

## TREE POINT LIGHTHOUSE



By Don Anderson

The original Tree Point Lighthouse in Alaska prior to 1935. The small buildings to the right are oil houses. U. S. Lighthouse Society photo.

*Submitted by San Francisco resident Don Anderson, this article is an excerpt from his autobiography, "Under Fortune's Smile: Memories From America's Half Century."*

*The U.S. Lighthouse Service established Tree Point Light Station, the southern-most lighthouse in Alaska, at the entrance to the Revillagigedo Channel, in 1903. The light first shone there on April 30, 1904. Anderson arrived there fifty years later as a nineteen-year-old Coast Guard seaman. Enjoy his colorful and sometimes salty interpretation of life at a remote Alaskan lighthouse. The names of his fellow Coast Guardsmen have been changed to protect the innocent... or were they guilty?*

and float planes. It was a short flight and the splashy landing took me by surprise. I spent the night at the Ketchikan Coast Guard base and the following day traveled sixty miles south in a fifty-two-foot patrol boat to Tree Point Light Station at the southern most tip of Southeastern Alaska. There I would remain as a lowly Coast Guard Seaman for twelve months.

Tree Point was a verge of rocky coast on Alaska's inland waterway but exposed through Dixon Entrance to the stormy waters of the northern Pacific Ocean. It was utterly isolated by miles and miles of chilly rain forest and rugged mountains and the gloomy gray overcast sky. The nearest inhabitants were in Prince Rupert, British Columbia, thirty miles farther south - but it might have been a thousand. The lighthouse was situated, however, on the mainland - a superior circumstance to being stuck on a pile of offshore rocks or worse yet a floating lightship. The rewards for serving one year in all such isolated circumstances were thirty extra days of leave, having the year counting as sea duty for promotion, and getting some choice in my next assignment.

Tree Point Light Station was built in the early 1900s for the old US Lighthouse Service - by my time defunct. The light tower, right out on rocky Tree Point, was square white-painted masonry and not very high - nothing like the tall round towers seen on picture post cards. At its base were an engine room and a radio shack. Two diesel-driven turbines generated electricity, which was stored in a bank of several dozen, very large, glass batteries. Everything ran off direct current. Two hundred yards inland from the lighthouse, and sheltered from the ocean wind by a tree-covered hill, there were three, six-room, white, frame houses and a smaller schoolhouse. Tree Point had once accommodated three lightkeepers, their families, and a teacher. A quarter of a mile around the point, at a small cove where the sea was deep right to the edge of the cliff, there was a boathouse and a hoisting boom that swung out over the water. The hoist could lower and lift our motor launch with a fairly heavy load of people and supplies fifty feet from the water to the boathouse deck. A narrow gage tramway and boardwalk connected the boathouse with the living quarters

**I**n the mid-winter of 1954 I flew from Detroit to Seattle and then on to Sitka Island, Alaska. From there, I was taken in a two-engine amphibian to Ketchikan where the coastal mountains allowed only a narrow ledge for the town and no place for an airport. Water planes had always been my favorites: flying boats, seaplanes, amphibians,

and light tower. Our drinking water flowed through a two-mile-long wooden pipeline from a lake in the hills to a large cistern behind the houses. Every few months we walked its length and plugged leaks in the pipe with wooden pegs. Maintaining Tree Point Light Station required a lot of work from us four Coast Guard enlisted men.

The officer-in-charge, the OIC, was a Engineman First Class named Bewley: a diminutive nervous misfit already the veteran of several years' lighthouse duty in Alaska. Bewley was eligible to retire but he relished the sovereignty of being an OIC. Married petty officers were allowed to have their families with them at light stations and Bewley lived with his wife in the first of the three big houses. Mrs. Bewley was blechy-blond, forty-ish and seemed nice enough but Bewley pretty well kept her housebound and didn't let the rest of us have much to do with her.

The second house was occupied by [a guy named] Diegel, another seasoned and neurotic lighthouse sailor. Diegel was a second-class boatswains mate and nominally next in

command, but Bewley gave him no authority at all. Diegel was fat, lazy, and ill tempered. He despised Bewley. While Bewley was constantly busying about, Diegel did as little as possible and each was ever vexing the other.

