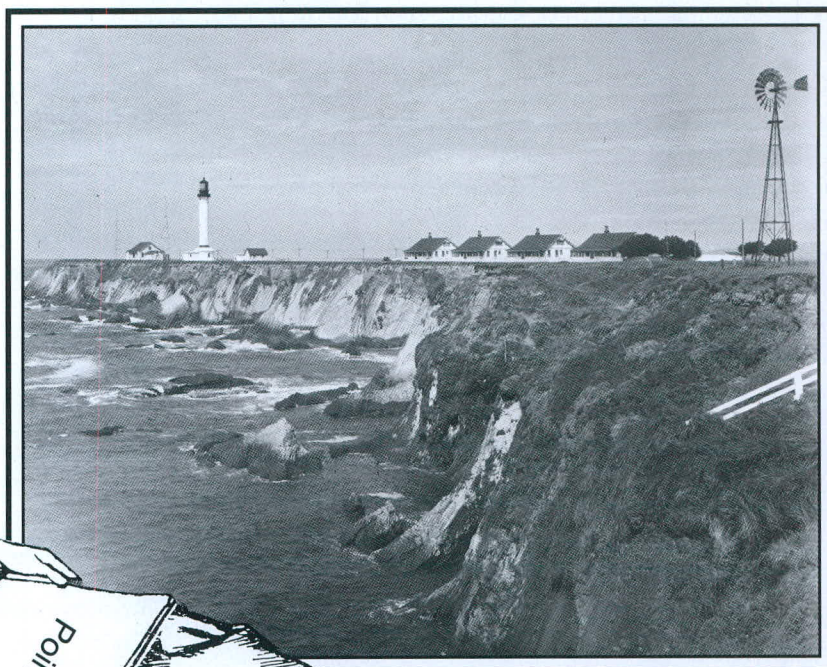


Point Arena



Point Arena Light Station. From right windmill for well, keeper's homes, oil house, tower and fog signal building. USLHS photo.

Lighthouse Memories Part III

By Cora Isabel Owens

On July 1, 1937, we started north again, hiring a truck to take our furniture. Since the transfer was at Bill's request, we had to pay for transportation of our household effects.

We went through several small towns before arriving at San Francisco, then we crossed the Golden Gate Bridge which had been completed the year before. The road was not too bad until we passed Jenner. In 1937, the Jenner Grade hardly seemed like a highway. It was fortunate we were driving during summer; in winter it was often closed because of slides. We kept climbing and climbing, curve after curve, the ocean always in view.

We passed Fort Ross, Gualala and Anchor Bay. When we arrived at the town of Pt. Arena we were told our new station was three miles further, so we continued on our way. I told the children the first one to see the lighthouse would get a nickel—Shirley saw it first.

The gate was closed but unlocked. We learned it was always closed, because of two or three cows on the property.

There were four houses in a row, we stopped at the first one and Mr. Elmer Williams, the head keeper, came out to greet us. We were assigned the house at the end of the row; it was apparent that all four houses were built by the same plan, which was not the case on many light stations. The front and back yards were large, and fenced in with a picket fence in front, a high board fence in the back, and two high lattice fences on each side of the house separating the front and back yards. I thought it was a good yard for croquet and for the children to play in.

After our experience with the living quarters at Pt. Sur, I was anxious to look over our new home, and I was very happy to find there was plenty of room, even for our family of seven. There was a very large kitchen, large dining room,

average sized living room, utility room, pantry, bathroom, two bedrooms, a sun porch and two open porches, front and back, all downstairs. Upstairs there were two more bedrooms. The master bedroom was downstairs with the intercom telephone. We decided to put the three younger children in one of the downstairs bedrooms and the older two upstairs. One room was left over for a guest room—this was more like living!

Out back was a shed for storing coal and a barn for a cow. A ruling from the District Office allowed a Keeper to have a cow where there was enough grazing land. There was also a chicken house and pen. We bought a Jersey cow and a small flock of chickens. A section of the backyard was fenced off for a garden, but it would have to wait for the next Spring—although there were several plants of rhubarb already flourishing. I guess you could say we had a mini-farm.

Keeper Williams had a wife and two

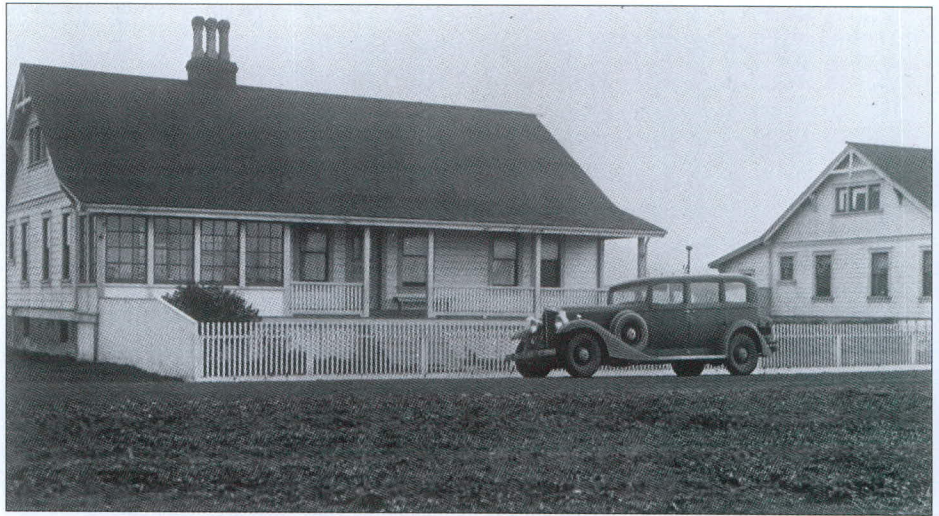
children still at home, there was also Mr. & Mrs. Lovell Hamilton with two children, Mr. & Mrs. Lilburn Titus, with five young children. Mr. Hamilton and Mr. Titus were related—uncle and nephew, and natives of the Pt. Arena-Manchester area. It was a very friendly atmosphere among the families and it didn't take long for the thirteen children at the station to get acquainted.

