

Although the story of the building, not the life history of, the Grays Harbor Lighthouse is the subject of the book, one of her main thrusts is highlighting the work of architect Carl Leick, a draftsman for the 13th Lighthouse District (Oregon and Washington). Leick designed several lighthouses in the Pacific Northwest and, when not employed by the government, constructed other notable buildings (Victorian houses and a church). And to a lesser extent, it is also the story of the man who oversaw the construction of the light station: Charles Erickson.

Ms. Groth not only traces Leick's background (and work history leading up the construction of the light station), from his native Germany and Erickson's from Sweden, but also fills the reader in on the backgrounds of some of the subcontractors. When a subcontractor in San Francisco is selected for the metalwork, information about the owner and his business is discussed.

The book paints a vivid picture of the community in the Grays Harbor area: local businesses, road scrapping, festivals, work climate, and even the impact of the Klondike Gold Rush on the community.

She dots the i's and crosses the t's and digresses into the tiniest detail. If you were ever interested in the difference between Tenino and Chuckanut sandstone, this book is for you. Or how about the differences between Chehalis and Puget Sound brick,

the cleanliness of gravel, or the work of a 19th century tinsmith? Half a chapter is devoted to digging the well at the station. Great detail is written about stone cutting, types of stone used, the tools employed, and how they are sharpened. Another section speaks of the kinds of lumber used at the end of the 19th century and the framing of

buildings. Overall, more information than one needs.

But, I digress.

Make no mistake, the errors in this book are very few and everything is well documented. If author Groth doesn't know something as a fact, she uses words such as "probably," "I assume" or "it may have been."

Chapter 10 is a salute to Carl Leick, a talented but perhaps a cantankerous individual, who constructed some remarkable buildings in the Northwest. The final chapter brings the reader up-to-date on what is happening with the light station today. There are voluminous end notes.

Author Groth incorrectly states that the 13th Lighthouse District engineer was the superintendent, when the head of a lighthouse district in that era was known as an "inspector" and was always a naval officer. In this case, it was Commander John C. Morong, U.S. Navy. The heads of districts were known as superintendents after 1910. The engineer for the district, Captain Walter Fisk, who is discussed at length, worked for the inspector and oversaw building construction.

Ironically, the weakest part of this book is the discussion of the lighthouse apparatus. Although she did contact some people familiar with aids to navigation, the sparse information was either incorrect or she didn't understand the explanations. As an example, there were nine, not six, orders of Fresnel lenses.

Soft cover, 8 1/2 x 11, 208 pages, 64 black and white photographs (some wonderful period photos), 17 drawings, and several maps and illustrations. The book may be ordered by e-mailing [Kgroth@BuildingGarysHarborLighthouse.com](mailto:Kgroth@BuildingGarysHarborLighthouse.com). The cost is \$24.95 plus \$5 shipping and handling.

**Building the Yaquina Lighthouses,  
Jetties, and Life Saving Station**

By George M. Collins  
Reviewed by Wayne Wheeler

**A** new lighthouse-related book has arrived, and it's a different cut than the many that tumble off the bookstore shelves each year.

*To Guide, Guard and Rescue*, by George Collins, is actually four stories in one with a whole lot more thrown in to entertain and amuse the reader. It is broken down into four chapters and an addendum. Actually, to my mind, it is two books: one containing the chapters and the other a series of juicy sections ranging from how the panic of 1873

affected the Oregon Coast area (where the chapters take place) to information on who the lighthouse and life saving station keepers were. The comprehensive addendum explains the workings of the Lighthouse Service and the Life Saving Service, provides some human and animal tales, and has information about shipwrecks, as well as dispelling some of the myths that stick to lighthouse lore like tarnish to brass implements.

The chapters are all well-researched and well-written; they flow nicely and make for an easy and entertaining read. Of particular note are the numerous historical photographs, a delight by themselves.

Chapter 1 - Details the establishment of the Yaquina Bay Lighthouse, which had a short existence as a lighthouse (only three years), but also served for a spell as housing for Yaquina Life Saving Service personal, a civilian family, and for a short period of time as the residence of the chief architect for the first Yaquina Bay entrance jetty. It was eventually transferred to the Oregon State Parks Department. Chapter 2 - Details the construction of the more famous Yaquina Bay area lighthouse, Yaquina Head. Chapter 3 - Records the construction of the Yaquina Bay jetties. Chapter 4 - Records the establishment and history of the Yaquina Bay Life Saving Station.