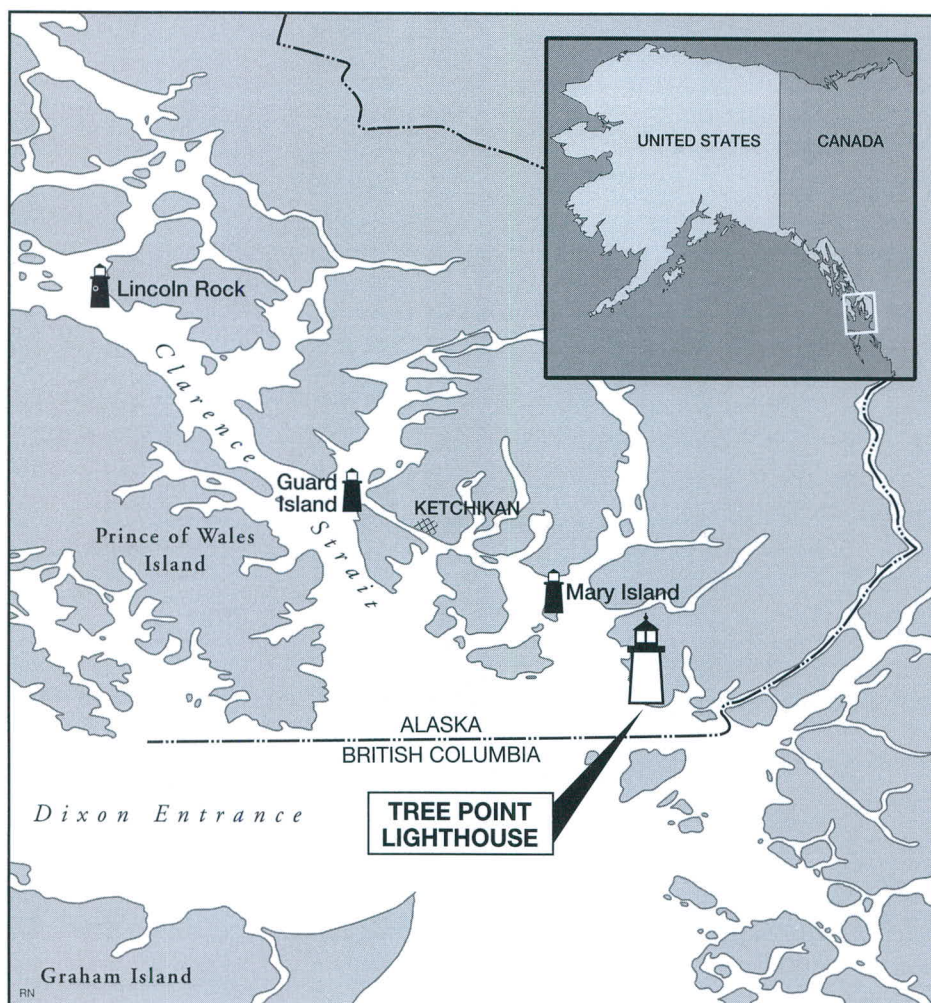
I moved into the third house with a young Engineman Striker named Beverly – first name Beverly, which I had never heard for a boy. Beverly was a freckled redhead from Savannah, Georgia, self-effacing and apologetic for being backward and a Southerner. He hadn't asked for an assignment in Alaska, just took last pick because he was the sort of person who always went unnoticed and never made a fuss.

Of we four, one was always on watch in the radio room – six hours on, eighteen off. Whomever had stood the midnight watch slept until noon, so there were only two of us in the morning and three after lunch to do all that was needed to keep everything in working order. Weekdays were given over to maintaining the machinery in the lighthouse engine room and at the boathouse and hoist. In addition, we each had to take care of meals,

laundry, and housekeeping. Twice a month the man on watch radioed a food order to the Coast Guard Base at Ketchikan. It was sent to us on the Prince Rupert mail boat, which stopped in the water a few hundred yards off shore where two of us met it in our motor launch. It was a treat to rendezvous with the mail boat because there were often women on board to have a look at. Once each quarter a Coast Guard supply ship brought us dry stores and fuel oil.