In the town of Pt. Arena there were two grocery stores, three churches (Catholic, Methodist and Presbyterian,) three service stations, an elementary school, high school, three hotels, two motels and a movie theatre. The Pt. Arena Elementary School had very good teachers, and three rooms for about 100 pupils, a change from the one-room school and nine pupils at Pt. Sur. Earlier, during the logging era, the town was larger than in 1937.

Bill did the milking at first, but after a few months he developed an allergy to the hay. Then Sarah Lou and Shirley learned to milk and took turns at it; they continued until they graduated from high school, then I took over. Our cow Bessie gave lots of good rich milk. We used about half of it for drinking and cooking, the rest was set aside for butter, buttermilk and cheese. Nothing was wasted.

One morning I started for the barn to milk Bessie. She was nowhere in sight. It was raining and I was getting soaked looking for her. Finally I decided to walk around the bluff to see if she had fallen off. As I walked behind the engine room I saw her standing on a ledge about seven or eight feet down from the top. I called to her to come up. She tried, but every time she put her hoof on the bank, it gave way as the soil was very soft from the rain. I went for help. The men rigged up a block and tackle and used the Packard to pull her up. Two men got down where she was and tied a rope around her; then, they pushed as Bill started pulling with the Packard. When she was back on top, they removed the rope, and she just walked away as though nothing had happened.

There was commercial electricity from the Pacific Gas & Electric Company to run the equipment in the engine



Above—The Owens house at Point Arena in the late 1930's. These bungalows were constructed in 1909, replacing the original brick fourplex that was badly damaged in the 1906 earthquake.

Below—Bessie, the cow, poses with Cora and five of her daughters.

Photos courtesy of the author.

Right—The twins, Jean and Joan Owens in the front yard. Photo courtesy of the author.



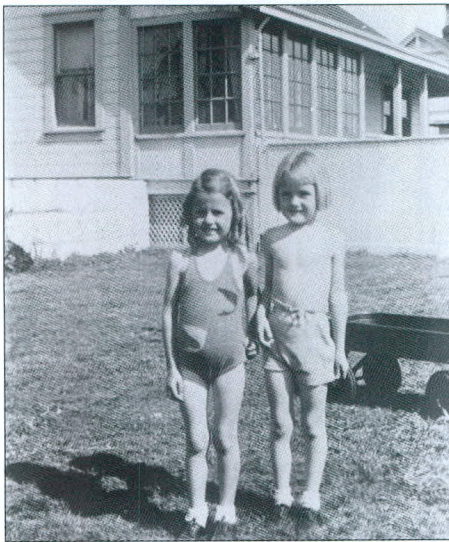
room and light tower. The station was also equipped with a large Kohler Generator which took over automatically if the power failed, as happened often during winter. Mr. Williams also had a small Kohler generator which produced enough D.C. electricity to run his washing machine. He had extended the wiring to the two houses close to him, so they also could use washing machines. He very generously offered us the same privilege. Bill put the electric motor back on our washing machine and we bought an electric iron.

We had not been there very long when wiring for overhead lights and outlets was installed. They also installed an electric cook stove. I was glad to know we would have electricity for lights and ironing. I immediately purchased two irons for AC. (This was before wash and wear materials.) With five girls, having two irons meant that one of the girls could help with the ironing. At first, I

used the DC iron, and had the girls use the two new irons, but we kept on blowing fuses. Bill had the electrician check on us. He told us the wiring wasn't meant to handle such a load, so we cut down to two irons. Each keeper was allowed 360 KWH of electricity per month.

If I seem to dwell on the living conditions of the stations and their surrounding areas, it was because that was my concern as mother of the family. Of course, at the light stations, the fathers were the head of the family, but their main concern was to keep the station equipment operating, and keep the buildings in repair. Their jobs depended on that, just as ships depended on the fog horn in foggy weather, the light at night, and the radiobeacon at all times.

The next spring, I got to work on the garden. I planted the usual vegetables. As they grew, I discovered it wouldn't be an easy situation: the soil was very good, but there were dozens of hungry gophers. It was a constant battle to see who would get most of the crop. I could stand still in the garden and hear the gophers biting into the carrots, cabbage roots and potatoes. With each bite of a carrot, the plant would wiggle! I started setting traps and caught a great many. But that was too slow, so I used Bill's .22 rifle and got many of them that way. I have never seen as many gophers as were at Pt. Arena Light Station!



Joan Silva:

You really did live in a lighthouse?" People ask that in disbelief when they find out I grew up on a light-station. I have fond memories of Pt. Arena. I remember arriving there, as a four-year-old girl. A little neighbor girl standing on the sidewalk watched us as we five children piled out of the car, one by one. I don't know if she was fascinated by the thought of having playmates, or was just trying to figure out how so many kids could fit in the back seat of one car.

Mom always had a huge garden. One of our chores was to pull weeds—that job was not particularly liked by any of us. When we got to the peas and carrots, we spent most of our time eating them, as they always tasted better right off the ground. After all the vegetables were picked and cleaned, Mom canned for days. I remember the cellar stairway shelves and basement lined with row after row of jars; she also bought fruit to make preserves. I know it was a lot of hard work for her, but she seemed pleased with her accomplishments when the task was done. Mom had always wanted to live on a farm like she had as a child; I think she brought the farm to the lighthouse.

