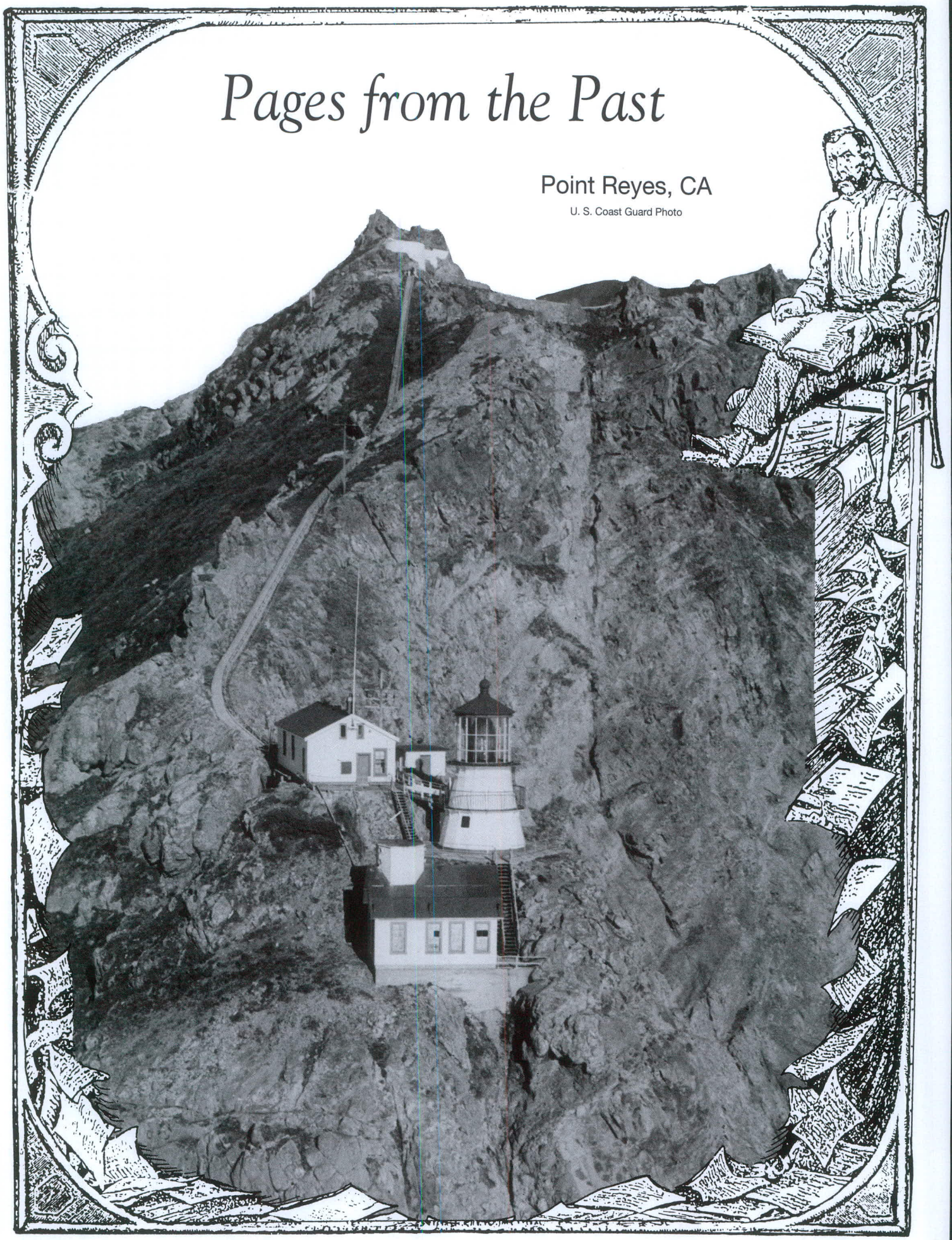
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Pages from the Past



Point Reyes, CA

U. S. Coast Guard Photo

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CAPTAIN LUDLOW

Ex-Keeper Ryan's Story of Point Reyes

The Lighthouse Inspector Wants Unfilled Vouchers Signed

J.C. Ryan, the late head keeper of the fog signal station at Point Reyes, tells a story which reflects but little credit on Captain U.N. Ludlow, the United States Lighthouse Inspector. Ryan held three positions as keeper. In July, 1883, he was at Ano Nuevo Lighthouse, in January, 1886, at Point Arena and in December, 1887, was appointed to the late office which he held till February 10 last. He is further an ex Union soldier, having belonged to the Army of the Potomac, and is in possession of ample testimonials of naval officers and others certifying to his sobriety, industry and honesty.

