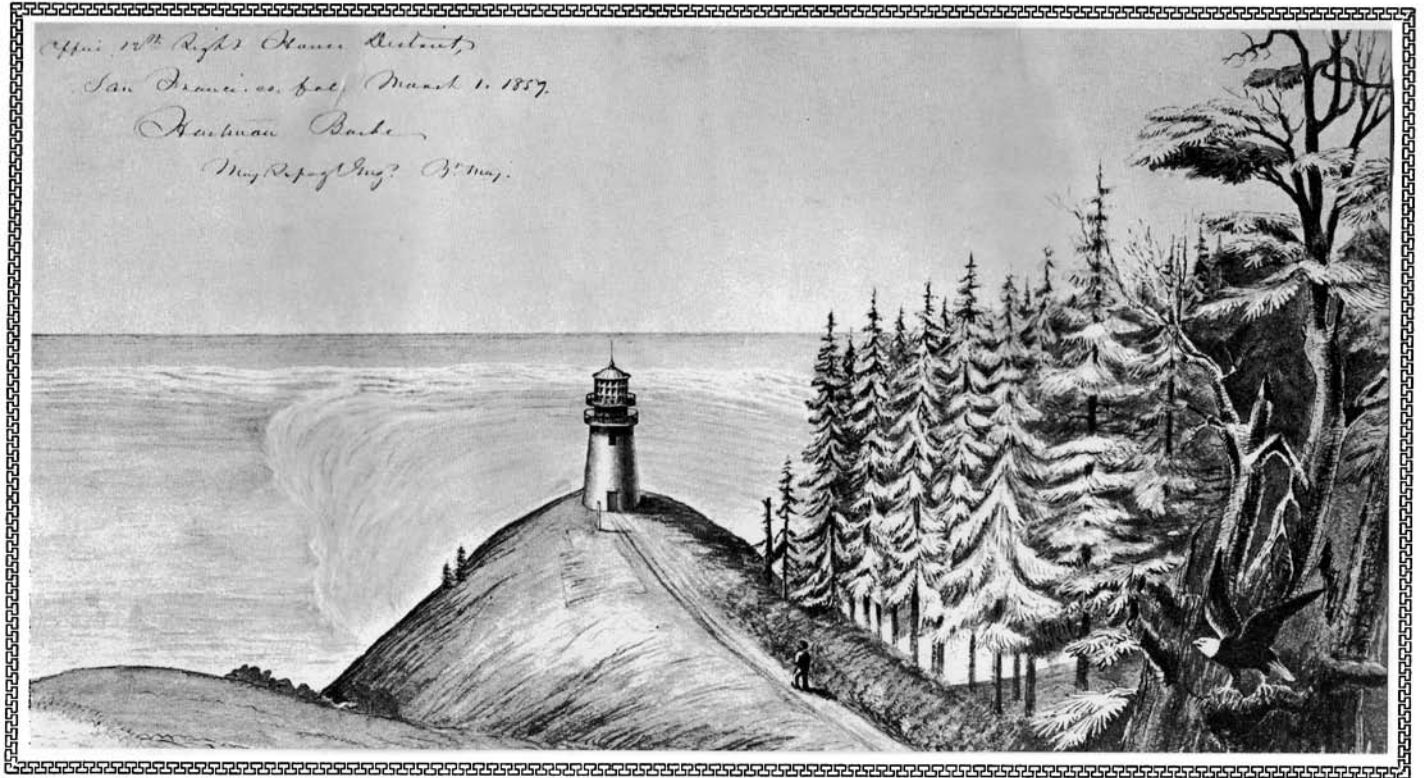


# Cape Disappointment Light Station

By Wayne Wheeler



The above watercolor is the work of Major Hartman Bache. As a Lieutenant and member of the Army Topographical Engineers, Bache surveyed the locations for the first eight light stations to be constructed on the west coast. He later made Major and was assigned to the Lighthouse Board as Inspector of the 4th District (NJ, DE & MD). In July, 1855 he was transferred to the new 12th District (the entire west coast) as Inspector with offices in San Francisco.

