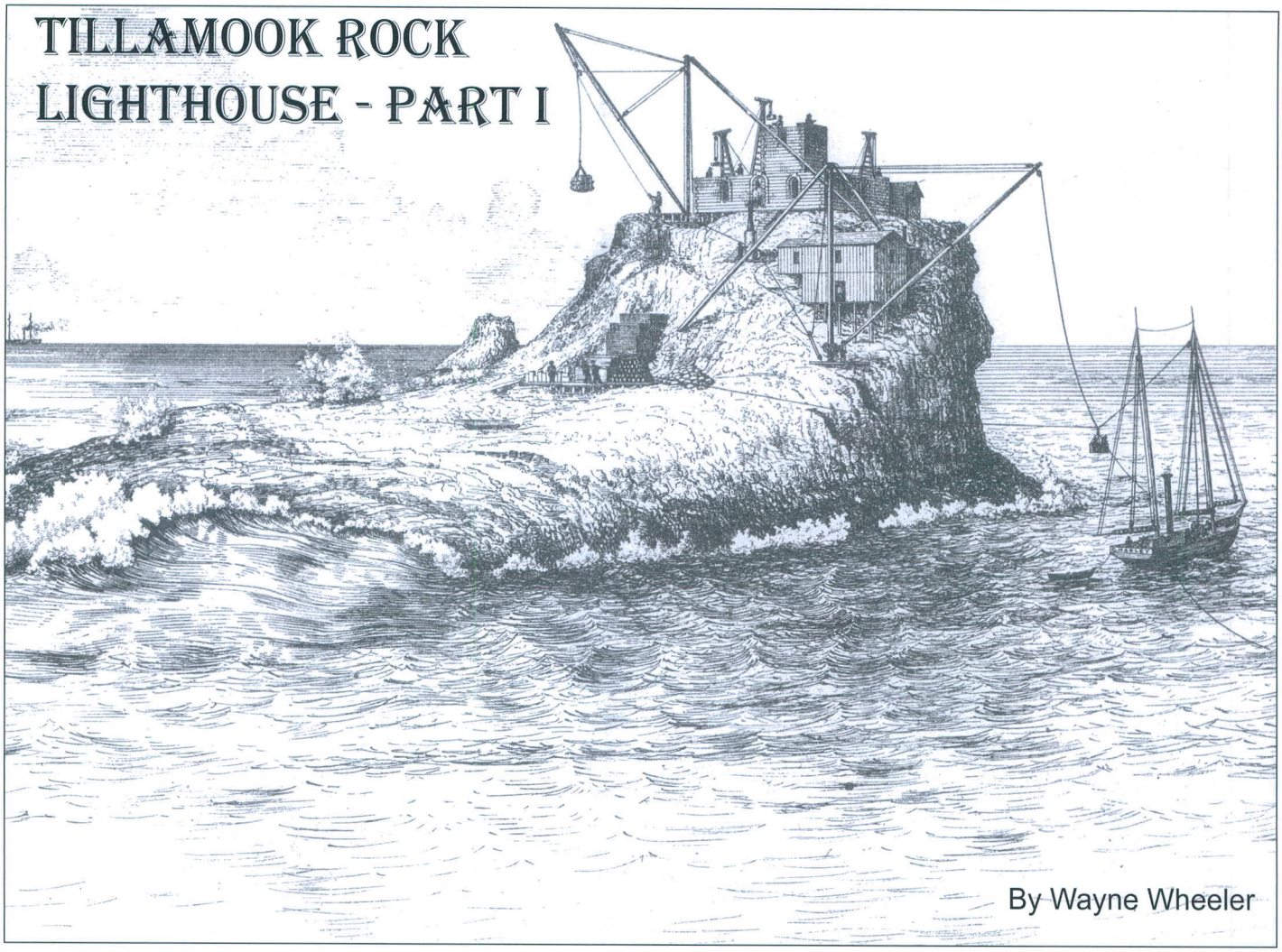
TILLAMOOK ROCK LIGHTHOUSE - PART I



By Wayne Wheeler

The Graveyard of the Pacific

The Graveyard of the Pacific is a nickname given to the coastal region in the Pacific Northwest stretching from Tillamook Bay, on the Oregon Coast, northward to the tip of Vancouver Island, Canada. The prevailing northwest winds and south-streaming Japanese current tend to set vessels onto the lee shore. This coupled with the region's heavy seas; frequent and unpredictable weather; fog; and the rugged, rocky coast have caused the loss of numerous vessels and lives. More than 2,000 vessels and 700 lives have been lost near the Columbia River entrance alone. One obstruction to navigation that lies some 20 miles south of the Columbia River entrance is Tillamook Rock.

Over the years the United States government probably constructed 1,800 light stations on our sea coasts and in the Great Lakes. A vast majority of the stations were rather simple undertakings, but a few were engineering feats that rivaled some of those of Scotland and England. St. George Reef, California; Standard Rock in Lake Superior; Race Rock in Long Island Sound; Minot's Ledge, Massachusetts; and Tillamook Rock, Oregon, are five that stand alone in the annals of lighthouse construction in this country. This is the story of that sea-swept station Tillamook Rock, known to her keepers as "Terrible Tilly."

The following is an account of Bill Harris, one of the workmen who constructed the Tillamook Rock Light Station. It is reprinted from the 1886 Kenosha *(Wisconsin)* Telegraph. *Interspersed are official reports of the lighthouse's construction.*

January 8, 1886 - Aboard a lumber vessel at a loading dock, Astoria, Oregon.

"Why yes, I've seen my share of rough life, and I've been in a number of tight places at one time or another, since I first came to Oregon in 1850. But the time when I felt most certain that my last hours had come was the 7th of January, 1880, on old Tillamook Rock."

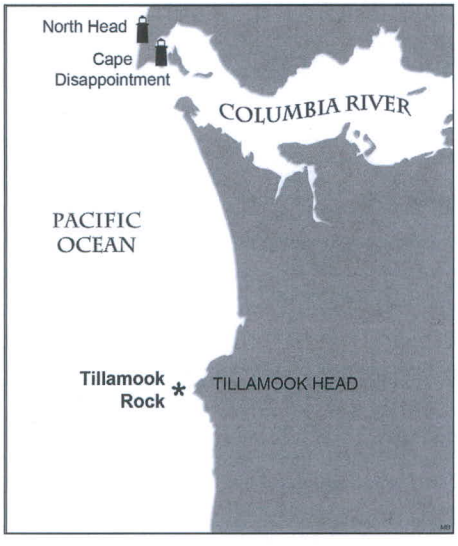
The speaker was a typical old Oregon pioneer: lean, bony, [and] muscular; a man without a bit of nonsense or brag about him, one to whom all the world could not scare, and one whom no emergency would confuse.

We were at this time at Astoria loading round timber for spars and masts—those beautiful clear trunks of Oregon fir for which the ship builders of New England now send to the Columbia River, away round Cape Horn.

Sitting on deck that evening with the full moon just looking up over the distant peaks, our sailor lads were on hand for one of Bill Harris' Oregon experiences. Bill was loading lumber with us and it was his remarks I have recorded above.

"On Tillamook Rock?" questioned several voices. "What, Tillamook Rock 20 miles down the coast from the bar?"

Harris: "The same, only there wasn't any light on it then. We were blasting that winter for the foundation of the present lighthouse. Well it's an ugly place. The fact is putting that lighthouse there has been one of the boldest engineering feats of the century, though it has never attracted any particular attention, for it was all done as quietly as clock-work, and no bragging. I worked over there a year and I know what I'm saying. For years they had talked of a light there or else on the head [land] back of it, for you know what a blind dangerous opening the mouth of the river makes. But anybody who had ever been near the rock said that it could never be done; that no mortal man could ever land on the rock, much less face a gale there.



"The sea is never still about Tillamook. It has a manner of rising up suddenly, and ebbing off around the rock in an awful tumultuous fashion. There is tremendously strong water all around, with an undertow so powerful at times as to draw a small boat down, due to 'suck holes' among the cliffs.

"Finally, the number of wrecks and the necessity of having either the head or the rock lighted, drove the Light-house Board to take it up. Major G.L. Gillespie, then Chief Engineer of the board, was directed to examine the location, and with his usual courage he at once said that the light must be put on the rock. I suppose there weren't two men here at Astoria who did not say: 'It can't be done.' It was looked upon as a foolhardy project, sure to result in the loss of life.

"This was in the spring of 1879, but it was not until June that any vessel dared to go near the rock. At length, on the 22nd day of the month, the revenue cutter *Corwin*, with Mr. H.S. Wheeler, C.E., and a party of sailors, steamed down to Tillamook. It was a very calm day and by using a surf boat two sailors were landed on the north-east side, which seemed that day to be the lee side. But they had hardly climbed up the slope when the seas rose up threateningly, without any apparent cause, and nearly swamped the surf boat. It was impossible to approach again, to get the men off the rock, but after an hour or two lines were thrown to them, and they jumped into the sea and were rescued."

Board Report: In 1877, the 13th Light-house District (Oregon and Washington) petitioned headquarters for initial funding to construct a lighthouse on Tillamook Rock. In the following year's *Annual Report of the Lighthouse Board*, it was reported:

"Tillamook Head, sea-coast of Oregon - An appropriation of $50,000 was made June 20, 1878, to establish this station. It was originally designed to have the light erected on the headland; but as there is a large, dangerous rock projecting out of the water one mile seaward of the head, it was thought advisable to have the rock carefully examined to ascertain if it should not be utilized as a site for the light-house in preference to the headland. The directions for the examination were given in the autumn, but, for unavoidable reasons they could not be carried out until the opening of summer. After several ineffectual attempts, a successful landing was made on June 26. It is an isolated basaltic rock divided, above low water, into two unequal parts, by a wide fissure with vertical sides running east and west, stands 100 feet above the sea, and has a crest which can be so far reduced as to accommodate a structure not greater than 50 feet square. A comparatively quiet landing can be made on the east side when the sea is smooth. The water on all sides is steep.

"Apart from the rugged character of the headland, the tendency of the sea [ward] face to slides, and the great distance from the nearest supply point, the headland is too high for the site of a light-house in a locality visited by such dense fogs. The light should be placed as low as possible, and the rock is its proper site. Though the execution of the work will be a task of labor and difficulty, accompanied by great expense, yet the benefit which the commerce seeking the mouth of the Columbia River will derive from a light and fog-signal located there, will warrant all the labor and expense involved. It is recommended that a siren fog-signal be erected at the station in connection with the light, and that $50,000 [more] be appropriated to continue the work."