Jean Carpenter:

In the "good old days" many women still delivered their babies at home. I remember when Mom was about ready to deliver my youngest sister, Diana. A midwife had come to live with us as the time drew near. I remember how Dad had to keep the old coal kitchen stove heated so the baby could be brought into the kitchen to be washed clean and wrapped in blankets. He kept telling us to keep the kitchen door shut so the heat would stay. Finally, when the event took place I remember the midwife, a lovely older lady from the mountains, bringing the new baby into the kitchen. Joan and I were only five years old at the time, but I knew that it was a momentous occasion. Diana was a healthy baby, to the delight of Mom, as the nearest hospital was forty-eight miles away.

In March 1939 our sixth and last daughter arrived. We named her Diana; the older girls were delighted to have a baby in the house again.

There was a very good little beach at one corner of the property, back of the barn. The children often went there. They looked for shells and they liked to explore the caves between the beach and the mouth of the Garcia River. Shirley even found a nameplate, inscribed for the schooner *Crescent City*.

Bill was offered a transfer as Head Keeper to Cape St. Elias Station in Alaska, at \$1800 per annum. However, it was an isolated station suitable only for bachelors with no family living quarters. Since he had left Baltimore to get away from the cold weather he preferred to remain at Pt. Arena.

Three or four ladders had been installed from the bluffs down to the rocks. The men would go down to get abalone now and then. Some of the rungs were missing and the ladders were in bad shape. They had been there for a long time. Long after the girls were

grown, and Bill had retired, they told me they had often gone up and down the ladders. The younger children went, too. The two older girls looked after them.

There was another escapade that Sarah was involved in. There was a big blow hole that everybody called the Devil's Punch Bowl. Mr. Williams told us that one man had fallen in it and before they could rig up a rescue he washed out through the hole at one side of the bottom, and was never seen again. I would guess that it was about 40 feet deep and 25 feet across. Sarah, a girl friend and two young Coast Guard boys climbed down to the bottom and then back out. I would not have thought it possible. The sides are more sheer and smooth now, and I don't believe anyone could possibly climb it today. I still don't understand how the girls could do those things without either Bill or me knowing; they were always around when I wanted them, or when meals were ready. I guess they were learning to be self-reliant, but, at what risk!

Sarah Lou Swartz:

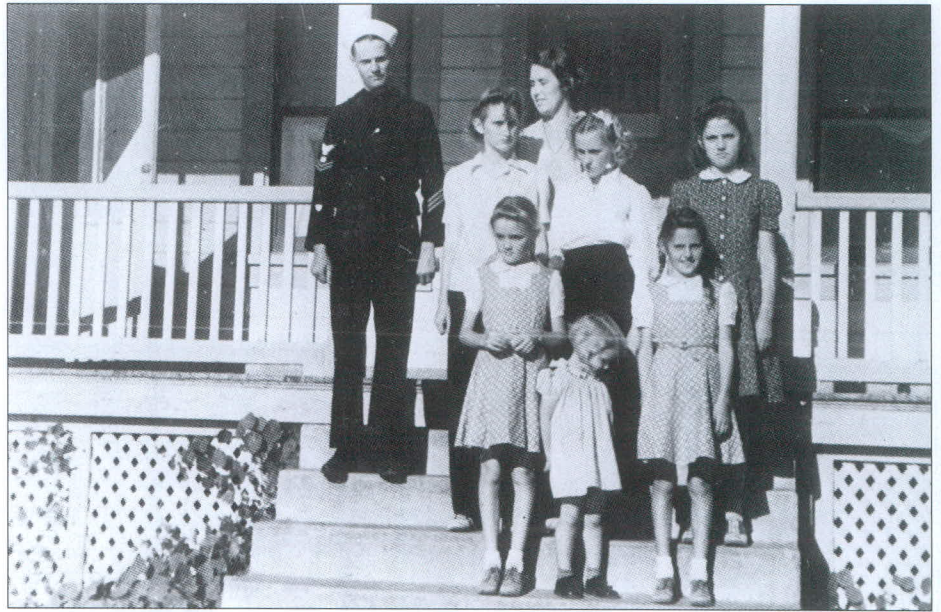
We loved crossing the river and going to the beach to look for glass balls. We'd cross at the mouth of the river when the tide was low. If the water got up to our neck we'd turn around and go back to cross further up the river. (Ed.—these girls never learned to swim, but that didn't stop them.) We had figured out the best spots for crossing. Then we'd return home when the tide was low again. If we wanted to cross and the tide was too high, we would take our dad's boat and row across. Over the years we found lots of glass balls by the sand dunes, as well as flint stones.

In the evenings, we would sometimes all sit out on the porch steps wrapped up in blankets, look at the stars or make up different things from the shapes of the clouds. Mom knew all the constellations...

In March of 1939, a situation arose where Bill was the only man on station. Mr. Williams was away on leave. The first assistant had been fired a short time before, and the third assistant went into town, got drunk, and did not come back. The fog horn had run for several hours. Bill was alone on watch all night, and was overcome with weakness and fatigue and passed out just after shutting down the fog horn. When he came to, he managed to sit out the rest of the night. In the morning he called the office of Superintendent Rhodes, telling him of the situation, and asking for another man to help out. Capt. Rhodes didn't have anyone available, so he gave Bill permission to hire someone locally. He got a man from the ranch next to the lighthouse and then he went to see the government doctor in Mendocino. The doctor found that his heart was weak, and prescribed Digitalis. Later in the year, in October, he had to go to the Marine Hospital and learned he had digitalis poisoning. He was allergic to it.