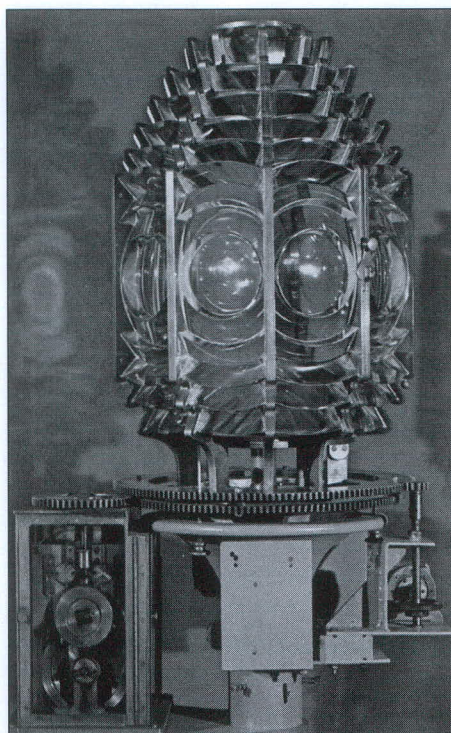
Our frozen, canned and dry goods were kept in a locked storage shed – locked by Bewley against the plundering he feared from Diegel. Beverly claimed to have eaten little but fried eggs, grits and pork chops during his six months at Tree Point and complained that the unused portion of his food allotment was grabbed up by Bewley and his wife. Mrs. Bewley did invite him to Sunday dinners when Diegel was on watch – maybe to make up the loss. I undertook to cook for both Beverly and myself, ordered our full share of supplies, and joined Diegel in bickering with Bewley over their fair allocation. Steaks, chops, chicken and meat loaf; along with rice, potatoes and frozen and canned vegetables were my offerings. My cooking skill was slight, but we had a cookbook and I improved with experience and the responsibility. I taught myself to make Bisquick biscuits with brown gravy from drippings and Beverly was delighted. We couldn't keep much fresh stuff but I ordered and cooked a few vegetables and we had lettuce and tomato salads for several days after each food delivery. Our kitchen range was an aged woodstove that had been converted into a diesel fuel pot-burner. It didn't get very hot and cooking times were long. In winter, we kept our range burning all the time because otherwise water might collect and freeze in the low sections of the pipe from the outdoor fuel tank. I kept a stockpot simmering on the back of the stove and sometimes we had a decent soup and other times it turned bad. Once Beverly turned the range off without thinking, he often didn't think, and we had to dig a trench in the frosty ground to uncover the fuel pipe and then melt the ice inside with a blowtorch.

Radio watches in the lighthouse were long and dreary – especially nights and weekends. In good weather, it was quiet except for the pounding surf, the ticking of three clocks, and a little crackling static on the two-way radio. Sometimes we heard the voices of distant fish-



ermen chatting on the international distress frequency. We were supposed to tell them to use some other band. In the radio room there were three tall pendulum clocks - shiny steel and brass works inside fine wooden cases. One controlled our radio beacon and the other two were backups. At the beginning of each watch we reset our clocks to a signal we got on the radio: Greenwich Mean Time, GMT. The clocks gained or lost only a second or two in six hours. On every hour, and at twenty and forty minutes past, the timer clock told the radio beacon to repeat our signal, "dot-dash-dot-dot" over and over for three minutes. A boat or ship captain with the proper rangefinder equipment could compare the directional source of our signal with that of another light station to determine his location.

The light at the top of our tower was housed in a three-foot tall rotating octagonal brass cage that held scores of curved glass prisms that made up the Fresnel lens [he is describing a third order, eight-sided lens, now housed in the Tongass Historical Museum in Ketchikan]. We pronounced "Fresnel" as it was spelled. A small plaque said that our lens had been made in France. The lamp inside was only a three hundred watt clear glass bulb but the



**Tree Point's original 4th order Fresnel lens produced a flashing white light every six seconds with a range of 15 miles. The tower had a red sector warning of a nearby reef. The lens is now in the Tongass Historical Society Museum in Ketchikan. From an old post card.**

lenses concentrated its brilliance into eight sweeping beams that were supposed to be visible for twenty-two miles on a clear night. During the day, the lens was covered with a canvas bag to prevent sunlight from yellowing the prisms. At night the beacon was turned by an electric motor but the original clock-work mechanism, powered by a weight at the end of a long cord, and the old oil lamp were still in place for the unlikely event of our being unable to generate electricity. Whoever was on watch at sundown climbed up the tower stairs to uncover the lens before switching it on from the radio room below. Several times I relieved Beverly at midnight and found he had forgotten to remove the canvas cover. On those evenings Tree Point was no "sentinel of the sea" to anyone.

When I was on watch in good weather, I sometimes opened the radio room window, so I could still hear if someone called us, and sat outside where the ocean splashed against the rocks. Inside at night I read books and magazines and wrote letters. In a two-year-old *LIFE* magazine, I saw a picture of Soraya, the lovely teenage commoner just married to the Shah of Iran. Soraya and Connie Cavanaugh, my pen pal at Michigan State, were striking



**Tree Point Light Station in 1963 showing the new tower and the railway which runs past the dwellings (top right) and to the lagoon with the landing dock and crane. Photo courtesy U. S. Coast Guard.**

look-alikes. I wrote to Connie that she was almost as beautiful as the Shah's new queen – in her own way of course. I had been reading Hemingway and wanted to say something fine but I guess I botched it. Connie said the weight I placed on appearances was shallow. I was miffed and told her so. Then she wrote I had over-stepped some line or other and that I was not, "...her benefactor." I looked up benefactor but still didn't understand. Perhaps these sentiments that Connie expressed were harbingers of feminism that I was not yet prepared to understand. I was hurt. Miffed. I decided our pen pal friendship was no more than a charity for Connie and I sent a proud missive to end it. Several years later the Shah discarded Queen Soraya because she had not produced a male child.