District Report: The 13th Lighthouse District's engineer's report to the Lighthouse Board in 1880 stated:

"By act of June 16, 1880, an additional appropriation of $50,000 was made to continue construction, and to add a fog signal to the station. On July 11, 1879, I submitted to the board a report embodying plans and estimates for the buildings I proposed for this station…the plans received the approval of the board on September 11, and instructions were given by telegraph to commence the leveling of the rock. On August 30, the

secretary of state for the State of Oregon… conveyed title to, and jurisdiction over, Tillamook Rock to the United States….

"It was thought necessary that before any work was directed, that a competent person should land on the rock and take its measurements. I confided this duty to Mr. John Trewavas, an excellent master-mason of this city, who had experience in like undertakings, but in an attempt to execute the orders given him he lost his life at the rock, by drowning on the 18th of September. Every precaution was taken, in advance, by the presence of a revenue cutter and its surfboats fully manned and equipped, but his life could not be preserved. The disaster prejudiced the public somewhat against the project, and in order to prevent further delays and to forestall the evil tendencies of the public of my plans, I immediately appointed Mr. A. Ballantyne, foreman, organized the same day a party of eight skilled quarrymen, which was as large as I thought could be accommodated on the rock in the beginning, and sent them to Astoria, with instructions to the foreman to make a lodgement on the rock without necessary delay, and to commence the work of reducing the crest. To assist in the landing the revenue cutter *Corwin* was placed under my orders on the 24th of September, but the weather continued so unfavorably that the steamer could not cross the bar until October 12th, at which time a mooring buoy was put down near the rock. The men all this time were in quarters at the light-station at Cape Disappointment. On October 21, the cutter landed four men, together with hammers, drills, bolts, provisions, stove, and an abundant supply of canvas, to protect them and their supplies against the weather."

Harris: "On the 26th of October, ten workmen, myself among them, with Mr. Ballantyne and a good supply of food, blankets, tools, etc. were landed from the *Corwin* …and the work of blasting off the top began in good earnest. But I'm free to say that I hardly expected to get off that ledge alive."

District Report: "For the first ten days of reaching the rock, the party of quarrymen, nine in number, had no shelter from the rain and storms, except such as was afforded by a loose covering of sail cloth lashed to ring bolts; in the meanwhile they excavated with great dispatch a shallow niche in the north and east side, in which was placed a strongly built timber shanty securely bolted to the rock, and covered with canvas, likewise lashed to ring bolts.

"December 16, 1879 - *Mary Taylor* (Denny, master) landed some light supplies. Tried to land a quarryman (Gruber), but found that the man was too big for the breeches buoy. I told Denny to lash him on top of it, but he (Gruber) did not like the idea, so I told Denny to get a cork life-belt in Astoria and land Gruber next time.

"December 18, 1879 - Wind light from the northeast, squally with snow showers. The *Mary Taylor* (Denny, master) arrived. I went aboard in breeches buoy. I went partly to give Captain Denny instructions about landing the derrick, and partly to see Gruber sent ashore, but the lines being slack I was towed in the water all the way aboard, which scared the man (Gruber) worse, but after a short time we sent him aboard in the boatswain's chair, all right without wetting the soles of his boots, the first man that landed dry on the rock.. A slight accident happened while I was aboard. A tackle gave way and hurt two men, but not badly."

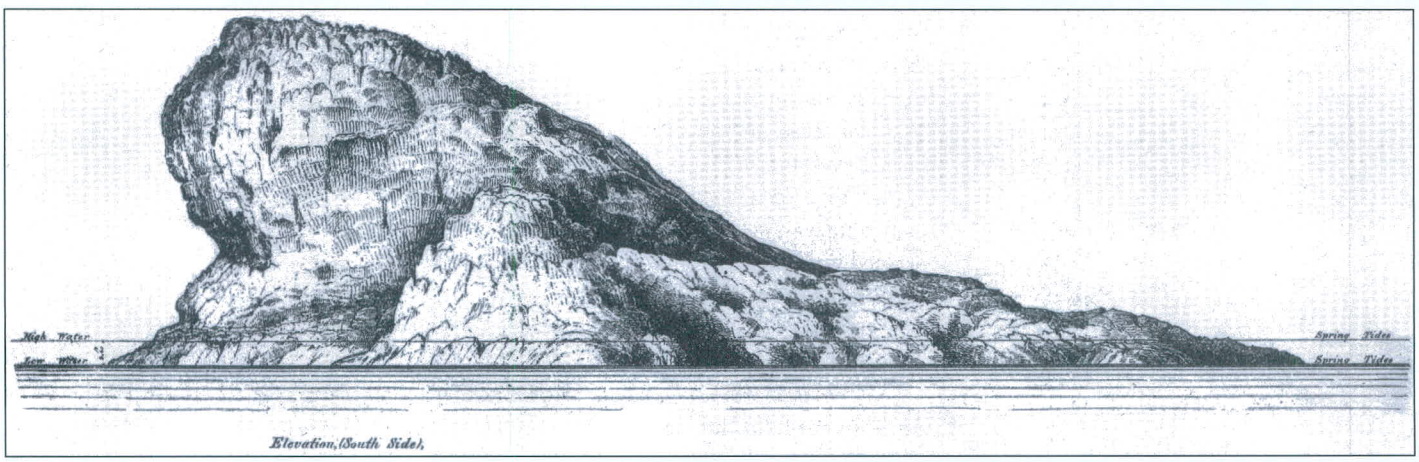
Harris: "It took us 15 days to drill in for iron rods and ring bolts and build a stone house for our provisions, powder, tools, etc. For our own shelter, a very thick, strong canvas double tent was pitched at the top of the rock.

"The work of blasting then began. Often when getting around the west face of the cliff, we had to work from swing stages, suspended out 90 feet over those boiling, roaring waves. So tough was the basalt rock that the best drills of English steel [hand drills—Ed.] required to be resharpened for every two inches of hole drilled. A blacksmith worked constantly with us, sharpening drills. For the blasts 'giant powder' was used; with each blast we were required to retreat down the east side of the rock.

"Thus we went on there, day after day, 'pecking holes' and blasting off rock which tumbled into the depths below, with little to cheer us save the scream of gulls, the harsh 'yonk, yonk, yonk' of the sea lions, and the gurgling plunge of the water beneath us.

"Not a nice place to spend Thanksgiving, Christmas and the holidays, eh? The work never stopped. The cutter came down once a week in fair weather, bringing fresh provisions and the mail, and getting our letters for the home folks."

District Report: "The party, notwithstanding its exposure and the many discomforts of its rude and indifferent quarters, worked diligently throughout the winter, and no complaint was made of hardships endured, though early in January the coast was visited by a terrific tornado [hurricane—Ed.], which caused the waves of the sea, after reflection from the face of the rock, to be carried by the wind over the crest continuously for many days, carrying away by their receding floods the supply house on the east



A sketch of the rock before construction began. From *Report upon the Construction of Tillamook Rock Light*, USLHS archives.

slope, and endangering even the quarters of the working party."

Harris: "On the first day of January five new men were added to the force. At last came the storm of which I began to tell you. It was on the seventh of January. [Actually the date was the third of January—Ed.] All that day and, in fact, for three days previously, it had been blowing, with snow and sleet. The sky was dark and gloomy, the wind blowing too hard for a man to stand on the top of the ledges.

"We had not been able to do much, and kept to our tent, wrapped up in all the blankets we had, to keep warm, for the wind was bitterly cold and piercing. The site of the tent had been shifted about 20 feet down the slope, on the landward side, to a little 'level' which had been blasted out for it. Our provision house stood 15 or 20 feet lower down, this latter being no more than 50 or 60 feet above the sea.

"Toward night it began to blow even harder; and as darkness settled over us, the gigantic forms of the billows rolling in looked terrific. But as nine, ten and eleven [o'clock] came the gusts yelled (for I can select no more fitting word) louder and louder. It seemed as if even the wind would tear us off the rock, we lay there muffled up, no one talked much. The new men looked 'wild.' Mr. Ballantyne tried to reassure them, saying that we were all right.

"No words of mine can convey any idea of the horrible shriek and roar and gurgling! But it was the jar of the ledges which startled us most. When with an explosive shock, like the report of a heavy gun, the enormous waves struck. And the worst of it was that we could feel that the hurricane was gaining strength steadily.

Toward midnight the English bark *Lupata* was set upon the Tillamook Rock. The workmen on the rock later reported they could hear the creaking of the block and tackle, see some lights on the vessel and hear the officers barking orders. The men built a crude fire in an attempt to warn the vessel of the rock which apparently worked, but the *Lupata* eventually smashed into the rocks on Tillamook Head and sank with the loss of cargo and crew.

"At last, about half past eleven, there came down our side a perfect deluge of water—hogsheads of it—*solid* water! That raised a panic which had been gathering for an hour. The men jumped to their feet and fairly yelled!—they were so scared. A wave of solid water had broken clear over the top of the rock.

"Gentlemen, about that time I would have sold my body to a medical college for four cents! I didn't believe that one of us would be alive ten minutes later. In about a half a minute another wave struck over and washed down on us. We were soaked through and through. And we heard at the same moment the crash of our storehouse, lower down. That was made of wood and iron. The water made a clean smash of it and washed off barrels of flour, meat, coal, powder—everything in it—making a total wreck. How our tent held on there is marvelous. But as soldiers know, a stout tent will outlive any house in a gale.