Harmon Day from Pt. Sur Light Station, was sent up temporarily. He decided Pt. Arena was a good station and submitted a request to be transferred there permanently. Bill would have been in line for the promotion, but Mr. Day had seniority. A short time later he was transferred to an Alaskan station. Then a Mr. Miller asked for the vacancy; as he also had seniority over Bill, he got it. (This was a different Mr. Miller than the one we had known at Pt. Sur.) When Mr. Miller left Pt. Arena in 1942, Bill was made First Assistant Keeper at last. When Elmer Williams retired, the next head keeper was Oliver Berg, who had been on The Farralon Islands for several years. Mr. Berg retired in 1945 and Bill was appointed Officer-in-Charge.

In October of 1939, the Lighthouse Services personnel were notified that The Service was being united with the Coast Guard. President Roosevelt felt it would save money. Rumors were flying thick and fast, it was a very unsettling time for us. We heard all lighthouse civilian keepers would have to enlist in the Coast Guard, or give up



Bill Owens, looking remarkably like Jimmy Cagney, in his Coast Guard uniform during WWII with Cora and all six daughters. Cora Owens photo.

their jobs. And, if they did enlist, it would be with a rating of Coxswain, at a base pay of only \$60.00 a month, and they would have to pass a physical examination. There were very few really young men on the stations; it was doubtful if they could pass a young man's physical. Also keepers would lose credit for the years they had worked towards retirement, as well as any unused leave they had. Most lighthouse keepers had families and had expected to stay with the service until retirement. It was several months before everything was settled. The final decision was that lighthouse personnel could remain civilian keepers of the Federal Lighthouse Service until they retired.

Shortly after the merging with the Coast Guard, the Officers-in-Charge were ordered to pack all lighthouse logs and send them to the District Office. When Bill was packing his office I looked through a few of them. Mostly they recorded routine daily work. Some had a little extra information: an account of a couple being married in the tower, a sighting of a bear on the station. Another told of an epidemic during the late 1800's when a keeper was sent into the town of Pt. Arena to care for the sick.

Originally all lighthouse keepers had

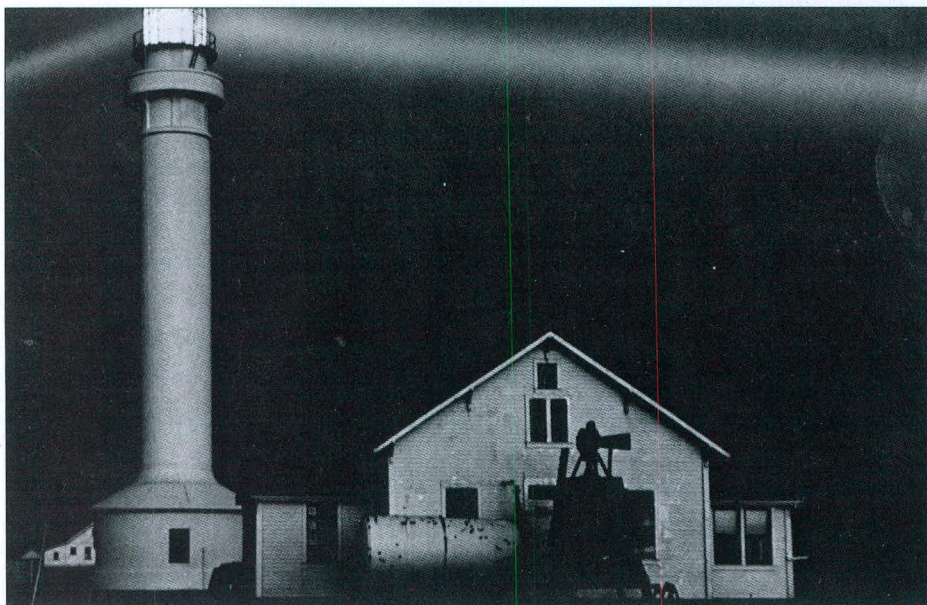
their own furniture, but the Coast Guard decided to furnish all the houses, and we had to get rid of some of our things to make room. They also laid dull brown linoleum on the downstairs floors.

Dixie Spence:

I was eleven years old when WWII started. I remember that the parents of our girl friends who lived in town, five miles away, would not let them spend the night with us because we were so close to the ocean. They thought the enemy would land.

But I also remember times at the beach, and roller skating on the long sidewalk in front of the four houses. We had the type of skates you clamp on to shoes. Afternoons we would listen to the radio, I think our favorite program was "Captain Midnight."

During our summer vacation from High School, some of us worked in the fields picking peas; I also worked at Titus Soda Fountain, earning \$1.00/hour. It seemed like a lot at the time.



Point Arena at night from seaward. The watchroom where Jean went (after hours) to 'spark' with her boyfriend is on the right side of the fog signal building. Cora Owens photo.

World War II started in 1941. In time of war the Coast Guard is automatically placed under jurisdiction of the Navy. It then became necessary for civilian keepers to enlist in a military service, at least for the duration of the war, since the government would not keep civilians on any of their installations. After considerable correspondence Bill joined the Coast Guard Reserve on October 6, 1942, with the understanding that he would remain at Pt. Arena and could return to his civilian status after the war.

The war changed things quite a bit. Since the West Coast was closest to Japan, there were three systems of watches. The lighthouse crew had to report by phone to San Francisco everything sighted on the ocean or in the air. There was a civilian watch about 1 mile from the lighthouse. A group of about 30 soldiers were sent to the station temporarily while they set up a barracks for them elsewhere. When their arrangements were completed they rode horses to keep watch along the coast. At all times they had one man riding south, and another riding north. Our windows were blacked out and our cars had to run with only parking lights until special dim lights could be installed. But the bright light at the lighthouse continued to be turned on at night.

Bill had orders from the District Office that all cars on the station should be full of gas, have food to carry in the cars, blankets ready and all women and children ready to evacuate. We prepared and had all the children sleep downstairs that night. But no evacuation call came. I never heard if there really was a chance of invasion or if it was only for practice.