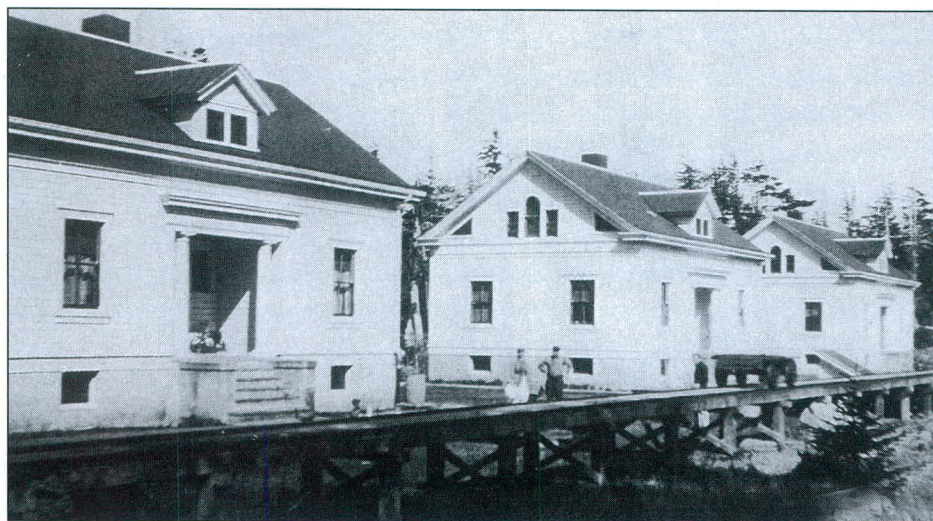
Sometimes they even splashed against the radio room window.

Twice each day the person on watch radioed a weather report to the National Weather Service on Sitka Island: visibility, cloud cover, wind direction and speed according to the Beaufort scale, precipitation, temperature and dew point. We had a poster to guide our observations – with pictures of various kinds of clouds and their usual altitudes. One of the cloud pictures was called, "Mackerel Sky," like fish scales, and was labeled a portent of stormy weather. Dew point was the temperature difference between the readings of a pair of Fahrenheit thermometers, one dry and the other wearing a little wet sock, that we swung around at the end of a chain. I didn't understand what benefit knowing the

with a boat hook one of its hands pulled off. He said the body was pretty well chewed up and that hauling it into the launch made him sick. They wrapped it in a tarp and all I ever saw was a package waiting to be picked up by a cutter from Ketchikan. I felt shortchanged – wished I had been in on the action.

On Saturday afternoons and Sundays we didn't work except to stand watches. When the weather was mild Beverly and I sometimes ventured out for a hike – usually inland because the shoreline was tough going, abrupt and very rocky. Just to the south of our quarters was what we called the Small Lagoon and farther on, around Boathouse Cove, was the Big Lagoon. The tide ran ten to fifteen feet and both lagoons were dry at the ebb but fairly deep at flood. The lowland flora was temperate rain forest: tall dark evergreen trees, low ferns and mushy humus underfoot. Rotting fallen logs smelled of alcohol. During fierce storms, trees often blew down because there was so little soil for them to take root in. There were ponds and swampy meadows here and there and we often saw mink, skunks, and porcupines. Deer ranged higher on the hills but we knew of no other large animals. Hiking was slow going and never took us to anyplace that looked much different from where we had been all along. We understood the area had been logged fifty years earlier but, except for an occasional giant tree stump, there was little evidence that another person had ever before visited the forest around us. Once we came across the overgrown remains of a logging railway but it seemed only to emphasize our isolation.

One of the upstairs bedrooms in Beverly's and my house was filled with paperback books. Hundreds of them in piles and stacks along the walls. Some were peculiar World War II Armed Services Editions with brown "kraft" paper covers and two pages printed side by side on each leaf, others were regular pocket books. Most had never been opened. Beverly said he read only historical romances. I urged him to try Hemingway, O'Hara, Steinbeck and Marquand – authors I was just discovering myself. He did, liked them, and said he was grateful I had broadened his horizons. We felt as collegial readers. We read Mr. Roberts and *The Caine Mutiny* and decided that Bewley, our own officer-in-charge, and Wouk's Captain Queeg shared the same personality disorder. My mother also read *Mutiny* and wrote that its message was, "A little psychology is a dan-



**The Tree Point dwellings were designed by Mr. Leick, an architect for the Service in Portland, Oregon. His dwelling design almost always included Paladin style windows, seen here under the peak of the roof. Photo courtesy of Norman Kinyon.**

A bad weather watch in the lighthouse was different. When visibility across the water fell to less than one mile the foghorn had to be turned on. The air compressor engines then growled continuously and the foghorn bellowed every twenty seconds. The horn was called a diaphone because it made a short low tone followed by an even lower one. Each blast was synchronized with our radio signal so that boat captains could calculate their distance from Tree Point even in a blinding fog: count the seconds between the start of the radio tone and then the fog horn blast and divide by five – that gave the distance in miles. I didn't like being on watch in bad weather. There was too much to keep track of, the noise was trying and I had to stay in the radio room. Fierce storms added the loud thumping of giant waves against the rocks.

dew point might be but I never asked the weatherman for an explanation. That same ignorance attached to most of what I was about in the Coast Guard – I mostly did a good job but because I hadn't any shipboard experience I didn't very well understand how what I did was made use of.