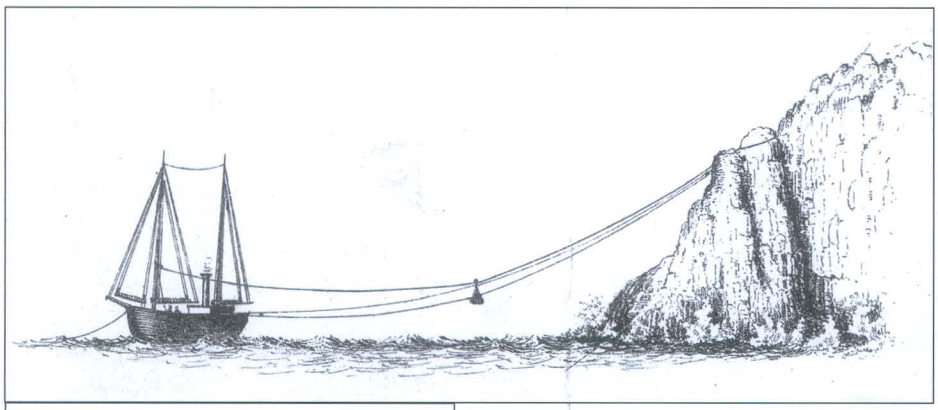
"Well, gentlemen, when that second wave went over, and we heard the storehouse go, we were thoroughly demoralized. We jumped out of the tent like half drowned rats, were all for climbing up on the highest part of the rock. And if Mr. Ballantyne had not had a cool head and steady nerves, not a man of us would have lived to tell the tale, and it is safe to say that no light would be shining on old Tillamook tonight.

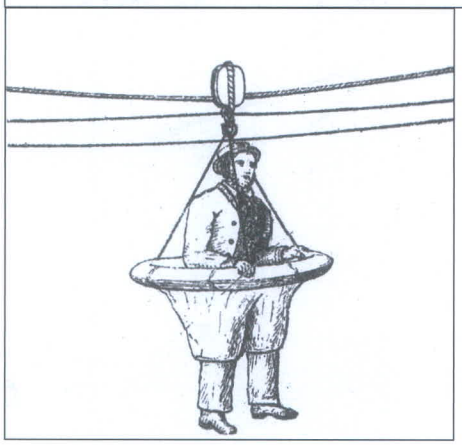
"'Hold on men!' he shouted. 'Stop, right where you are!' And he jumped in the way of us when we tried to get out past him. 'Steady, steady', he shouted. 'Do as I do. Down and hang on to the lines in the ring bolts!'

"For he knew that outside of the tent, on top of the rock, no man could stand or live, but would be blown off or washed off in a moment.

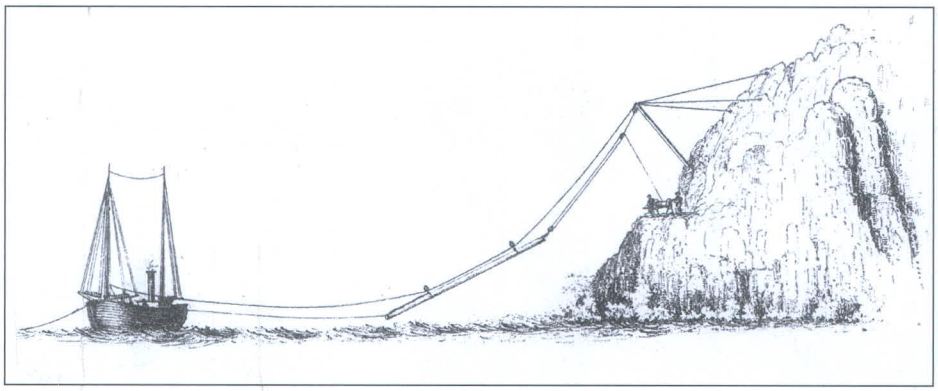
"That saved us, doing as he bade us. We hung to the ring bolts and stayed in the tent. Four or five more of these flood-like waves broke over; but the tempest decreased in violence after midnight.

"But it was a fortnight before the cutter

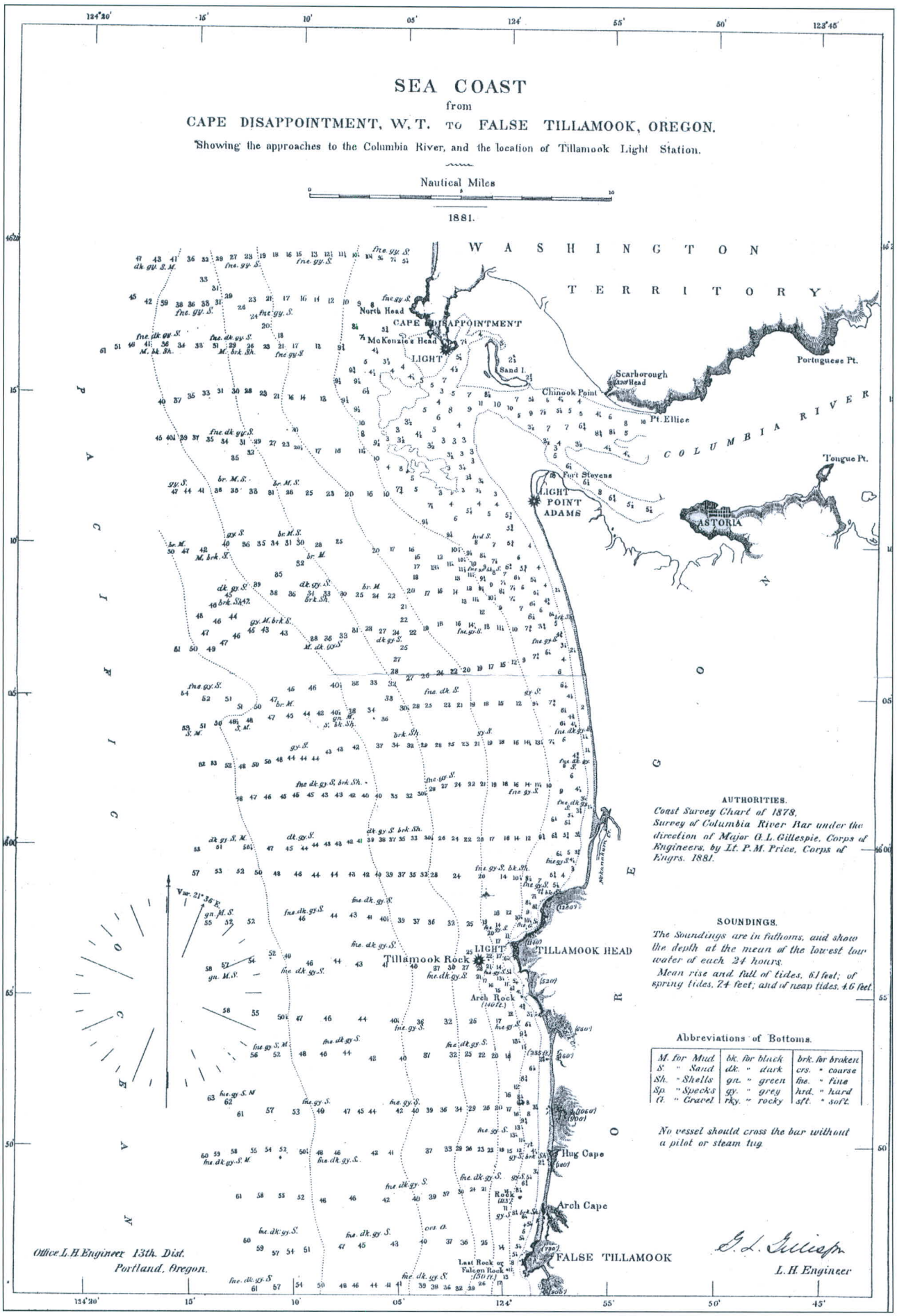


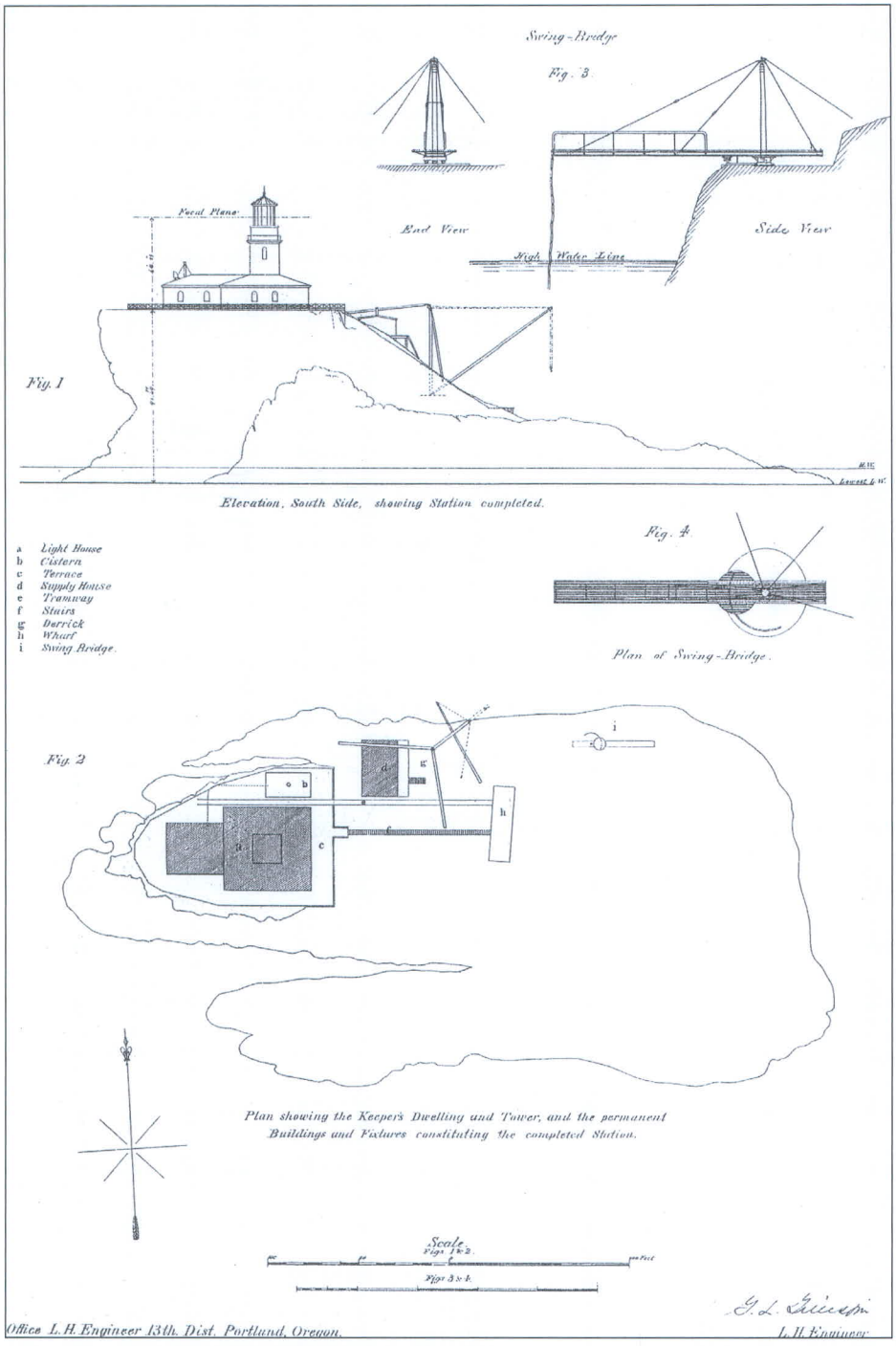


A breeches buoy was used to transport the workers to the rock. USLHS archives.