Each chapter sheds light on community life at the time of the constructions. Industry, commerce, vessels, employment, and other aspects of the area all give the reader a good feel of what life was like on the central Oregon coast during the years discussed.

I have a few problems with some areas of the Lighthouse Service that are not to-



tally correct or are misleading, but overall the book is a winner and explores areas not previously covered. If you are interested in lighthouses or the Life Saving Service or general construction practices or a glimpse of life on the West Coast at the end of the 19th century, this book is a nice addition to your library.

Soft cover, 8 1/2 x 11, 112 pages, 100 black and white photographs, and numerous drawings and maps. \$21.95 plus shipping and handling. The book is available at the Yaquina Bay and Yaquina Head Lighthouse gift shops or through Friends of Yaquina Lights or Oregon Historical Society.

### **Twin Lights of Thacher Island, Cape Ann**

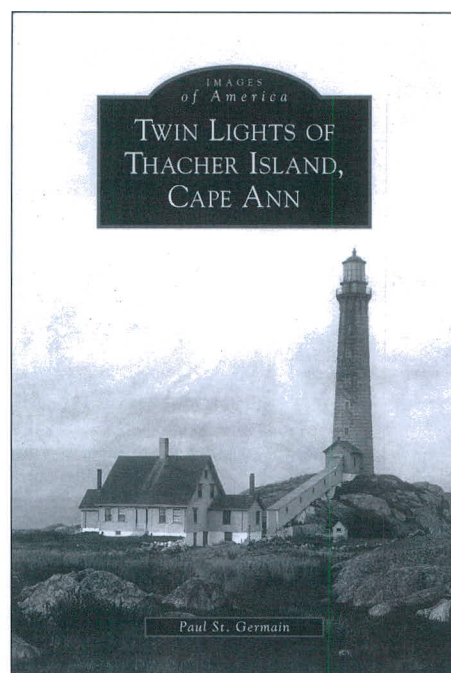
by Paul St. Germain  
Reviewed by Thomas Tag,  
Technical Advisor  
U.S. Lighthouse Society

I read many lighthouse books, some very good, some fair, and a few that should never have been written. Paul St. Germain's *Twin Lights of Thacher Island, Cape Ann* falls in the very good category.

This book is one of the *Images of America* series where the book contains mostly photographs with a short paragraph after each photo serving as an extended caption. However, unlike most of the books in this series, *Twin Lights of Thacher Island, Cape Ann* is a book about a single subject with great detail, and it has many maps and documents added to provide more historical details.

St. Germain has done a fine job of detailing the history of Thacher Island itself, as well as the history of the twin lighthouses on the island. He has produced a rich history of the people involved with the island and of the keepers of the lights. He also covers the technical details of the lighthouses with photos of the Fresnel lenses and their replacements through time, as well as the fog signals, boathouses, and tramways on the island. The book also contains

**Left: Yaquina Head Lighthouse, Oregon. Undated USLHS archive photo.**



information on a number of shipwrecks that occurred at or near the island.

In my opinion, this is one of the best books in the *Images of America* style that I have seen, and it will give the reader a complete history of these very important early American lights. If you are interested in the history of these lighthouses or this area of the country, you will find this a great book to add to your collection.

*When Storms Arose and Ships Wrecked,  
Lighthouse Keepers Sent the Message, and  
Life-Saving Service Surfmnen Responded.*



Founded at the Cape Cod National Seashore in 1995 by maritime historians, authors, museum directors, National Park Service professionals and other caring people, the U.S. Life-Saving Service Heritage Association strives to preserve the history, artifacts and architecture of the Life-Saving Service and the early Coast Guard.

JOIN US IN RESCUING OUR MARITIME HISTORY  
USLSSHA Membership includes:

\*Quarterly issues of *Wreck & Rescue Journal*, our 36-page magazine of Life-Saving Service and Coast Guard history;  
\*Our Annual Meeting and Conference, held in a different, historically-rich area of the U.S.; and much more.



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