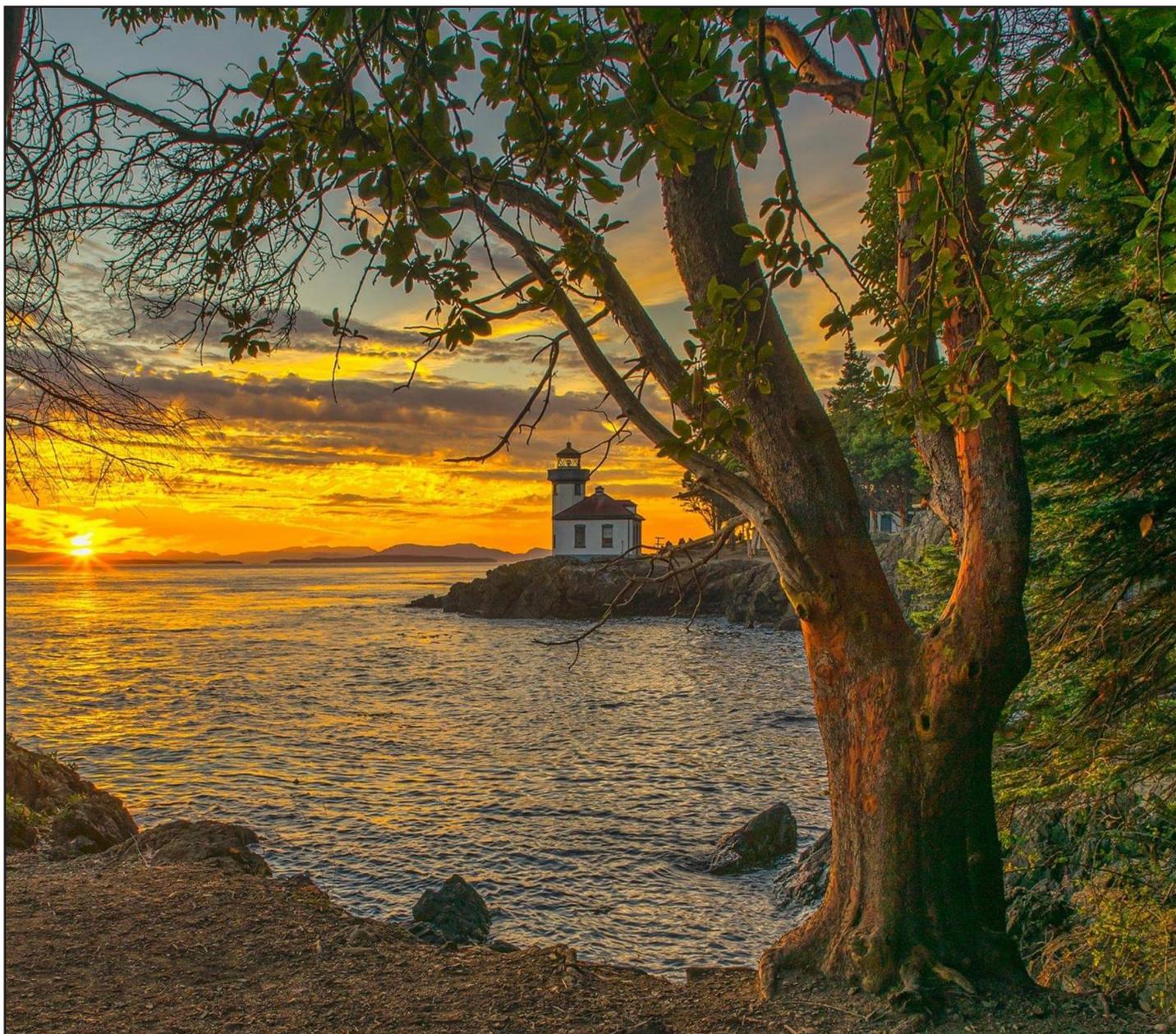


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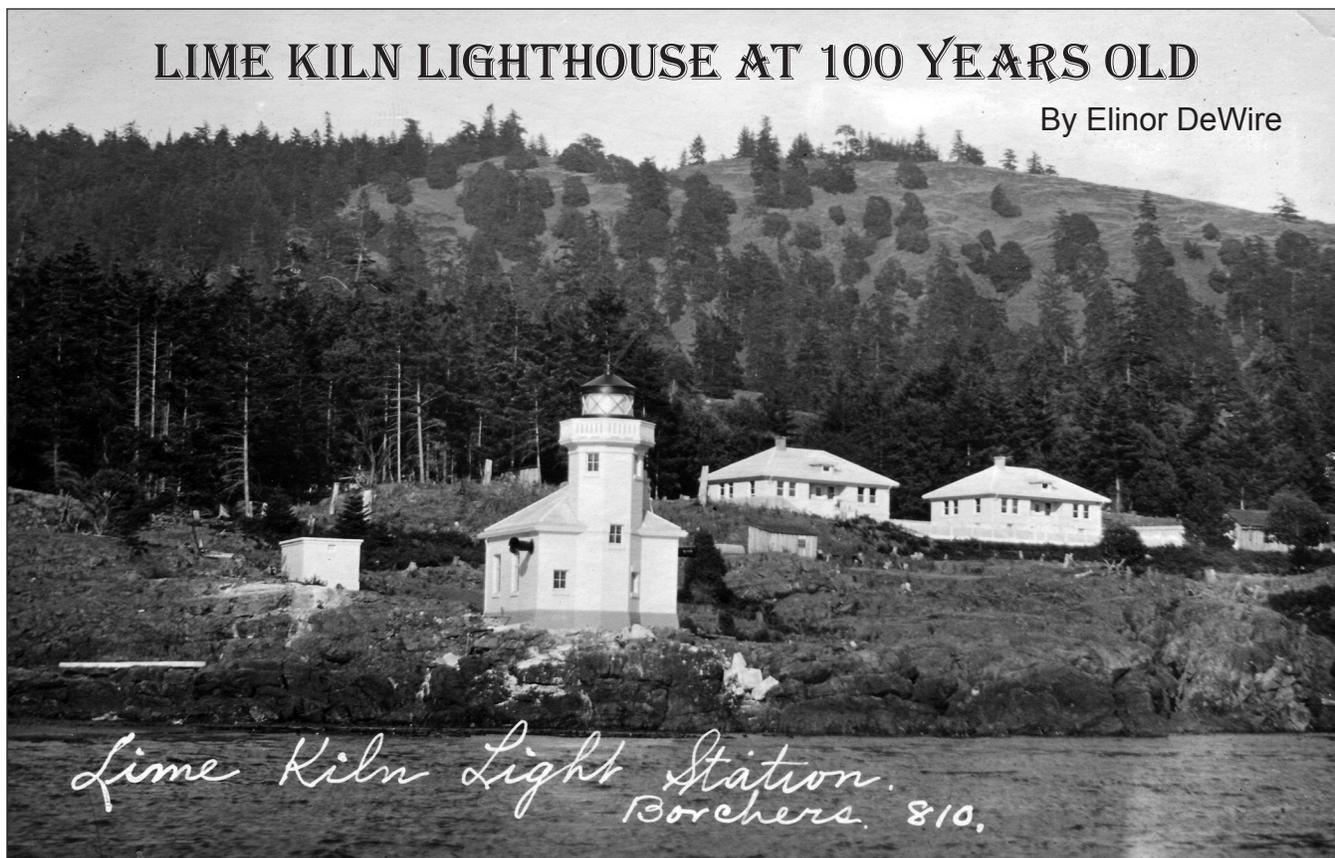
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## LIME KILN LIGHTHOUSE AT 100 YEARS OLD

By Elinor DeWire

Lightkeeper Louis Borchers of Turn Point Lighthouse captured a photo of Lime Kiln Lighthouse on a visit to the station shortly after it was commissioned. Borchers often spent his time off traveling to other lighthouses. Note the foghorns on the lighthouse and the curtain pulled around the lantern windows. National Archives Photo.