The rock end of the traveller and cable as originally designed (top sketch) and as later modified (lower sketch). The modification worked better, making it easier to unload cargo and causing fewer dunkings. USLHS archives.


SEA COAST
from
CAPE DISAPPOINTMENT, W. T. TO FALSE TILLAMOOK, OREGON.
Showing the approaches to the Columbia River, and the location of Tillamook Light Station.
Nautical Miles
1881.
WASHINGTON TERRITORY
OREGON
COLUMBIA RIVER
CAPE DISAPPOINTMENT
North Head
McKenzie's Head
LIGHT
Sand I.
Scarborough Head
Chinook Point
Pt. Ellice
Portuguese Pt.
Tongue Pt.
Fort Stevens
LIGHT
POINT ADAMS
ASTORIA
Tillamook Rock
LIGHT
TILLAMOOK HEAD
Arch Rock
Hug Cape
Arch Cape
FALSE TILLAMOOK
Last Rock of Falcon Rock
AUTHORITIES.
Coast Survey Chart of 1878.
Survey of Columbia River Bar under the direction of Major G.L. Gillespie, Corps of Engineers, by Lt. P.M. Price, Corps of Engrs. 1881.
SOUNDINGS.
The Soundings are in fathoms, and show the depth at the mean of the lowest low water of each 24 hours.
Mean rise and fall of tides, 6.1 feet; of spring tides, 7.4 feet; and of neap tides, 4.6 feet.
Abbreviations of Bottoms.
M. for Mud | bk. for black | brk. for broken
S. " Sand | dk. " dark | crs. " course
Sh. " Shells | gn. " green | fne. " fine
Sp. " Specks | gy. " grey | hrd. " hard
G. " Gravel | rky. " rocky | sft. " soft
No vessel should cross the bar without a pilot or steam tug.
Office L.H. Engineer 13th. Dist.
Portland, Oregon.
G.L. Gillespie
L.H. Engineer



Plans show the placement for the permanent buildings on the rock. USLHS Archives.

could cross Columbia Bar and come down to us; in the meantime we had to live on the scanty supply of food which, by Mr. Ballantyne's prudent orders, had been brought up in strong boxes from the storehouse that morning and had been secured under a tarpaulin in the tent; we were even obliged to melt ice and snow for water.

"At Astoria the people had given us up for lost, and a rumor had spread that not a living man was left on the rock.

"The work on the blasting was resumed and went on until the thirtieth of May, 1880, when the site for the masonry was cleared. During that time we had blasted off four thousand six hundred and thirty cubic yards of rock."

District Report: "For more than two weeks at this time the tender could not cross the bar to go to the assistance of the party, or ascertain if the story of their loss, which had been freely and cruelly circulated, were true or not....after sixteen days the party was found safe and cheerful, though much in want of fresh provisions. It may be of interest to know that men and supplies were landed upon the rock during the progress of the reduction of the rock by means of an endless line joining the mast of the vessel with a ring bolt attachment at the top of the rock...the supplies were placed in water-tight casks and suspended by slings from a traveler, which, by means of pulleys was made to move along the line [as] before described.

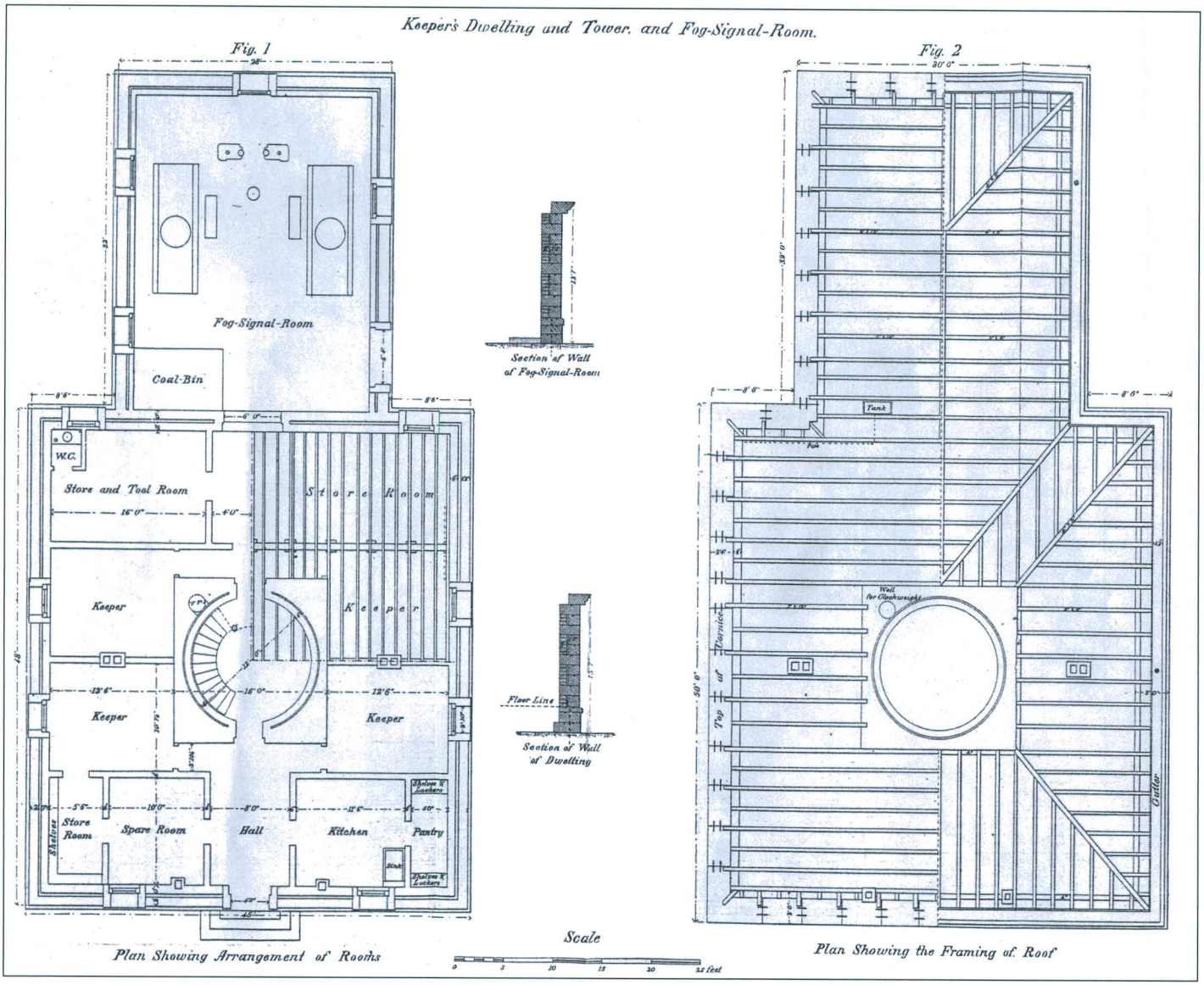
"In May, the rock was completely reduced down to the established foundation level and on the 31st of that month Mr. Ballantyne landed again on the rock with three masons, four derricks, one donkey engine and the appliances necessary for the laying of the masonry. The prior January a contract was awarded for the stone. The contract stone is fine-grained and compact basalt quarried at Mt. Tabor, six miles east of Portland. After many unavoidable delays, the first cargo of stone was landed on the rock on June 17th, by the lighthouse tender *Shubrick*, and on the 22nd the corner stone of the dwelling was laid. An additional cargo of stone was landed on June 26, together with a good supply of cement, sand and water. The work will be pushed as rapidly and the weather and seas will permit."

District Report 1881: "This station is practically finished. The small work party there is now building a brick engine and supply house on the northeast slope, a guard fence around the crest of the rock, a landing wharf, an iron stairway connecting the wharf with the keeper's dwelling and a tramway for raising supplies from the wharf to the supplyhouse and the fog signal room. An appropriation of $25,000 to complete the station is requested."

Harris: "During June, derricks and a landing stage for the receiving of the cut stone from Astoria were set up...the lighthouse was completed January 8th, 1881, thirteen days later, the light flashed forth over the black expanse of the Pacific for the first time. In all, the work had occupied five hundred and seventy-three days from the date of its commencement.

"Altogether, it is a noble piece of work, and it is one of the few things in my life that I am proud of having helped do—to put that light on top of that sea-washed rock. But were I to live fifty years more, I should never forget that night of January 7, 1880, on old Tillamook."