Occasionally we got distress calls – usually from a becalmed fisherman with engine trouble. We passed the information on to the Coast Guard Base in Ketchikan and then maintained radio contact with the disabled boat until help arrived. Our two-way radio call letters were NMJ, "Nan-Mike-Jig." Once while I was on watch a passing fisherman radioed that there was a dead body floating a mile or so off shore. Bewley and Beverly went out in the launch to get it and Beverly later told me that when he snagged the corpse

gerous thing." Later in a review I read that *Mutiny* was a reactionary argument in support of order and authority. Why hadn't I seen that – been able to counter my mother's cliché? Beverly and I read *Across The River And Into The Trees* and I loved it – I identified with the mature passion of an older man and a young woman. I was later disappointed to find that most critics, and Hemingway himself, dismissed *Trees* as a potboiler.

Before leaving home for Alaska, I had put all my own books in boxes and made lists of their contents. From Tree Point, I asked my mother to send the wooden toy box with a brass hasp and hinges. One of the books inside was *Out of My Life and Thought* by Albert Schweitzer. When I read it I was swept away by Schweitzer's range of interests: music, theology, medicine, and ethics. I imagined such a full life engagement for my own future self, despite my stumbling progress to age nineteen, and even some similar splendid accomplishment. Later, when I was in college, my friend, Dr Joe, scoffed at Schweitzer: a foolish missionary – no scientist at all – not even a good medicine man. I was disheartened. My romance with nebulous and grand conceptions suffered erosion. Still, however, I admired Schweitzer's "Reverence for life" and continued to welcome similar notions when they came along: Ghandi measuring a civilization's goodness by how well its people treated their animals; Anne Lindbergh never pruning a blossom next to a new bud, cutting mother from child

In all my books, I wrote my name on both the flyleaf and on page 17, just how the Detroit Public Library marked its books.

At Tree Point Diegel took to bed claiming illness and refused to stand his six hour watches in the lighthouse. Bewley accused Diegel of malingering and tried to dislodge him by pulling the fuses from the box in his basement. Diegel replaced them with pennies. Beverly and I also thought Diegel was a slacker but it was worth covering his watches for a few days to see Bewley in such a stew. While Bewley was on watch we sat in Diegel's upstairs bedroom and argued about Senator McCarthy. Diegel said McCarthy was a champion and that all communists should be locked up or kicked out of the country. I said McCarthy was a bully. I even ventured that communism was a good idea. Diegel was outraged, Beverly taken aback. We argued. What about Stalin? I didn't know much about Stalin. I voiced my opinions with fervor but the heat of emo-

tion addled my arguments. Political debate was difficult and dangerous spoken ideas became indelible – hard to defend and hard to reexamine.

When he left Tree Point, Beverly was replaced by a young Engineman Striker whose name I can't recall. A goody-goody prig who never swore but nevertheless beat me consistently on the pool table in the basement of Diegel's house. Then Diegel left and was replaced by a tall skinny third class boatswain's mate named Yenks who was as hateful as Diegel had been slothful. Both the prig and hateful Yenks moved into the third house with me.

The prig had recently gotten married and Bewley arranged for this new wife to come to Tree Point – even though the prig wasn't a petty officer. Bewley wanted companionship for his Mrs. I guessed. The new wife came down from Ketchikan on the mail boat and she and the prig settled into the middle house, leaving me to manage alone with hateful Yenks. The new wife was a plain yet wholesomely pretty girl. She hardly talked to Yenks or to me. Probably Bewley had warned her against us. Walking to the light tower on a sunny morning, the sunshine itself being remarkable, I sighted the new wife hanging out wash and singing to herself. It was very touching. I stopped to watch her coming and going from the door to the clothesline. My spirits soared and I felt dizzy.