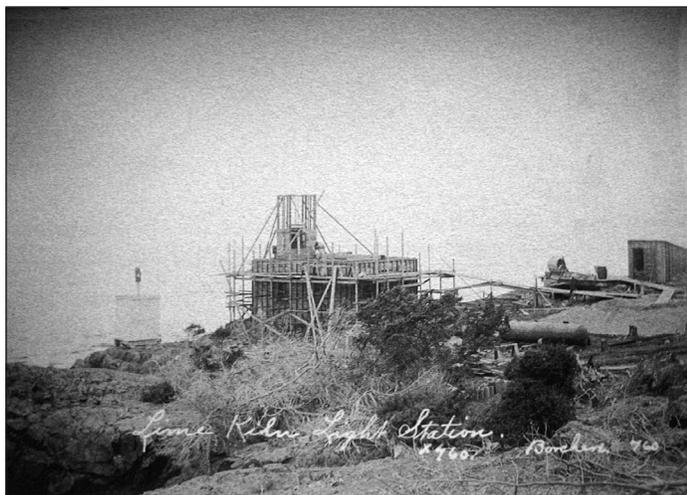
**L**ike many of its sister sentries on the West Coast, Lime Kiln Lighthouse had an ignoble beginning. It was an important site located along the vital route north from Puget Sound into the Strait of Georgia, the sheltered portal at the southern end of the Inside Passage to Alaska. Navigators made a critical turn at Lime Kiln Point into Haro Strait and a labyrinth of islands between Vancouver Island and the British Columbia mainland. The water here was too deep for soundings, and there was a swift tidal current. Add in some fog, and even the best of mariners was rendered helpless. Yet, it took years and much Congressional dithering to get a lighthouse built on the point.

Discussions about placing a light at the entrance to busy Haro Strait initially centered on Kellett Bluff on Henry Island, just off the northwest shore of San Juan Island. But it was decided that Lime Kiln was a better location, and in 1914 a lens-lantern on a pole went into service there. It was run by acetylene tanks housed in a box-like structure beneath the beacon. The light operated on its own, the tanks needing to be replaced about every six months. The idea was that ships exiting Puget Sound would turn northwest at Point Wilson and run for the beacon at Lime Kiln, a distance of about 30 miles. There they could safely enter Haro Strait and proceed along the twisting route to Canada.

It was an economic move on the part of the fiscally strapped U.S. Lighthouse Service, since the tiny acetylene beacon cost little to erect and maintain and needed no lightkeeper. It was a political decision as well, since Washington, D.C. was far from the Salish Sea, and Congress had little sense of the need for navigational aids in the Northwest. World War I loomed, with fears of United States involvement, a threat that encouraged the government to tighten its purse strings. Historians have even suggested there was bias that resulted in East Coast lighthouses being given funding preference.

Whatever the reason for placing such a diminutive beacon on Lime Kiln Point, it was woefully inadequate, with a short range and no fog signal. Continued marine mishaps and lobbying by interests in Washington and British Columbia wore down Congress. By 1917, \$40,000 had been appropriated for a fourth-order lighthouse and third-order fog signal on Lime Kiln Point. Construction bids were solicited, but in the end the government settled on cheaper local labor to construct Washington's last traditional lighthouse.

Work was begun in August 1918. The handsome sentinel—a 38-foot-tall, reinforced concrete tower incorporated into a fog signal room, along with an oil house, equipment shed, and two comfortable homes for the principal and assistant keepers—was



**Above and bottom right: Lime Kiln Lighthouse was shown under construction in 1919. The original lens-lantern beacon can be seen in the photo above. Courtesy of the Coast Guard Museum Northwest.**

completed less than a year later. It was a design of district engineer Carl Leick, who had drawn up plans of lighthouses for many sites in the Northwest, including Oregon, Washington, and Alaska. The lantern for Lime Kiln Lighthouse was fabricated at Wisconsin Iron and Wire works in Milwaukee and shipped to the site. A fourth-order Fresnel lens, composed of three 60° flash panels on one side and 180° of reflectors, revolved in a mercury float and produced three flashes every 10 seconds. A reed foghorn sent two blasts every 20 seconds from trumpets protruding from the north and south sides of the fog signal room. The light station, 55 feet above water, went into service for the first time on June 30, 1919.