The completed dwelling is one story, 45 x 48 feet, with an extension for the fog signal of 28 feet 6 inches x 32 feet, under



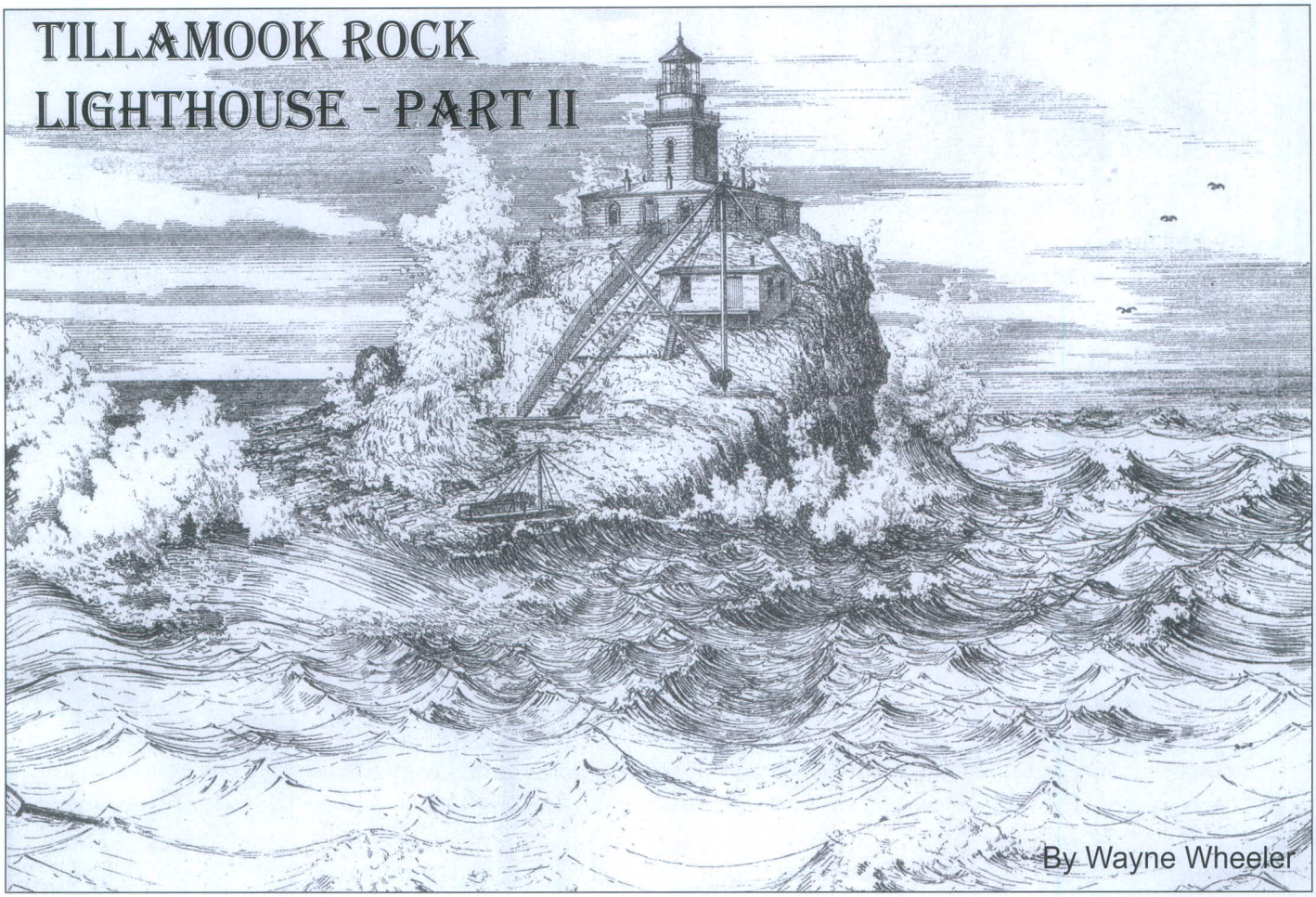
Above: Plans for the interior of the Tillamook Rock Lighthouse. USLHS Archives.
Right: The completed Tillamook Lighthouse circa 1910. USLHS Archive photo.

the same roof on the west side. There is a first-order lens displaying a flashing white light every five seconds. The fog signal is a first-class siren sounding a five-second blast every thirty seconds.

The completed cost was $123,492.82 ($2,510,000 in 2010 dollars).

Superintendent A. Ballantyne went on to supervise the construction of the St. George Reef Lighthouse (off the northern California coast) from 1882 to 1892. It was a much more difficult station to construct and ended up being the most expensive lighthouse ever constructed in this country.

TILLAMOOK ROCK LIGHTHOUSE - PART II



By Wayne Wheeler

In the last issue of *The Keeper's Log*, we told the story of constructing the Tillamook Rock Light Station, an engineering feat of the first magnitude. It was a project that cost the life of the first engineer to set foot on the rock and took nearly two years to build, costing $2,500,000 in today's money.

The hardships endured by the men who constructed the station continued for those gritty men who manned it for 76 years (1881 - 1957). The story of Tillamook Rock is one of isolation from the outside world: confinement to the station building as heavy seas washed over the rock and sometimes even the lighthouse. It is a story of running low on food due to seas running so high for days on end that the supply vessel could not land supplies or relief personnel.

Because of the remoteness and the hardship of serving at the station, the initial head keepers did not last long, even though the salary for the head keeper was $1,000 a year (as opposed to the usual $600, which was standard for head keepers at most stations in the latter part of the 19th century). From the outset the Lighthouse Service declared Tillamook "A male station, far too confined for both sexes."

The first head keeper, Albert Roeder, lasted only a little over three months, from January 20, 1881, to May 5, 1881. His replacement, George Rowe, took over on May 5, 1881, and made it to August of the following year before he resigned. The next keeper, Fred Cooper, resigned after 2 ½ months. Of the first 11 head keepers, 10 resigned from the service and 1 was transferred. From 1881 to 1900, there were 19 resignations of all keepers and 9 were fired for incompetence.

The story of Tillamook can best be told by the station log entries, and even they do not reflect the day-to-day travails of the station and, perhaps, the interaction of the men stationed there. Friction must have pervaded the station, and tempers probably flared from time to time when food supplies ran low and the men had to endure long periods between mail and newspaper deliveries.

Originally, duty periods for keepers were three months at a stretch with two weeks off. However, rough seas, sometimes lasting for days, could extend a keeper's stay on the rock. Eventually keepers worked for 42 days and were granted liberty for 21 days. Five keepers were assigned to the station so that, at any given time, one was ashore and four at the station. Three held the watches and one acted as cook for the day. Watches were divided into three eight-hour periods and rotated. The light was turned on an hour before sunset and off one hour after sunrise. Whenever the weather thickened and the visibility was reduced to two miles, the fog signal (a siren for the entire life of the station) was activated.

Interestingly, it was the fog signal that caused the bitterest argument among the men. The decision to energize the signal was left to the man on duty, and woe be to him who turned it on with good visibility or left it on too long.

Keeper W.T. Laurence has some fun with his camera on the front deck of Tillamook Rock. He has captured himself with a double exposure, applauding himself doing a jig—things were sometimes slow at Terrible Tilly. Oregon Historical Society photo.

Log entry by Keeper George Rowe, Feb. 6, 1881:...I notice that this complete isolation is having a depressing tendency on the minds of all. Besides we are out of vegetables & everything except salt meat, flour, beans and rice.

Feb. 9, 1881: Stormy night, gale from the S.W., the heaviest one we have had since my being on the rock. The building completely flooded inside and out. There might as well be no windows as the ones there are in the buildings...fit so badly, both the sashes and iron shutters, that most of our time is taken up trying to keep the water out. We have had no fires today as the chimneys draw the wrong way. [station] Boat badly stove [in] by the seas.

May 12, 1881: Blowing fresh from the SW, cloudy and rain squalls. Tugboat in command of Capt. Staples visited the rock, could not land on account of heavy seas. Everybody disappointed as we are anxious to hear from shore. There should be some arrangement to get the mail whenever the steamer comes. Can be done by the captain notifying our friends or by publishing in the *Astorian* as the men on the rock would bear the expense.

May 17, 1881: Tugboat *Astoria* came to the rock in charge of Capt. Wass, landed 12 men to work on the rock. Capt. Wass landed everything in good condition. Light keeper gone ashore by order of Capt. Reider.

May 18, 1881: Tugboat returned to the rock with Col. Gillespie on board. Too rough to land, fired up the fog signal for him to listen to the sound.

July 23, 1881: All hands well and anxiously looking for a boat to bring the mail.

July 25, 1881: Clear light southerly breeze today, quite warm and pleasant, something unusual for this place. No boat from town with mail. Something should be done about the mail matter if they ever expect any to stay here any length of time, nothing new on the rock.

Sept. 28, 1881: Have been looking for steamer *Shubrick* to take 1st Ass't Stark away and bring someone in his place. Am anxious to have the change made as Stark is not fit for the place. [Stark served from May 5 to October 8, 1881.]

Dec. 21, 1881: Blowing a gale today from the southeast, cloudy...We have a nightly lodger in the shape of a very large sea lion who came up to sleep on our door steps. Rather startling to open the door on a dark night and be confronted by such a visitor!

Dec. 24, 1881: Rainy night n.w. breeze. The first fine day for two weeks. Christmas Eve, but a dull one for us on the rock, no way to make tomorrow any more agreeable.

April 27, 1882:...nothing new on the rock, but very anxious to have a run ashore. The long tedious winter we have passed though on this barren rock will be something never to be forgotten. When the men came here they were promised a chance to get ashore once every three or four months. One of them has been here close to ten months without any liberty. And the rest of them 7, 8 and 9 months. We are out of all kinds of provisions except flour, beans and salt beef. It is now a month since I wrote for leave to let them have liberty, but have heard nothing from it. Our boat is stove in, we have no chance to help ourselves.

April 29, 1881: Warm and clear. Fixed the roof where it was cut by rocks during the last storm, put on three patches and soldered places where the seams had spread apart...still no one from shore.

May 15, 1882: Variable winds, cloudy. We are very hard up for provisions. Meat all gone, have had nothing but cold water since the first of April. No vegetables since the middle of December. We have repeatedly sent ashore for supplies, but they take no heed of our wants. Is it possible that the authorities are so indifferent, or have they failed to deliver our letter to headquarters?

May 18, 1882: NW breeze today with rain squalls. Been trying to repair the boat as we shall be obliged to try and reach the mainland unless the steamer with provisions

Keeper W.T. Laurence (left) and another (unknown) keeper share some time in the kitchen at Tillamook Rock. It is not exactly the "spit and polish" image of a lighthouse kitchen that we often envision. But then, perhaps the inspector is not expected for a few months. Oregon Historical Society photo.

comes within a few days. We are living on beans and flour (alone).

May 20, 1882: Heavy northerly wind, clear and warm. Launched the boat and went to one of the mooring (buoys) and tried to catch fish, not even a bite! No meat, no coffee, no sugar, no pickles and no fish. In fact we have nothing but dissatisfaction at the way we are treated. Steamer *Shubrick* came to the rock at 7 p.m., too rough to land. Went to anchor at Arch Rock.