The War brought rationing of certain foods, gas, and auto tires. There were different-colored stamps: white for sugar, red for meat and butter. Also green, blue and gray stamps; I don't remember what they were for. We were driving a Packard at the time, and using it as a school bus. The school did not have a bus to send our way, so they gave me a contract for driving. Our car got about eight miles per gallon of gas. It was considered a necessity to get the children to school so we got all the gas and tires we needed.

There were usually three or four Coast Guardsmen living in one house on the station; as service men they were allowed all the stamps they needed. At the end of a month Bill found out from the stores in town how many stamps were needed for their purchases. He wrote a check for the stamps (no money) so the storekeepers could keep their records accurate for their government report.

Diana Brown:

My earliest memories are of tagging after my sisters, especially Jean, to the beaches surrounding our home. As my sisters became teenagers, my mom and dad had their hands full, what with all those single guys' quarters right next door. I was always the tag-along who couldn't understand why she wasn't welcome when her sisters would be talking with some of the fellows at the station.

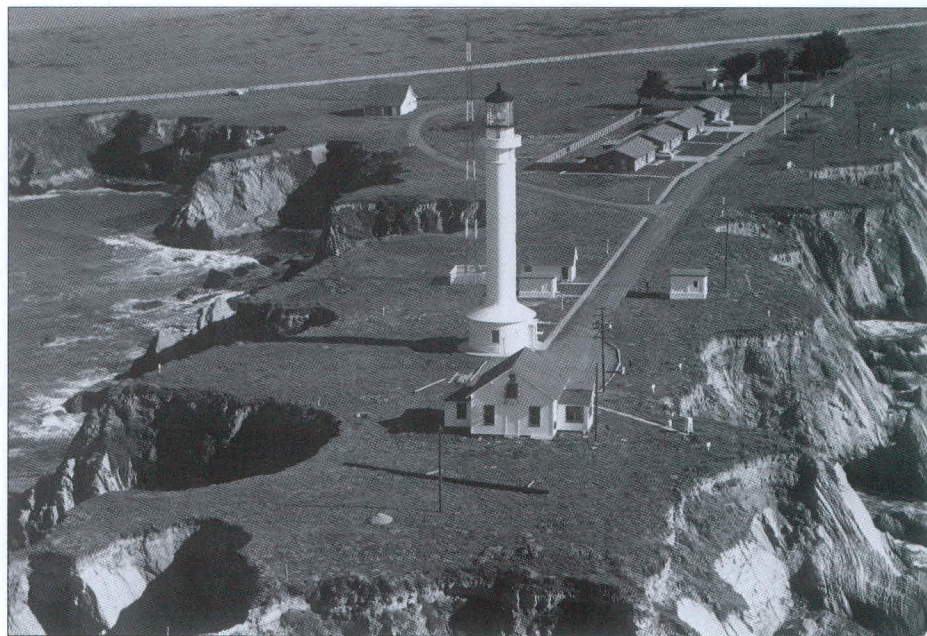
The floors of the lightstation were covered with what they called battleship linoleum, very hard to keep clean and shined. Since we were liable to have the quarters inspected at any time, it was an ongoing battle. When Mom would wax the floor, she would fix up an old pair of pants with a pillow sewn in the seat part. One of us would sit on the pillowed part and a sister would grab the legs and slide you around the floor. We thought it was great fun. If Mom had told us that the purpose was to buff the floors, I'm sure we wouldn't have decided it was fun after all.

My sister developed a crush on one of the crew. I might add, she married him. But at the time Dad was pretty strict about his daughters being too friendly with the guys. One dark evening Jean, Joan and I were playing hide and seek. Jean's boyfriend was on watch down at the tower, and she decided to sneak down to see him. I was to tell everyone she was still "hiding." As Dad was sleeping, since he had the watch at midnight, she thought there wouldn't be any problem. Well, as luck would have it, fathers have a second sense—five minutes after Jean left, Dad took off for the watch tower. We weren't allowed to play hide and seek for a long time after that.

The Lifeboat Station, the Loran Station, Pt. Cabrillo Light Station and Point Arena Light Station were united in a Coast Guard unit with the Officer in Charge of the Lifeboat Station having authority over all. Somebody in the chain of command decided Bill had been on Pt. Arena long enough. He was ordered by the Officer in Charge to go to Pigeon Point Light Station. Bill did not want to go and stalled. He tried and tried to reach the Commander of the District, but he was away on leave. Finally, the Officer in Charge of the Local Station told Bill if he wasn't on his way to Pigeon Pt. the next morning he would send some men over to put him on the bus. Bill tried once more to reach the District Commander by phone and was successful at last. He explained the situation, relating he would like to stay at Pt. Arena. The Commander said to just sit tight, and he would get back to him shortly. All the Coast Guard units were on the same telephone line. When Bill heard the ring for the Lifeboat Station, he quietly took the receiver down and listened to the District Commander tell the Lifeboat Station C.O. to: "...leave Owens alone."

One morning as Bill was going on watch he saw something about a mile off the coast. He thought it was a sub, but wasn't sure. He called in to report it and was told by the Officer of the Day: "There are no subs in these waters, go back to bed and get some sleep." I also saw it as I was washing the dishes. A day later a Japanese sub sank a lumber schooner north of the station. The next day some officers came to the station to swear Bill to secrecy. Bill wanted to know how long they wanted him to keep quiet about it, and was told: "Until after the war."

A few miles south of Pt. Arena on the Olson Sheep Ranch, the owner was riding his horse around the ranch. As he got close to bluff he heard a humming noise. He rode closer to see what it was and spied a Japanese sub sitting in close to the bluff, apparently recharging. He called the District Office to report it. They sent a plane over to bomb it. The first one missed, the second one went down the hatch and that was the end of



Point Arena Light Station in the 1950's. The oil building is right of the tower and the old barn left of the lantern room. The bungalows of the Owens' era had, by this date, been replaced by 'modern' ranch style buildings. Note the severe erosion of the cliffs. USLHS photo.

the submarine. After the sinking, the newspapers printed pictures of two types of Japanese subs. One of them was exactly like what I had seen.