The first keeper was Clifford P. Hermann, a veteran of the Lighthouse Service who had spent 14 years as a lightkeeper at lonely Destruction Island Lighthouse three miles off Kallaloch, Washington. Lime Kiln Lighthouse must have seemed like heaven after such a remote assignment. The panorama of the slate-colored Salish Sea, rimmed by snowy mountains, and the beauty and amicability of populated San Juan Island were welcome delights. Hermann stayed three years.

He was followed by Louis Betteker, a seasoned lightkeeper. Betteker had transferred from an Alaskan lighthouse to Semiahmoo Lighthouse in Bellingham, Washington—an octagonal wooden sentinel standing on stilts in the bay. After being waterbound at Semiahmoo, he was grateful to have a land lighthouse with the chance to raise chickens and grow a garden. Betteker was praised by the government in 1923 for rescuing two men whose boat had caught fire off Lime Kiln Point. He provided the men with dry clothing and housed them at the light station until they were taken to Friday Harbor for pickup.

The Settles family arrived in 1935 during the Great Depression. Helga Settles, wife of principal keeper Arvel Settles, left behind a wealth of memories of life at the light station, giving us a picture of Lime Kiln Light Station in its heyday. The Settles had

been stationed at Grays Harbor Lighthouse and had requested a better climate for their son, Charles, who was afflicted with asthma. The dryer, more inland air at Lime Kiln seemed just right. The area is affectionately known as the Washington Banana Belt due to its moderate climate and clean air. Young Charles thrived there and spent the remainder of his life on San Juan Island.

Helga Settles recalled in a newspaper interview in 1992 that the family had no experience with ferry schedules, the necessary island-to-island rhythms that ruled life in the San Juan Islands. The children were delighted riding on the large boats that plied the many isles in the Salish Sea. San Juan Island, the second largest of the 170-plus San Juan Islands group, was the last stop on the U.S. ferry route, which went on to Sydney, British Columbia. Lime Kiln Point looked out over the border between the United States and Canada, and from there one could see the ferries to the north sailing their final leg as they crossed Haro Strait.

After the family arrived on San Juan Island that first summer, they asked directions to the lighthouse. A clerk in the island drug store told them to take the main road east and then northeast until it ended. The closer they got to the lighthouse, the bumpier and rougher the road became. At Deadman's Bay—a horrid name, to be sure—the car was stopped and they waited 15 minutes to be sure the hairpin turn around the ravine was clear of traffic. The final stretch of the trip was rough and narrow.

The Settles thought they had been assigned to a lighthouse at the end of the world, but to their complete amazement it turned out to be its own little paradise. The station was abloom with roses, dahlias, and hollyhocks and had an ample vegetable garden. Wildflowers grew around the light station in a vibrant carpet of color, and the view was incomparable—a panorama of the Haro Strait, with its ship traffic moving in and out of the southern entrance to the Georgia Strait, pods of whales passing below the lighthouse, bald eagles soaring and fishing for salmon, and the snow-capped Olympic Mountains in the distance.

There was no electricity at the light station in 1935, though most of the nation's lighthouses were electrified by this time.





**The Settles family was photographed during their time at Lime Kiln Lighthouse. Arvel Settles is on the right. Helga, his wife, stands next to him. Settles family photo.**

Arvel Settles kept the lens turning with clockworks and fired up the kerosene generators and compressors when the third-class Daboll foghorns were needed. His son, Charles, recalled being paid 10 cents to wind up the clockworks for his father. The mercury in which the lens floated was sieved about four times a year to clean it. Sometimes, Charles' father would give him a bead of mercury to play with, and the boy would roll it down the tower's spiral stairs. There was little concern at that time about the dangers of mercury. In later years, Charles Settles liked to brag that he was sane and well, despite his exposure to the toxic substance.