Sept. 29, 1882: Vaman is devoting this day to the manufacture of a bow and arrow to kill time with I guess as there is but little to kill - all well, but myself.

July 1, 1887: Wind northeast, fog signal in operation ½ hour. A sea lion cow gave birth of young.

Sept. 30, 1887: Blowing hard from the south, rainy and misty. Goodbye September.

Dec. 4, 1887: Heavy gale from the southwest. Seas commenced breaking over the building about 9:15 a.m.. About 11 a.m. the window of the oil room stove in and the room and hallway flooded. At 2 p.m. the lumber in front of the house got adrift. At 4:05 the seas broke in the upper s.w. pane in the tower. Zauner on watch getting the lamp ready, set storm pane, which was soon carried away, started siren and made a wooden shutter for the break. At 6 p.m. the north tank on the west end of the building broke adrift, broke connection and plugged feed tank. 9:30 set storm pane which was also broken in and made a wooden shutter. About 12 p.m. all the tanks were jammed together against the rail in the n.w. corner, having but a few inches of water left and it being clear, (could see the Cape Light), shut down the siren and set the lantern in the tower. The seas were breaking over so heavy and often that it was dangerous to attempt to fill the tank from the cistern, and there was but 3 feet 1 inch of water in it and might be more necessary before damage was repaired. Seas continued breaking over until 3 a.m. of the 5th. From the commencement the seas came over on an average of every five minutes. Those that broke over the tower struck the ventilator in such a way that the water came down into the lamp. Everything in the tower is covered in salt water and water is coming down [from] the tower in streams. Also 30 of the lenses [prisms] are badly chipped and the [linen] cover badly cut, the clockwork is in very bad condition. A very gloomy Sunday.

[Ed.: The keeper was concerned about the loss, or unavailability, of water to run the steam powered siren fog signal. When he speaks about the "ventilator," he is referring to the ball vent on top of the dome of the lantern room. The chimney from the lamp (in the lens) travels to the top of the lantern room and is attached to the bottom of the vent ball, or ventilator; thus, water is entering the vent and coming down the tube into the lamp and lens and eventually streaming out onto the deck of the lantern room and down the tower stairs.]

Lars Amundsen (shown here with his wife Marie circa 1904) was third assistant keeper at Tillamook Rock from 1899 until February 28, 1900, when he was promoted to first assistant. He remained in that post until he left the station on January 26, 1906. U.S. Lighthouse Society archives.

It is a rare day when the seas are calm enough to enable the lighthouse tender to maneuver under the hook. The ship is possibly the *Madrono* or *Manzanita*. Oregon Historical Society photo.

Dec. 10, 1887: SE wind, hazy, cleaned tower and lens and washed windows.

Dec. 31, 1887: SW wind, gale, cloudy and rain. [LHS tender] *Manzanita* came in sight at 9 a.m. landed new keeper G.S. Hunt and 3rd Ass't Keeper J.H. Martin, and mail and papers, but would not wait for our mail. Mr. McClure and Mr. McIntosh (brick layer) were aboard but did not land, mooring buoy carried away. Goodbye 1887.

March 6, 1888: Wind SW, cloudy, warm, showers. Caught two pairs of albatrosses.

March 27, 1890: Mr. L.C. Seaver goes insane.

May 4, 1890: Moderate SE wind and hazy. Fixed upon the garden and planted radish and lettuce seeds.

March 4, 1891: Fresh SE wind and rain. Fumigated the kitchen to kill the cockroaches.

July 18, 1891: Light S wind and hazy. The swallows started to set on the 4th of July and hatched on the 18th.

August 8, 1891: Light NE and cloudy. A young swallow had her first fly today.

July 11, 1893: Light south wind and cloudy. Six ladies visited the rock and spent a happy time here.

Dec. 9, 1894: Heavy seas started at 11 a.m. and came over tower. 10 plate glass panes were broken.

Dec. 12, 1894: First warm meal since the 9th.

Dec. 13, 1894: [LHS tender] *Columbine* arrives but could not land, delivered news in a bottle.

July 15, 1896: [LHS tender] *Manzanita* arrived 2 p.m. and tried to make a landing, but could not due to heavy seas, proceeded south.

Dec. 31, 1896: High seas occasionally go over the station roof and filled the oil butt.

Jan. 27, 1897: The pilot schooner *Jessie* called and landed some newspapers.

July 19, 1899: Lassoed a big bull sea lion early this morning, weight 2,000.

Dec. 25, 1905: Strong SE wind and rain squalls going over the house all day and night. A dreary Christmas Day.

Over the years the station was inundated by storms many times, some storms more severe than others. One of the strongest storms to strike the station occurred on October 24, 1934.

Henry Jenkins, the youngest of the four keepers at the station, came abruptly awake in his bed, arms flailing and gasping for air. He was lying almost completely submerged in a pool of icy water. Gagging and choking, he fought to breathe. His initial thoughts were that the entire station had finally been swept into the sea. When the water in his bedroom receded, he found that he was wedged into his closet with his legs entwined in the rungs of a chair. The roar of the storm was thunderous. As another surge of water blasted through his window, it picked up his bed and sent it sliding across the floor.

After working the midnight shift the night before, Jenkins had crawled into his bed at 9a.m., just minutes before the storm rudely inundated him.

By ten in the morning the scene at Tillamook Rock was utter chaos. Huge mountainous walls of boiling, greenish-black water reached upward and over the lantern room, 131 feet above sea level, and cascaded down on the lantern room and steel roof, showering the station with rock and seaweed. With a violent shudder, the entire western overhang of the rock, weighing an estimated 25 tons, broke off and fell into the sea. Tons of water, broken glass, rock, dead fish, sea birds and seaweed came crashing into the lantern room through broken windows and down the stairs into the dwelling of the station. The flooding of the living spaces caused the keepers to climb the steel roof supports to keep their heads above water.

Original circular order issued to all lighthouse keepers from the office of the U.S. Lighthouse Inspector on September 1, 1893. This one went to **TILLAMOOK ROCK** and was signed by its keepers and the inspector. *Courtesy of Oswald Allik.*

Office of U. S. Light-House Inspector.
THIRTEENTH DISTRICT.

Portland, Oregon, 1 September 1893

CIRCULAR ORDER TO THE LIGHT-HOUSE KEEPERS OF THE 13TH DISTRICT

The regulations governing the uniform of Officers and men, of the U.S. Light-House Service, as set forth in a pamphlet sent to you will be strictly adhered to.

Every appointed keeper or assistant keeper must be in the prescribed uniform on or before January 1894. Failure to comply with this order will be reported to the Light-House Board with the recommendation for the dismissal of the delinquent.

This order does not apply to the laborers, temporary employed at the lighthouses. When a laborer is appointed acting assistant keeper he will at once comply with the regulations.

Every keeper at the light-stations will sign this order and the chief keeper will inform this office that the order is thoroughly understood.

O. W. FARENHOLT.
Commander, U. S. N.
Inspector 13th. L. H. District.

On May 1, 1884, the Lighthouse Board issued a regulation requiring all male keepers, assistant keepers of light stations, and the masters, mates and engineers, and assistant engineers of light vessels and tenders to wear a prescribed uniform. Although required to be in the uniform when on duty, it is doubtful that the keepers at remote stations adhered to this requirement. The above circular is probably the result of the district office learning, or suspecting, that some of the keepers at some stations probably were not following the regulation. We very much doubt that the keepers at the remote Tillamook station cared much about wearing the uniform, save during official visits and inspections.

Waves crash against the rocks at Tillamook Lighthouse. Columbia Maritime Museum photo.

The undersea telephone cable to the town of Seaside on the Oregon coast had parted early in the storm. The men were isolated from the world with no means of communication.

Even though they felt they might not last through the storm, their sense of duty trumped their fear. With an incredible effort, they managed to get to the lantern room. Sixteen glass storm panes (windows) had been smashed. A 60-pound boulder had destroyed the oil vapor lamp and badly damaged the lens. With water periodically pouring through the windows, they were able to erect storm shutters to cover the open windows. Assistant Keeper Hugo Hanson's hand was badly cut from flying glass. The oil vapor lamp was extinguished, the first-order lens chipped and cracked, and the revolving mechanism so badly damaged that it was not repaired and placed in operation for six days.

No light was displayed that first night, but by the next night they had managed to set up an emergency optic, a 300 mm lens displaying a fixed white light. The main optic was returned to operation on October 27.

The four men who strove tirelessly during this period to restore their station were William Hill, keeper; Henry Jenkins, Hugo Hansen and Werner Storm, assistants. Assistant Jenkins, a qualified radio operator, put together a short-wave radio apparatus from miscellaneous materials. Near midnight, October 23, he succeeded in reaching the district superintendent, through amateur operators ashore, with the first report of the conditions on the rock.

When the storm subsided on October 25, the keepers cleared the exposed cowl resonators on the roof of the main building, choked with rock fragments and other debris that had rendered the fog signal sirens inoperative during the storm. They set new glass in the lantern room panels and continued their efforts to repair the lens and its apparatus. The massive derrick, which constituted the only means of transferring men and supplies from vessels to the station, had been completely demolished.

In 1945 a young Coast Guardsman seaman named Jim Gibbs was transferred to the Tillamook Station. He writes of his initial impression in one of his many books on the Pacific Northwest:

> "As the craft jockeyed closer, the dank odor of seaweed and bird droppings filled my nostrils. The bastion-like walls that rose before us were almost frightening. Seemingly casting an evil shadow over us, the ocean lifted the boat to a pinnacle and dropped us into a bottomless pit. Barnacles and mussels, huge ones, were exposed, slick and slimy round the girth of the rock like the fouled boot topping of a large merchant ship....I couldn't believe that I was going to be a resident of such an isolated place; it seemed more like a pint-sized Alcatraz and [a place] that I was about to serve my sentence as an undesirable service man....I had already been informed that those who manned this stationary ship were old-time career civil-service employees, the last of the

U.S. Lighthouse Service personnel, permitted to remain in their former status when the Coast Guard took over that branch of the Commerce Department in 1939....Suddenly, over the sounds of the wind and surging surf there was a grinding noise and a huge wooden boom began swinging slowly like the neck of a cautious giraffe. It halted its arc above our restless craft. It began threading its way downward toward the water as our craft pitched and rolled violently, holding cautiously to the 50-foot distance from the sinister base of the bastion... 'Here!', shouted the bo's'n, tapping me on the shoulder, 'this is for you!'