However, the new wife didn't last because Tree Point Light Station suffered an angry outburst of personalities that ended with everyone but me being reassigned. Bewley provoked the conflict by announcing that he would no longer stand any radio watches. He said he needed to work all day every day at overhauling our generator and air compressor engines. That left the prig, Yenks and me to stand all the watches: eight hours on – sixteen off, seven days a week – plus our regular work. It was hardly fair. Yenks was furious. He stayed up all night and got drunk on whiskey he had brought secretly from Ketchikan. Bewley put Yenks on report. Yenks threatened to beat Bewley to a pulp. Bewley locked himself into the lighthouse engine room. Yenks stood on the hill behind the tower with his seventy-pound lemon-wood hunting bow and bellowed taunts at Bewley. Bewley cowered inside and Yenks split the top panel of the lighthouse door with a broad head hunting arrow. Bewley called for on the radio for help

from the Base in Ketchikan. I didn't see any of this, except the split door afterwards, because I was sleeping after an eight hour graveyard watch.

In the afternoon, an investigation party from Ketchikan arrived on an eighty-three footer. Yenks had sobered up and retreated to his room. The Prig was on watch. At the boathouse I operated the hoist to lower Bewley in the launch so he could meet the patrol boat at anchor in the cove. When he maneuvered back in under the boat hook he was accompanied by an officer wearing a pistol and a first class petty officer holding a rifle. Bewley attached the cable to the launch and I revved up donkey engine to hoist them fifty feet up to the boathouse deck. I got the launch five feet above the water but the engine stalled. It often did. You just jammed your foot on a brake peddle to keep the load hanging where it was, then dogged the gears and started up the engine again. I was nervous and not very experienced with the hoist. I missed the foot brake. The launch fell back into the water and I found the brake just before the hook smashed through the bottom of the boat. Bewley and our visitors were knocked askew. It all happened in an instant. Bewley was livid. He unhooked the launch and steered it over to the rocks. He and the officer got out and climbed up to the hoist house. Bewley himself then raised the launch and the petty officer, who had gotten it hooked up again.

The officer conducted his inquiry in our living room and the yeoman recorded it in shorthand. Their guns weren't needed. My own interrogation was brief – I hadn't witnessed anything. Yenks was taken back to Ketchikan the following day. Mrs. Bewley and the new wife packed up and left on the next mail boat and Bewley was reassigned to Seattle. The prig got a hardship transfer to the East Coast because his wife was pregnant. Not long afterwards I heard that the policy of quartering wives at Alaskan lighthouses had been discontinued because of the blow-up at Tree Point.

Skinny hateful Yenks was replaced by a fat jovial second-class engineman: an encyclopedia reader and hobbyist. The prig was followed by a friendly seaman named Hansen and the command of Tree Point Light Station passed from Bewley to another short wiry Officer-In-Charge, a first class boatswain's mate named Bay.

Bay didn't have much sense of humor but he was conscientious and fair. We all stood the

same watches. Bay insisted that all four of us live in one house. I balked because he wanted me to share a room with Hansen. Serving at an isolated lighthouse was bad enough, I argued, I deserved a room of my own. Bay relented and gave me the downstairs bedroom he had wanted for an office. When Bewley had been the OIC we never bothered to raise or lower the flag. It stayed at the top of its pole and the winter wind shredded it into half a dozen tresses of grimy cloth. Bay had us run the flag up and take it down every day. Once I used a tattered and discarded flag to wipe some spilled oil from the engine room floor and Bay got mad. He said retired flags were still to be respected and must be burned.

I got on well with Hansen, the new seaman. We took several all day hikes up into the hills and discovered two long abandoned gold mine starter holes. On a double dare we jumped in our underwear from the launch into the ocean and stayed in for one full minute. We both turned blue. The fat jovial Engineman knew all sorts of outdoors stuff – he was like a Boy Scout leader. He constructed a crossbow from the branch of a yew tree and taught me how to pan for gold in the foothill

streams. I actually found a few flecks. Both he and Bay were good cooks and, overall, my second half year tending Tree Point Light Station wasn't nearly so tense and tedious as the first six months.

Bay found eighteen animal traps in the schoolhouse basement, cleaned them up and set out a trap line. He intended to catch enough mink to have a coat made for his wife in Seattle. I set one trap for myself and caught one mink. The dead mink was a pretty gruesome sight and I set no more. I later read that trapped animals often die slowly of shock, bleeding and exposure and sometimes even try to free themselves by chewing away their caught leg. Bay caught a lot of mink and one ermine, which he said was just a winter-white weasel. He taught me how to skin them and to tan their hides in brine. We turned each pelt inside out like a glove and stretched it over a wooden shingle to cure. They looked comical hanging from a basement clothesline with their legs splayed – like hairless flying squirrels.

Bay took me deer hunting and I shot at a deer but missed. He got one. We skinned it and cured the hide just as we had the mink's. I cooked some venison on top of the stove, thin-sliced in gravy. It took a long time but

tasted OK. Bay had a shotgun and I tried duck hunting at the small lagoon. I went alone before sunrise and hid behind some rocks. When light arrived, I saw a tight cluster of ducks sitting in the middle of the pond. I fired both barrels at once and raised a big swoosh of water but all the ducks flew away. Bay said you couldn't kill sitting ducks. Their tough wing feathers protect them from the bird-shot. I should have thrown a rock to scare them up and then fired from underneath. Bay shot a Canada goose on the fly but it fell at the mouth of the big lagoon. The tide was running and swept the goose out to sea before we could get to it.