At the end of the war some airplanes came home to their base from the South Pacific. Pilots were ordered by someone to take the planes on a trial flight as far as Pt. Arena and back. The planes had not been serviced; they got as far as Pt. Arena, ran out of fuel and all went down in the ocean. A terrible mistake by the someone...

In the meantime, Congress had ordered raises to all government employees, so we profited from that on his return to civilian status. The position of lighthouse keeper had been listed in the Classified Civil Service system. Now under the Coast Guard, who made it clear they would not hire any more civilian keepers, they were withdrawn from the Classified Civil Service System and listed as (F.L.H.S.) Federal Lighthouse Service Employees.

On July 1, 1943, Bill made Bosun Mate First Class. On August 11, 1943, he was ordered to the San Francisco Aids to Navigation School for instruction in being a lighthouse keeper, in spite of his 10 year's service. The Coast Guard preferred the title of Officer-in-

Charge, rather than Head Keeper, when he was put in charge of Pt. Arena Light Station, in August 1945. We had fared better financially under enlistment, as the military paid compensation for wife and family. On December 11, 1945, he was returned to civilian status. Civilian keepers would still be in line for promotions as openings became available, and Headquarters in Washington, DC would have the final say concerning any action involving civilian lighthouse personnel.

Bill received a letter of Excellent Performance of duty from Commandant W. K. Scammel dated 13 August. A Coast Guard PBY plane had crashed one-half mile north of our Pt. Arena Light Station on August 7, 1946. Bill witnessed the crash and immediately called the Pt. Arena Lifeboat Station and the district office in San Francisco with the location. As a result, the body of Warren Zinkel, AOMIC, USCG, was recovered by the lifeboat.

Early in 1948, a Coast Guard enlisted man, Charles Garber, arrived with his wife and child at Pt. Arena to take over as Officer-in-Charge. Bill had not been notified of any change. A prominent member of the Pt. Arena community wrote to Congressman Clarence F. Lee protesting such treatment of a civilian lighthouse keeper by the Coast Guard.

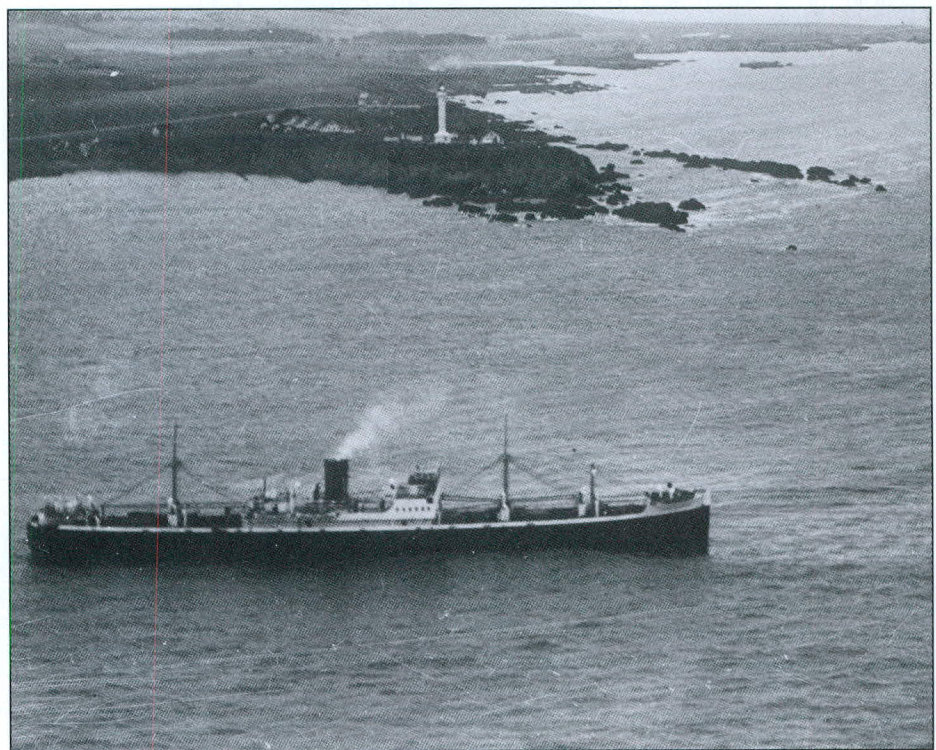
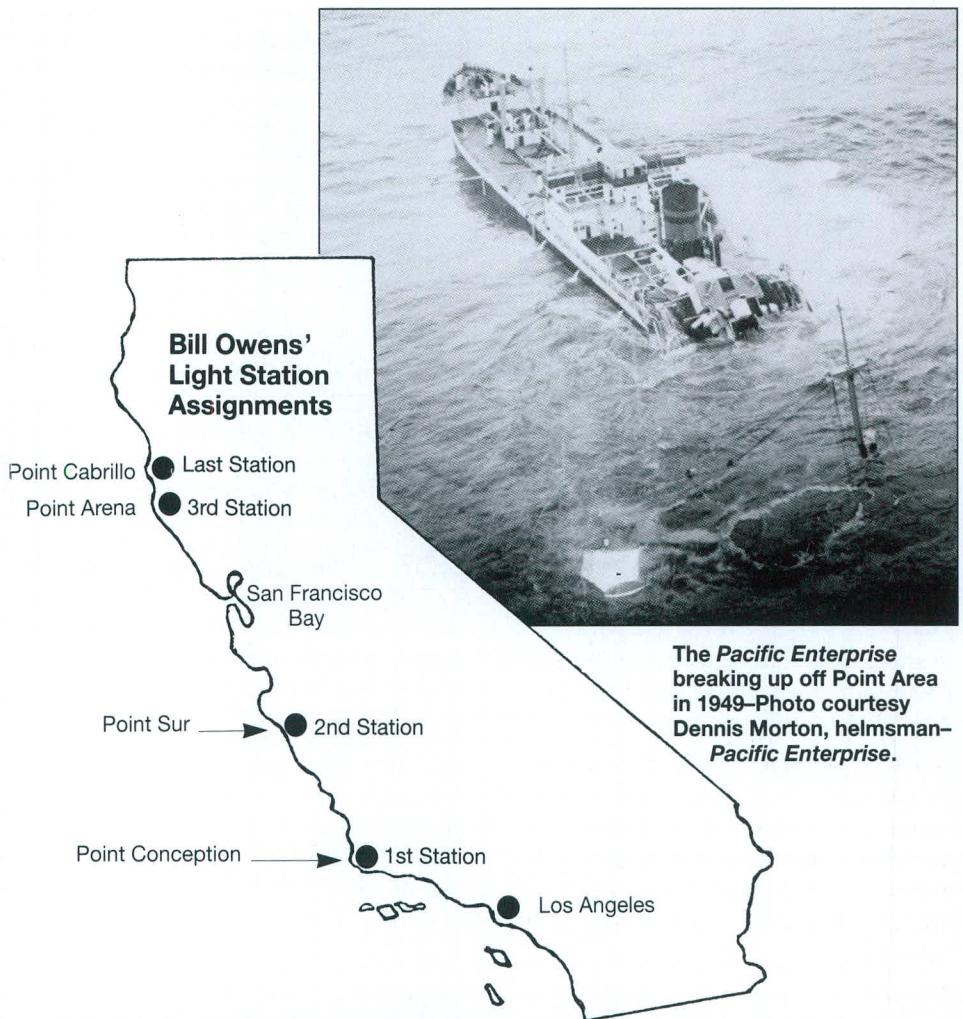
This tense situation continued for several months. Garber would stand no night watches, so Bill refused also. After all, he had no notice that he was no longer the Officer-in-Charge. Bill continued his work on the station. Garber was eventually transferred after a few months and Bill resumed the duties of Officer-in-Charge.