The Settles burned oil lamps in their quarters. Helga did the laundry on a washboard and cooked on a wood stove. Coffee was kept ready, as at all light stations, and Helga was celebrated for her cooking. Local fishermen brought her salmon. Helga herself fished for cod. Every Sunday she made sponge cake because visitors came to Lime Kiln Point on that day. Arvel dressed in his blue wool keeper's uniform and welcomed people for tours of the light station.

The Cowell Lime Quarry was a short distance north of the lighthouse. The kilns at the quarry had given the point its name and imparted an alkaline smell to the area. The Settles' kids enjoyed watching wagonloads of wood pass by on the trip to fuel the kilns. Wood hauler Bob Flynn would stop on his way back for coffee. While he visited with Arvel and Helga, the children watered the horses and pretended to be cowboys. The kids also built a treehouse, went rabbit hunting, swam in the lagoon below the light-

house, or were sent on errands, such as walking to a nearby farm for eggs and meat or to pick fruit.

Agnes Settles was a young girl when her father was in charge of the lighthouse. In later life, Agnes wrote down some of her memories for her children.

A memory of her pet dog was bittersweet: "The dog's name was Dane, and he went everywhere with me and was a good pal. He had a doghouse outside but was not tied up. One day Mr. Edwards called. [He was a] neighbor a few miles up the road. We used to visit back and forth. He said he was sorry but Dane was getting into his field and had killed a sheep, so he had to shoot him. I was just devastated but later understood, as raising sheep was his livelihood. I never got another dog after that."

The children went to school in Friday Harbor. Their school clothes were ordered from the Sears Roebuck catalogue. After Arvel Settles bought Helga a Singer sewing machine, she made most of the clothes for the family. The Settles' kids walked about a mile, past the narrow and dangerous curve at Deadman's Bay, to catch the school bus. The bus was too big to go along the cliff road, so it met the kids at a large rock overlooking the strait and then turned around. The kids were lucky to have hot lunches served at school, cooked by local woman named Orpha Sutton. All the teachers were single women, a practice in the Depression Era. On the way home from school, the kids carried glass bottles of milk for the family, since there was no milk delivery to the point.

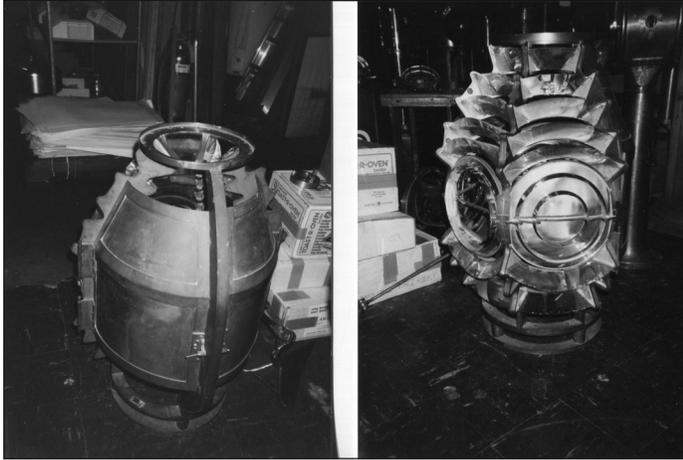
Agnes Settles recalled: "We had a radio that ran with a battery, so we enjoyed coming home from school to hear our favorite shows: *The Lone Ranger*, *The Amateur Hour*, *The Shadow*, *Amos and Andy*, *Fibber McGee and Molly*."

For his labors, Arvel Settles earned about \$110 a month. He shared the two daily watches with his assistant keeper. The optic was extinguished and wiped down every morning, and the incandescent oil vapor lamp was cleaned. Curtains were then pulled over the lantern windows to protect the apparatus. If fog came in, both men went to work to fire up the engines that helped produce the ear-splitting honks of the foghorns. The rest of their time was spent painting, repairing, and grooming the light station. And come evening, the lighting of the lamps launched the routine again. Helga recalled that her husband only sat down to write reports and correspondence, and she only sat to sew.