In August, a ship towed a floating salmon trap from Ketchikan and anchored it just off Tree Point. Bay and I took the launch out to the trap and speared half a dozen sockeyes. He built a smokehouse and we cut the salmon into orange-pink steaks to cure them. Shortly afterwards I had a dream: black winter branches against gray sky; in the middle ground, surrounded by puddled water, a dark tree stump had a large orange-pink salmon steak nailed to its side – the only bit of color. A gaunt black hound loped with graceful splashing slowness out and around from behind the stump and then from left to right across the foreground. He looked just like Alfred A. Knopf's Borzoi hound, except that Knopf's dog always runs from right to left. I remember this dream whenever I see the Borzoi hound on a book spine – or a salmon steak on my plate.

I decided to give to my mother, book-by-book and occasion-by-occasion, the complete works of her favorite author, A. A. Milne. The adult books that Milne claimed in his autobiography to be his best – unjustly neglected because of his reputation as a children's author. I got a list from an out of print book dealer in New York and ordered them all. Pretty resourceful, I thought – shopping by mail for little-known books from a remote Alaska lighthouse. I wrote an amusing inscription at the front of one and sent it for her birthday. She appreciated my cleverness. I continued this practice three times a year: birthday, Christmas and mother's day but after a while she said something about a nice idea gone stale. My feelings were hurt but I continued to send the books until my stock was exhausted. I don't think my mother read them all. Now they're all mine but I've read only a few.



The Tree Point crane hoisting the station boat. February 3, 1951 photo courtesy of the Coast Guard.

In one of her letters, my mother warned me against excessive self-gratification. Not in so many words – but her message was clear. She wasn't moralizing. But still worried that over indulgence in private satisfactions would stunt my social development and stifle my initiative. She went so far as to question my motives for choosing to serve at a lighthouse – speculating that it had been less adventure seeking, as I maintained, than self-doubt about my ability to manage more normal circumstances. Better, she counseled, to take up the challenge of joining others and even to sail the stormy seas than to seek out the safety of passive isolation. I was outraged. I answered with guilty denials and a harsh condemnation of her meddling. A mean letter of the kind she had several times cautioned might need to be written but should never be posted.

The winter weather was seldom snowy or icy cold but it was often stormy. The wind was once so fierce I couldn't walk upright to

the lighthouse to take over my watch. I crawled along the tramway to keep from being blown over and got soaked by rain and the spray from waves crashing against the rocks. At Christmas time, our supplies were low because rough seas had prevented taking out the launch to meet the mail boat on its past two trips. On December 24th a Coast Guard plane from Sitka Island flew over and dropped two turkeys, a case of beer, and some canned goods by parachute. Bay took charge of the beer and rationed it out, though none of us were big drinkers. I roasted one of the turkeys but it took seven hours because I couldn't get the pot-burner oven hot enough. We ate late in the evening.

In January, near the end of my year at Tree Point Light Station I fell and injured my wrist. Bay wasn't very sympathetic but the swelling persuaded him to request my evacuation. An amphibian flew down from Ketchikan but the water was too rough for a landing so a

ninety-five-footer was dispatched. Ninety-five foot patrol boats were the Coast Guard's newest and I felt like a VIP. In Ketchikan I was seen by a doctor and X-rayed – no broken bones, just a sprain. I was fitted with a plaster cast and given a few days light duty before going back to Tree Point. Ketchikan was boring – no place to go, nothing to do. I was too young for bars and too timid to visit the whorehouses on Creek Street...

I returned to Tree Point on an old buoy boat. We started out late in the day and anchored for the night on the leeward side of Mary Island. I stood the eight to midnight anchor watch and worried the whole time that something might need tending and I wouldn't know what to do – this being my first sea duty. But nothing went awry except I got a bit sick from the rolling of the boat, which settled my resolve to continue my service on dry land only.