"He handed me a life ring with a pair of oversized canvas pants protruding from a hole in the center.

"'Take it' he insisted, 'it's a breeches buoy.'

"What in blazes do I do with it? I retorted.

"'You want to get up on the rock don't you?'

"I nodded my head feebly.

"'Then jump into the pants and hop up on the fo'c'sle head and wait until we get under the cable hook.'"

Jim Gibbs eventually is hoisted aboard, but not until being dragged through the water on his way up. When he lands on the deck of the hoist he is greeted one of the keepers.

"'George is the name, George Wheeler. Yah, better get topside and get them wet duds off, Ask for [Oswald] Allik, he'll show you where to go.'... Just as I reached the entrance of the lighthouse, I turned back once again to see a cargo net being attached to the cable hook, with supplies, mail and my seabag....

"I was impressed with the exterior of the lighthouse, solid stone blocks better than two feet thick, fit together with precision....I found myself in the kitchen face to face with a third keeper whom I assumed to be Allik....Allik was a shy, soft spoken individual, but friendly....he showed me to my room at the east end of the building, but he didn't come in.

"'One rule we keep here,' he said, 'is that we stay out of each other's bedroom. Gets pretty lonesome with no place to go and we got to respect each others privacy.'

"With that he left me at the door. I went inside the 10 by 10 foot room,

Passenger transferred from ship to Tillamook Lighthouse using a breeches buoy. Oregon Historical Society photo.

which contained a bed and an old dresser with a linoleum of sorts on the floor. An ocean view was afforded through a single ship's porthole offering a southern exposure. It was apparent that a window had once been where the porthole was fitted, for I was soon to learn that the fury of the southerly gales had taken its toll, repeatedly having shattered windows and storm panes. The rugged porthole, set deep in the stone, contained inch-thick glass. Even then, I could see numerous nicks where debris had been flung against it. As I looked at my 'cell,' many thoughts passed through my mind and most were negative. The trance was broken with a knock on my door, but on opening it nobody was there. Instead, my sea bag was standing at attention. I was quick to get off my wet clothes.

"When night came on dark and eerie, I could see the hint of lights at the distant resorts of Seaside and Cannon Beach. I knew for the first time what men imprisoned at Alcatraz...must have felt. Here alone was I with three career lighthouse keepers all considerably older than myself, none of whom appeared too happy to have a young Coast Guardsman added to their ranks.

"The rear door was at the northwesterly section of the building, below which was a straight 90-foot drop to the ocean. The northeast portion contained a small paint and storage locker and a tiny but solid, reinforced, masonry privy. Talk about your brick outhouses—this one capped them all. Curiosity led me to inspect and what I saw inside made me shudder. It was a one 'holer,' the hole dropping directly to the ocean, and the wind vacuum coming up through it was like a small tornado. I got to thinking that sitting on that wind tunnel

Small craft from the larger tender pulls alongside Tillamook Rock. Columbia Maritime Museum photo.

could greatly hamper nature's calling. I worried about that until I went back to the fog signal room and discovered that there was a bathroom, be it ever so small, with a toilet and a vintage bathtub. Later I was told of the great rejoicing when plumbing finally came to the rock. The privy over the precipice had probably caused more than one lighthouse keeper to change his occupation, and later on I was to learn why.

"The kitchen was simple—a stove that could cook and heat the room, old wooden cupboards, a plain table with four stiff-backed chairs. A small pantry was attached to the room, and for all intents and purposes the area was the center for all social activities for this stationary rock bottomed ship.

"Allik had his hands full preparing the evening meal, and I assumed he was the regular cook. When informed that each keeper took his turn on a rotation basis, I nearly swallowed my tongue. I couldn't even boil water."

On March 1, 1956, the Coast Guard held a second hearing on the fate of the Tillamook Rock Light Station (the earlier hearing was held in 1948). The Coast Guard claimed the station would soon involve a large public expense to replace some of the old equipment and to repair and modernize the structure. The Coast Guard stated that considerable time and expense was required to man the station and to transport men and supplies. Furthermore, transporting men to and from the station was a hazardous operation. With radar, LORAN, and radio direction finding stations in use, the need for a lighthouse on Tillamook Rock was no long necessary. The Coast Guard proposed placing a large, lighted whistle buoy near the rock.

Allik, the last keeper on the rock, was in charge when the Coast Guard finally decommissioned the station in 1957. His last entry in the lighthouse log, written on 10 September of that year, captures the sentiment of many light keepers:

> Farewell, Tillamook Rock Light Station. I return thee to the elements. [You,] one of the most notorious and yet most fascinating of the sea Sentinels in the world....For 77 years you have beamed your light across desolate acres of ocean. Keepers have come and gone: men have lived and died, but you were faithful to the end. May your sunset years be good years. Your purpose is now only symbol, but the lives you have saved and the service you have rendered are worthy of the highest respect....

The lighthouse was declared surplus by the government and sold in 1959 to a group of developers for about $6,000. A number of people owned the station in the following years, but any attempt at development failed due to lack of public water, power, sewage system, zoning restrictions, and any type of acceptable or easy access.

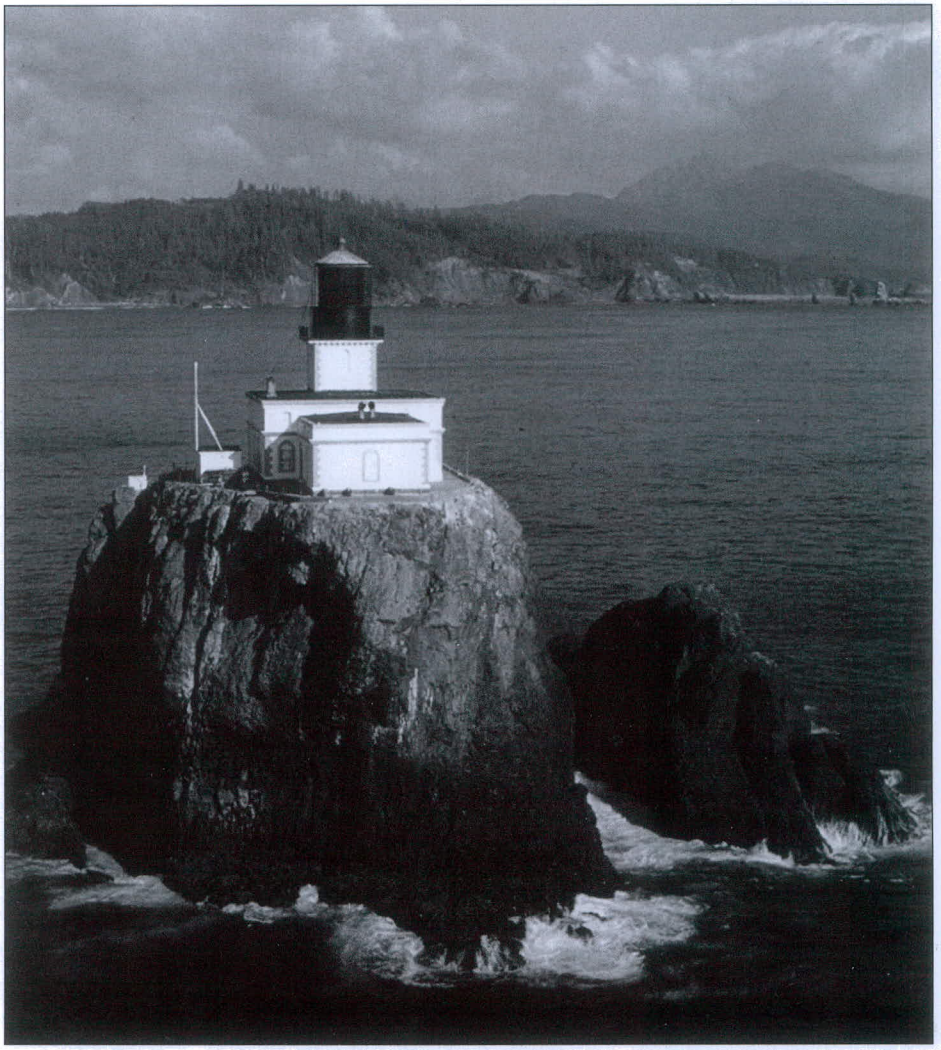
Over the next two decades the lighthouse deteriorated. Inhabited by only sea lions and thousands of sea birds, the structure was punished by storms and vandalism by boaters.

In 1979 the Tillamook Rock Station was purchased by a group of investors for $50,000. After considerable labor and expense, the lighthouse was restored and began operation as Eternity at Sea Columbarium in 1982. Prices to have your ashes placed in one of the 1,000 niches in the structures ranged from $690 (in the small derrick shed) to $2,500 at the top of the lighthouse tower.

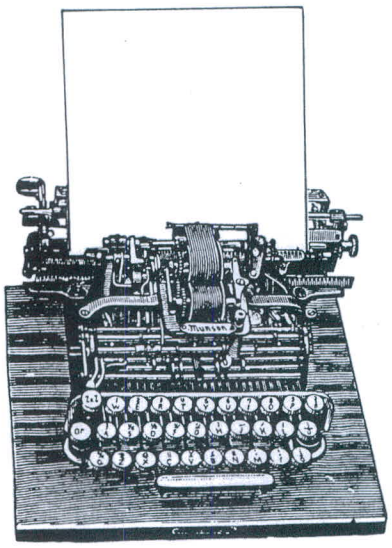
In 2007, after placing only 30 urns in the structure, Eternity by the Sea lost its license. Today the rock and lighthouse are caked in guano, and the roof leaks.

A state board says that the owners have not kept accurate records of the people placed there, and because urns are set on boards and not in niches, the lighthouse does not even qualify as a columbarium. Last we heard, the owners had plans to reapply for a license and to renovate the structure. However, according to the State of Oregon, in 2007, the columbarium's endowment was only $451.51.

The rock is also considered a federal wildlife refuge, and trespassing is prohibited.



A late-20th century photo of Tillamook Rock Lighthouse. U.S. Lighthouse Society archives.