In 1951, six years after the Settles left the point, a submarine power cable was laid from Anacortes to San Juan Island. The island and the lighthouse at last had electricity.



**Almost all lightkeepers had pets, and the Settles family was no exception. Agnes Settles was pictured as a little girl with her dog, Dane. Sadly, the dog was shot by a neighbor after it chased and killed a sheep. Settles family photo.**



In the 1980s, the late author Jim Gibbs photographed what he thought was the original fourth-order lens from Lime Kiln Lighthouse in storage at Coast Guard District Thirteen. Its current location is unknown. Photos by Jim Gibbs from collection of Elinor DeWire.

The fourth-order lens was replaced by a 375 mm drum lens with an electric bulb and flash mechanism. The foghorns also were electrified. Coast Guard personnel maintained the place. About a decade later, the light station was automated and closed up as part of the Coast Guard's cost-savings automation effort. A fence surrounded the lighthouse, and "No Trespassing" signs warned interlopers that this was government property.

In 1978 the light station was added to the state and national registers of historic places. Six years later, Lime Kiln Point State Park was established on 41 acres surrounding the light station and the old site of the lime kilns. Park rangers took up residence in the old keepers' quarters and eventually built a third replica house to use as an administration office and shop. Additionally, the Whale Museum in Friday Harbor set up a research center inside the lighthouse.

Dr. Bob Otis is the primary research scientist, known for his large database of information on whale behavior. Lime Kiln has always been a popular orca viewing site, and the area was declared



Lime Kiln Lighthouse was photographed in 2005 by Elinor DeWire for one of her books. Photo by Elinor DeWire.

a marine sanctuary for the whales in 1985. Otis has collected a wealth of data on orca and boat interactions. Today, hydrophones off the lighthouse, as well as watchers in the lighthouse, track individual whales and pods and record their activity. Every June on the summer solstice, a choir from Seattle comes to the site and sings to the orcas. Orca Sing draws many visitors.

With the assistance of the nonprofit FOLKS (Friends of Lime Kiln Society), the lighthouse and its ancillary buildings are being rehabilitated and preserved. There is an interpretive center and gift shop on site, and tours are given of the lighthouse on select summer evenings. Rangers and FOLKS volunteer naturalists offer talks and programs on a variety of subjects related to the point. Their primary goal is to help visitors see the lighthouse within the context of its natural surroundings and its unique history.

FOLKS will celebrate the lighthouse's 100th birthday on June 30, 2019, with much fanfare. To find out more about the Centennial Celebration or to support the lighthouse, go to [FolksSJI.org](http://FolksSJI.org) or email: [info@FolksSJI.org](mailto:info@FolksSJI.org) or call: 360-378-5154.

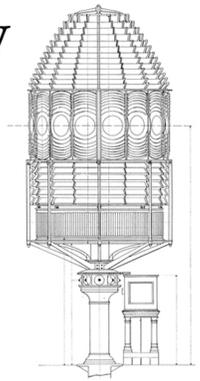
Left: Volunteers from FOLKS staff the interpretive center / gift shop. On the left is Erin Corra, Founder and Executive Director of Friends of Lime Kiln Society. FOLKS photo.



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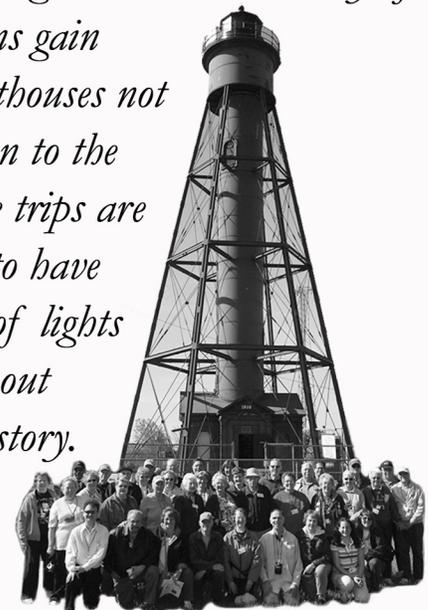
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