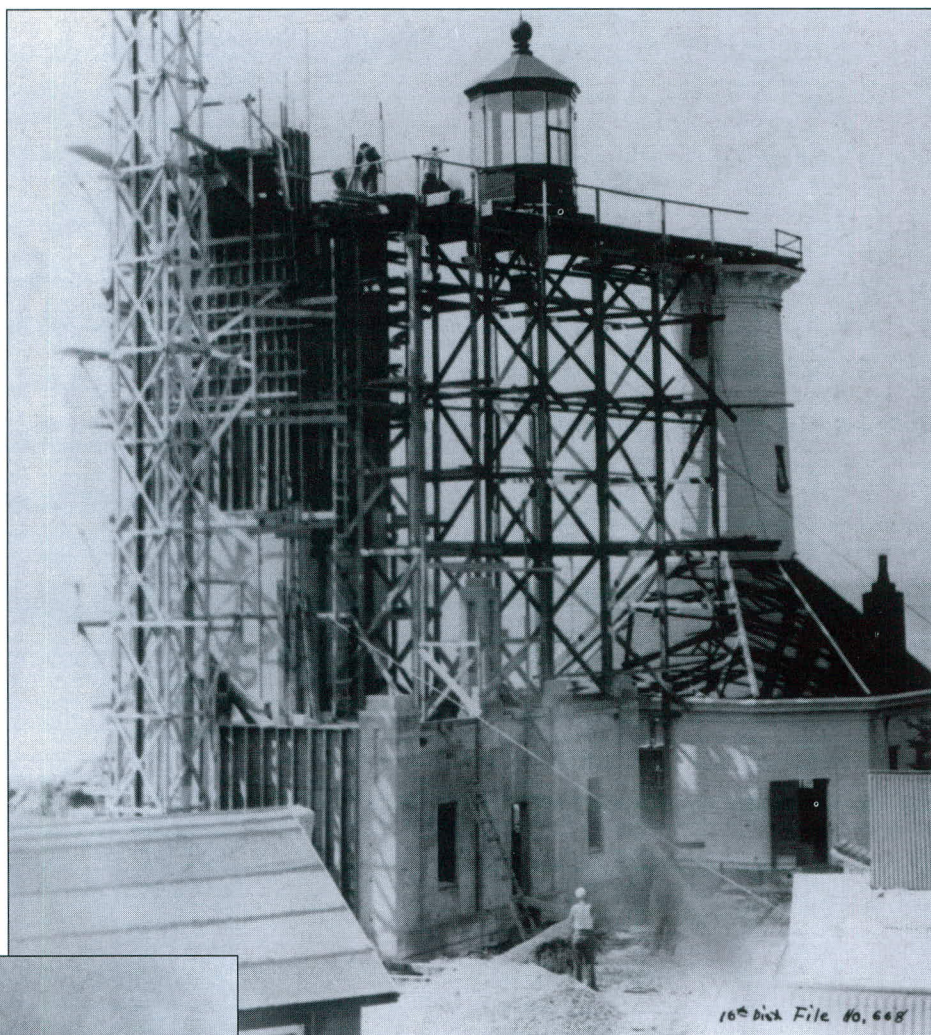


When the station was automated the Coast Guard installed the helicopter platform in the foreground to bring in servicing personnel. Oil storage tanks, at left, were used to fuel the continuously-running generators. They have since been removed and the aid solar powered. Photo courtesy U. S. Coast Guard.

A month later my year at Tree Point Light Station was finished. In boot camp I took the qualifying tests for petty officer training and received good scores. From Tree Point, I applied to Electronics Technician school and was accepted. ET was one of the most prestigious enlisted ratings and I was proud to be headed for six months of instruction at the Coast Guard Training Center in Groton, Connecticut. I traveled back through Ketchikan and Seattle and on to Detroit where I took the thirty days compensatory leave I had earned for having spent a year of isolated duty in Alaska.



The author looking sharp and sporting his new 3rd class stripe.



In 1935 the Lighthouse Service constructed a new poured concrete tower at Tree Point (above) and using a trestle design transferred the old lantern room to the new tower at left.

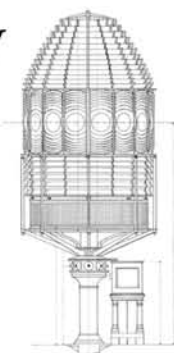
Left – The original 1903 Tree Point tower was constructed of wood, as were many Alaskan lighthouses. Because the weather caused them to deteriorate the Lighthouse Service replaced most of the Alaskan lighthouses in the 1930s. The two round shapes in the tower are horns for the air-powered siren fog signal. Photo courtesy U. S. Coast Guard.

For another look at the Tree Point Station in an earlier era, see the *Letters to the 'Keep* in this issue, page 45.





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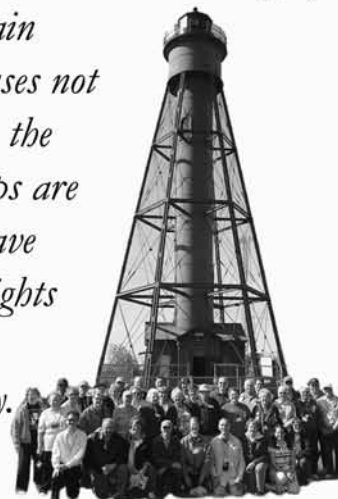
### *Education*



*The Keeper's Log magazine is the only one of its kind and has been published quarterly since 1984.*

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*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*