The misunderstandings between the Coast Guard and the civilian lighthouse personnel continued for a while. A lighthouse employee had always been able to take his leave during summer months when the children were not in school so as not to interrupt their education. Not so under the Coast Guard. About June 1, orders arrived stating no lighthouse personnel could take leave until further notice. Around September 1, another order arrived cancelling the first one. So, Bill started taking leave in October, by fishing in the Garcia River. The children didn't seem to mind, but I did. I had been rather confined, taking care of a family of eight, and keeping the house clean for those inspections I knew were coming any time.

On the morning of September 9, 1949, we saw there was a very thick fog surrounding the Point. The Station's fog horn had been blowing for some time. We could barely see the fog signal building from our kitchen. Then we heard a ship blowing its fog signal. Each blast sounded closer and closer until it sounded like it was in our back yard. Bill suddenly left the breakfast table to go see if something was wrong and he was in time to hear the crash. A British freighter of the Furnace Line, the *PACIFIC ENTERPRISE*, had struck Wash Rock, about one mile from the Point.

Bill called the Lifeboat Station and District Office. Meantime, the fog began to lift and the ship could be seen. It was in no immediate danger of sinking, and the crew was allowed to stay aboard. By the third day the waves had pounded her until there were signs of it breaking up, and the Coast Guard ordered all off. The passengers were taken to the San Francisco immigration office.

The Captain of the ship had thought he was near the Farallon Islands. He was



The Pacific Enterprise hard aground off Point Arena in 1949. The ship went around 9 minutes after 9 a.m. on the 9th day of the 9th month of 1949. The helmsman was 19 years old and on his 9th voyage and the ship's number was 149499. Photo courtesy of the Point Arena Lighthouse Keepers Assoc.

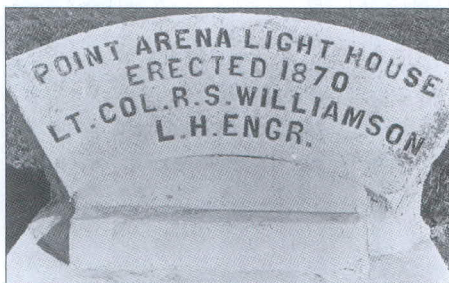
on his last trip before retiring. Several ports had given him a party to celebrate his pending retirement and the tragedy hit him so hard he had a nervous breakdown. Some people thought the accident meant the loss of his retirement pension, but we never learned the outcome.

Crowds of people flocked to the station to see the disaster. Bill and the station crew had their hands full keeping the people from walking too close to the bluffs. Our Daughter Diana, then ten, saw a chance to make some money: a friend had left us a box of peaches on the front porch, and she sold them for ten cents each to passers-by.

The next day, while on my way to the barn to milk the cow, I heard a loud whistling sound, and then the sound of wood and metal being torn apart. I turned around to watch as an air tank broke out of the side of the ship and floated south. The bow of the ship was listing as though breaking loose and by the next morning the ship was gone.

Some of the cargo floated onto the beaches: cans of snuff and salmon, hundred pound sacks of flour and much lumber. The flour had about one inch of soggy crust but the interior was dry. People kept coming to salvage what they could find on the beaches. Lumber was picked up by a rancher, but it was too valuable to be given, free—he was given the choice of paying for it or giving it up. A rug floated in, and one of the Coast Guard men was going to cut it up to put on the floor of his car. I offered him \$5.00, instead, and he accepted. It was an oriental rug which I still have.