Report of a Visit to Tillamook Rock

Astoria, April 4, 1937

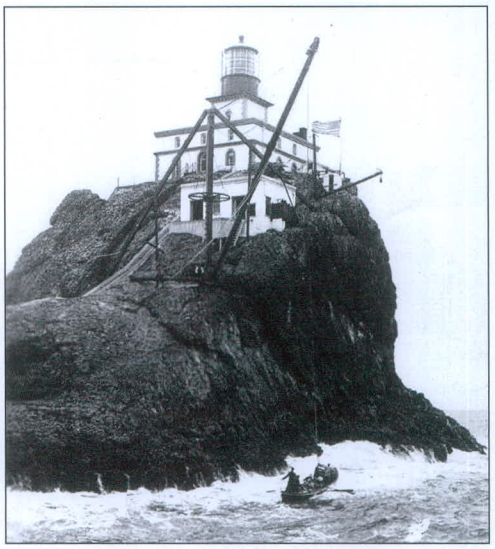
Mr. Paul E. Hartmus, Regional Director
Survey of Federal Archives, Portland, Oregon

Dear Sir:

I hereby respectfully submit a supplementary report on the survey of Federal Archives at Tillamook Rock Light Station, made on April 2, 1937, by the undersigned, accompanied by David H. Ellis, photographer for the survey. This particular survey is probably unique in the annals of the Survey of Federal Archives and the National Archives because of the difficulties attendant after leaving the mainland until the destination was reached. The humor of the situation and the point at issue will be more obvious when one considers an archivist to be a studious and bookish person and of sedentary habits.

After leaving Astoria, Oregon, on the U.S. Lighthouse Tender *Manzanita*, my intentions were to survey the records of this vessel with the assistance of Mr. Ellis. This intention I was soon compelled to forget because of my own personal physical discomfort. This distraction came about through *mal de mer*, or just plain seasickness. The vessel's archives were furthest from my thoughts and so were those on Tillamook Rock. Mr. Ellis experienced the same symptoms, but in a lesser degree. Captain Charles A.A. Modeer and the mates assured us that this was fine weather, although a heavy westerly swell was going and a south wind of near gale velocity blowing. Their assurance did not fool me; I know rough water when I see it and feel it; besides, it brought back memories of similar "smooth water" on the Atlantic coming back from the AEF in France.

After a bleak trip and still bleaker outlook, the *Manzanita* finally arrived at its destination, a quarter of a mile from the rock. At this position somebody wrapped me up in a life preserver, Mr. Ellis too, and hustled us into a life boat. Before we knew what had happened, we were adrift in the Pacific Ocean between the good ship *Manzanita* and Tillamook Rock, wolfish waves licking at our life boat and jagged rocks beckoning our frail craft to destruction. However, under the skillful guidance of the second mate of the *Manzanita* and its gallant boat crew, we managed to evade both evils; but more was in store for us. A few feet from the rock where billowing waves surge madly into foamy spray, a crate was lowered from the boom on the lighthouse onto the bow of the boat. Expert oarwork by the men and surprisingly skillful timing by the second mate kept both boat and crew together. This crate is about 3 feet square and 2 feet high, sides and bottom latticed to allow draining. Into this contraption Mr. Ellis and I were hustled by experienced hands who knew the timing to a nicety. While contemplating my present predicament with great misgivings, and daring a look at Ellis (whose countenance verified what I feared: the worst is yet to come), devilish waves reached up through the latticed floor trying to wet our feet. It was only a matter of seconds before we dangled over a hundred feet high between the sea and the sky. The good keeper of Tillamook Light did as is the custom: let us dangle for what seemed an interminable time, evidently to enjoy the three elements of nature—land, sea and air—from a vantage point such as we had in that suspended crate. Being ignorant at the time of his good intentions, and apprehensive lest the cable break, besides being unable to enjoy and appreciate the spectacle from that position in the sky, I tried to convince our host above the roar of the ocean and the fury of the gale, biting cold and fusillade of rain, that of the elements we were beholding, we were most beholden to only one: land. Still the boom did not move landward; finally in desperation and in agony of fear I yelled uncomplimentary remarks about his ancestry. This had the desired effect, for immediately understanding dawned on his face as he nodded affirmatively and swung the boom inland, lowering us carefully and gently on the concrete landing base. After climbing something like eighty steps we reached the feudal-castle-like shelter of the lighthouse. Warmed by a cheery fire and a steaming hot cup of coffee, we proceeded on our missions, Mr. Ellis to his and I to mine.

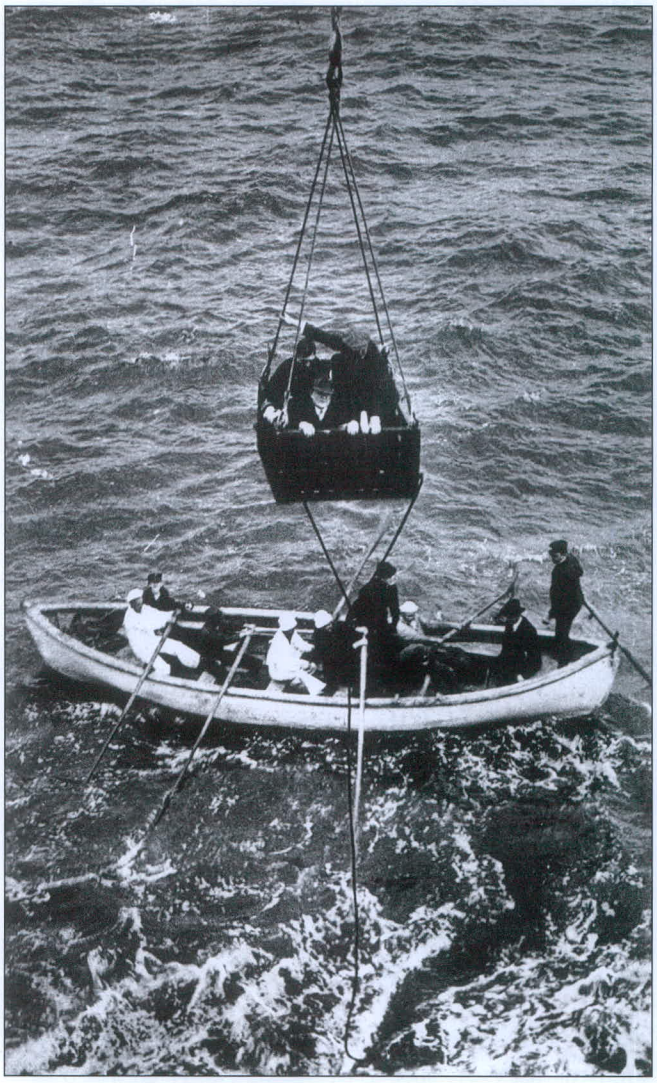


When our work was finished, the keeper summoned the *Manzanita* by radio phone. She came up speedily from her position, about a mile to sea from the rock. I saw the launching of the life boat with great misgivings, for only I knew what great spiritual agony I suffered.

Back in the crate, in the air, Ellis signaling higher. High in the air, Ellis focuses camera, standing up to take shot of lighthouse, myself crouching in the crate trying to keep it balanced, wishing Ellis would hurry up. Ellis makes shot, signals lower away. We go lower and swing out to sea; life boat tries to meet us as we are lowered; we make contact. I climb out and sprawl into life boat, crate unbalances and Ellis almost goes into water, crew steady crate, Ellis in boat with me. Trip to *Manzanita* through high choppy waves, we go to leeward of ship, waves dash us against ship, crew struggles to keep us from smashing, two of them try to connect with rope from davits, everything is a drunken crazy twisting and bouncing. Crew starts hauling, somebody places a rope in my hand, I start pulling like in the tug of war for dear old alma mater. The life boat is steady fore and aft but swings terribly from the ship to the ocean and back. We are even with the deck; the boat is made fast and lashed secure. Some men jump on deck, mate beckons to me to jump, I jump with brief case containing serials tightly clutched in my hand, I land on deck and stumble like a spavined horse. Into the cabin, seasick again. No survey of the *Manzanita* on return trip.

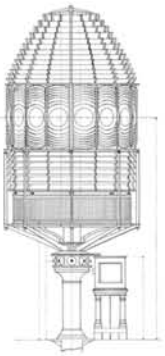
Back in the Columbia River, smoother water. We land, thank the captain for a pleasant trip, say good bye to officers, wave to crew, go down to office for mail, then home. On the way home I muse, "This ought to be good for a medal of honor—or at least a National Archives medal." Anyway, it was some trip. You can't be a sissy working on archives; it may be a rat-infested cellar, a musty attic, a lighthouse at sea, or a luxuriously appointed office. Archivists go where you send them.

Very respectfully;
A.J. Tittinger



Top left: Up, up, and away!
Top right: The tender's boat maneuvers under the hook preparing to place cargo in the crate. Oregon Historical Society photos.
Above: A bird's eye view of A.J. Tittinger "bravely" clutching the sides of the crate as he assends to inspect Tillamook Rock Lighthouse. Columbia River Maritime Museum photo.

Join the U.S. Lighthouse Society Today or Give the Gift of Membership!



Restoration & Preservation

Thomas Point Shoal Lighthouse, MD

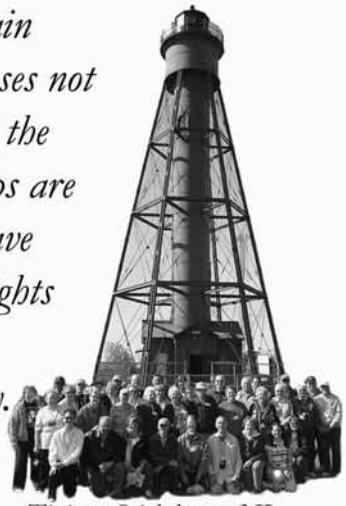
The U.S. Lighthouse Society has donated to many lighthouse preservation projects throughout the U.S. Most recently we were honored by being presented with the Preserve America Stewardship Award from The White House for our restoration work at Thomas Point Shoal Lighthouse.

Help Support Our Important Mission!

Education

The Keeper's Log *magazine is the only one of it's kind and has been published quarterly since 1984. Receive this award-winning publication as a benefit of membership.*

The Society organizes domestic and international lighthouse tours. Many of our excursions gain access to lighthouses not normally open to the public. These trips are a great way to have fun, see lots of lights and learn about lighthouse history.



Tinicum Lighthouse, NJ

To learn more visit

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