When sent out to Point Reyes, Captain Ludlow told him he would find things in a "horrible condition." This proved to be no exaggeration. Of the two sirens suppose to be in constant use during foggy weather, the south one was totally disabled, part of the castings lying round the station building. The north siren, which should blast for 5 seconds, with silent intervals of seventy seconds, could only be made to work by means of a sledgehammer once in thirty minutes, and sometimes only once in an hour and a half. This latter is confirmed by Captain Hooper of the revenue cutter *Corwin*, who lay off the point hours at a time, and seldom heard a sound. When Ryan applied for castings to repair the siren it took three months to get them to the station, and the carpenters were employed for six weeks at a time repairing windows, sashes, locks, etc., in the neglected "life preserving" institution. Captain Ludlow found, upon visiting the station, that the horns were working well, but complained of the cost and the fact that the place was not painted as it should be. Ryan informed the inspector that the painting would be attended to, but that in his opinion the putting into working order of the sirens was the more important matter. This did not please Ludlow and the troubles which resulted in Ryan's dismissal dated from that time. In addition to the useless sirens the late keeper says the arrangement of the buildings is most inconvenient, the dwellings being much too far from the signal station, some 800 yards according to his estimate, and an uphill journey at that. The work on the station is heavy, and for a great portion of the time he was short-handed, partially because the first assistant, an able and willing man, had a crushed hand and partly because Captain Ludlow sent men out who either couldn't or would not do the work required of them. It became necessary some months ago to have among the assistants a telegraph operator, and the first man, Feathers by name, was sent out and instructed to take his share of the work as third assistant keeper, similar instructions relative to the man being sent to Ryan. When asked to work in the fog signal station Feathers replied that he would be [damned] if he would. Ryan spoke well of Feathers otherwise and said that the man was not physically fit to do the work. In October last a man named Smails was sent to replace Feathers. Ludlow wrote that he had advanced money to Smails and that the man would do his share of the work as assistant keeper, in addition to whatever telegraphy there might be. Smails, however, was more obstinate than Feathers, and informed Ryan that Captain Ludlow had appointed him and that he would obey no orders.

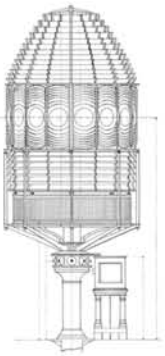
The schooner C.R. *Bishop* was spotted one morning in October, drifting in towards the reefs. Ryan went to Smails' place but was unable to arouse him. This was at 8 o'clock in the morning. The man refused to telegraph to San Francisco for a tug, and in support of this statement Mr. Ryan cites Messrs. Keep, Hanson, Stillstrong, Campbell and Crandall, all of whom saw the danger the schooner was in, and the efforts the keeper made to have Smails telegraph. Ultimately a farmer came to the rescue and rode to the nearest telegraph station, and a tug was then sent to the *Bishop's* assistance and saved her. At 11 o'clock in the day Smails made his first appearance, and then excused himself by saying that the line was down. On two other occasions Smails refused to telegraph or to allow Ryan's son, who was also able to operate, to send to this city for needed assistance.

Smails was called to San Francisco on November 2nd by Captain Ludlow and had never since been to Point Reyes up to the time Ryan left. The day following a substitute was appointed by Ryan according to custom. This action angered Ludlow, who sent a sharp letter to the already shorthanded keeper for daring to make the appointment. Shortly afterward a second letter was sent to Ryan by Ludlow, ordering him to sign a number of vouchers for keepers' and assistants' pay, without filling in the time they had worked. Ryan wrote back that he would not sign anything unless he filled in the blanks.

These vouchers state distinctly that the keeper certifies over his own signature that the man entitled to payment has worked the number of hours filled in at the regular spaces left in the printed matter. Ryan's refusal was the last straw, and on February 10th he received a notice from Washington dismissing him without assigning any cause.

San Francisco Chronicle
Friday, March 1, 1889

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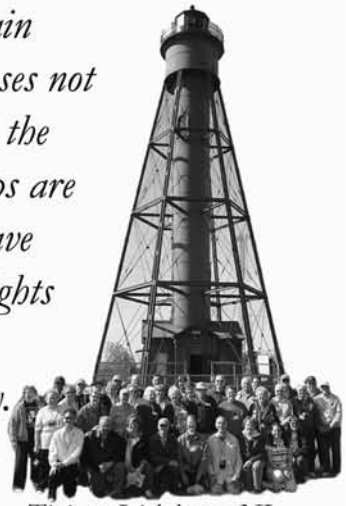
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