We had a few humorous incidents. While Bill was serving as an enlisted man in the Coast Guard Reserve, it was required that he always wear a hat with his uniform, when on duty. Weather permitting, he often went without it. Two officers, on an inspection trip, reprimanded him for not having the hat on when they arrived. A year later, when he had returned to civilian status the same officers came again. Bill happened to be wearing the hat, until he recognized them—he quickly took his hat off. As soon as the officers got out of their car



Keeper Owens found this stone lintel from the original tower in the surf off Point Arena.

Jean Carpenter:

The day of the *PACIFIC ENTERPRISE* disaster the Coast Guard Cutter *GREESHAM* was sent to the area for rescue of the English officers and crew. Unknown to me there was a sailor aboard who was later to become my husband. After nothing more could be done about the *ENTERPRISE*, one Edward Carpenter received his transfer papers to report for duty under the direct command of my father. How my mother and father managed to keep control of six daughters living on the station with Coast Guard sailors living next door would probably fill a book in itself! One night, when Mother had gone into town, and Dad was sleeping on the couch, I thought it would be a perfect time to visit Ed at the signal room where he was standing watch. It was dark and foggy as I took the path near the bluffs, so no one would see me, as we were not allowed near the signal room. After being so foolhardy to walk that close to those bluffs at night, I was lucky to arrive at the destination intact. Then, as I opened the door into the signal room, I couldn't believe my eyes: my Father was standing there, talking to Ed. Even to this day I don't know how he knew I had a rendezvous with Ed or how he managed to arrive before I did. It certainly confirmed my belief that parents are psychic.

one remarked to Bill, "I told you to wear your hat when on duty." Bill said, "I'm a civilian now, and it is not required of a civilian."

On another occasion two officers arrived for an inspection. First of all, they noticed that the station truck did not have valve caps on the tires. Bill said they were lost. The officers started out to inspect the fog signal. Bill told one of his men to take the caps off the officers' car, throw them away and get lost himself—go into town or someplace. Later, when the officers were finished inspecting the fog signal and tower, they returned to their car. Bill looked over and remarked that they did not have valve caps on their tires, either. The officers looked at their wheels and said they must have lost them. I'm certain they realized what must have happened, but they didn't say any more about it.

The light tower had to be painted or white-washed often. A method they used for a while was for one man to get in a barrel and be hoisted up as far as needed. Since Bill was the lightest weight of any one around, he was the one in the barrel until he became Officer-in-Charge.

The station was open to visitors every afternoon. Of course everyone wanted to go up in the tower to see the lens. Whoever was on watch had to go up the 147 steps with them, sometimes several trips in one afternoon. While Bill enjoyed being with people, so many trips were getting to be too much. Shirley and Sarah learned to light the lamp and relieved him of that trip when he was on watch at light-up time. When Shirley married and left, and Sarah started working in the office of a creamery in Manchester, I took over that job.

Our family had grown up fast. Shirley married first, shortly after her graduation in 1945. Her husband, Clifford Stormes, was assigned to Pt. Arena Light Station. Then Sarah; her husband, Jack Swartz, was assigned to the Coast Guard Pt. Arena Loran Station. Next was Dixie, whose husband Richard Spence was also at the Loran Station. Then Joan married Don Silva, who was assigned to the Coast Guard Lifeboat Station. And finally, Jean married Ed Carpenter.

Eventually Bill decided to ask for a transfer to Pt. Cabrillo Light Station. There is a very short tower on top of the fog signal building and no radio beacon. His request was approved by a letter dated January 21, 1952. Since he was a civilian keeper, Coast Guard Headquarters in Washington as well as the District Office in San Francisco had to change the classification of Pt. Cabrillo from an all military unit to a combination civilian and military. Diana was the only daughter left at home to move with us to Pt. Cabrillo.

Shirley Stormes:

After moving to Pt. Arena and going to school there, I envied the town children. They had two grocery stores, a movie theatre, a shoe store, a butcher shop and other amenities—so many exciting things...

We spent a lot of time at the beaches. The treasures we found! Pretty shells, pieces of colored glass tumbled by the sea until they were smooth, sea anemones. We would also dig a hole near the water's edge, and make a game of seeing who could catch the most eels; we were careful to make the hole where we knew they would be okay until the tide came in.

When the weather didn't permit us to go outside, my sisters and I would play games such as Parchesi or Chinese Checkers. We also tried mental telepathy with cards.

Living there on the station was a comfortable life for me. There was something about the fog horn blowing and foggy weather that would lull me to sleep—it still does.



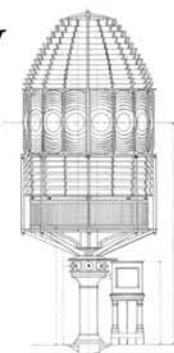
Keeper Bill Owens could keep a good watch on his six daughters from the lantern room. Cora Owens Photo.



The original Point Arena tower and brick fourplex, constructed in 1870, were badly damaged in the 1906 earthquake and had to be razed. This tower design was used at Pigeon Point, CA, Cape Hatteras, NC, Sand Island, AL and several other locations around the country. National Maritime Museum photo.



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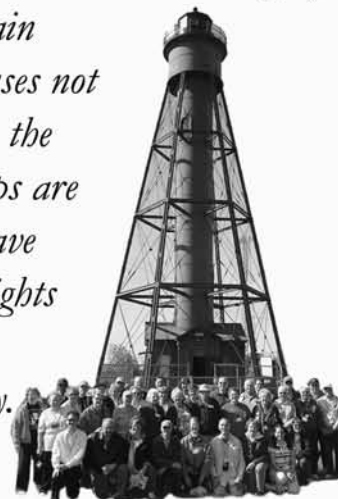
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