During the period 1854 – 1859 as the first eight authorized light stations were being constructed, Congress authorized the construction of eight more, some of them were finished before the first series was completed.

Hartman Bache thought that it was important to chronicle the new stations and to that end he traveled to the sites and made measured drawings and sketches of the new light-houses. When he returned to San Francisco

his draftsman, T. E. Sandgren, rendered the drawings into watercolors. The above drawing of Cape Disappointment is one of those watercolors. The words written on the upper left of the drawing states, "Office of the 12th Light House District, San Francisco, Cal, March 1, 1857. Hartman Bache, Maj., Topographical Eng. Brv. Maj.

Hartman Bache was the great grandson of Benjamin Franklin. From 1862 to 1870 he served on the Lighthouse Board. His cousin A.D. Bache was named Superintendent of the Coast Survey in 1843. He founded the National Academy of Sciences and served on the Lighthouse Board. A.D. Bache's brother, George, was a Naval officer and served on the Coast Survey, surveying northeast and Chesapeake Bay lighthouses.

The following article contains correspondence between Hartman Bache and the keeper of the Cape Disappointment Light Station.

The Columbia River, 1,210 miles in length, is the second longest river in America. Twice a day a huge volume of water running to the sea encounters an incoming tide at the mouth of the river.

This phenomenon, coupled with the wind and currents from the northwest, causes heavy surf and a dangerous bar situation. It is the leading cause of the hundreds of vessels which have been lost on the Columbia River Bar.

The first explorer to view the river was the Spaniard Bruno Heceta [He ceeta], on August 17, 1775. In his ship's log he recorded, "...the currents and the expanse of water made me believe it is the mouth of a large river or a passage to some other sea." He mapped the northern and southern capes and named them San Rogue and San Frandoso. Heceta eventually had a headland in Oregon named after

him as did the second European to sight the two capes, John Meares. Fur trader Meares sighted Cape Rogue, as it was initially called, on July 6, 1788. Captain Meares tried to find an entrance to escape the high seas he was experiencing. He wrote in his log, "...Disappointment continued to accompany us... we can safely exert that no river San Rogue exists." Because of his frustration he renamed Cape Rogue, Cape Disappointment.

Four years later the British navigator, Captain George Vancouver came to the same conclusion. After lying off the coast for two days, studying the tides and currents, he wrote that there was no large river in the area worthy of exploration.

On May 11, 1792, Captain Robert Gray of the American vessel *Columbia* did realize that a river extended back from Cape Disappointment. He crossed the bar and anchored at what is now Chinook, Washington. He traded with the local Indians, claimed the land drained by the river and its tributaries and named the river after his vessel, *Columbia*.

The second American vessel to enter the river, shortly after Gray, was the fur trader

Elsie, Capt. Baker commanding. The bay east of and behind Cape Disappointment is named for him. On November 17, 1805, Meriwether Lewis, and his Corps of Discovery, arrived and logged the longitude.

During the War of 1812, Great Britain claimed ownership of the cape and fort Astoria on the south side of the entrance. After the war, the treaty of Ghent returned the area to America. However, ownership remained in doubt for several years. In 1818, Capt James Biddle arrived aboard the American sloop of war *Ontario*, landed 150 troops, near the present Cape Disappointment Coast Guard Station, hiked to the summit, nailed a lead tablet to a tree, turned a ceremonial spade of earth, saluted the flag and claimed the vast area for the United States. Just two months later the British frigate *Blossom* entered the river, anchored and repeated the American's action claiming the land for Great Britain. Eventually the *HMS Blossom* ran aground on a rock in San Francisco Bay (near what is now Treasure Island) which is now named for that vessel.

The dispute over ownership continued. In

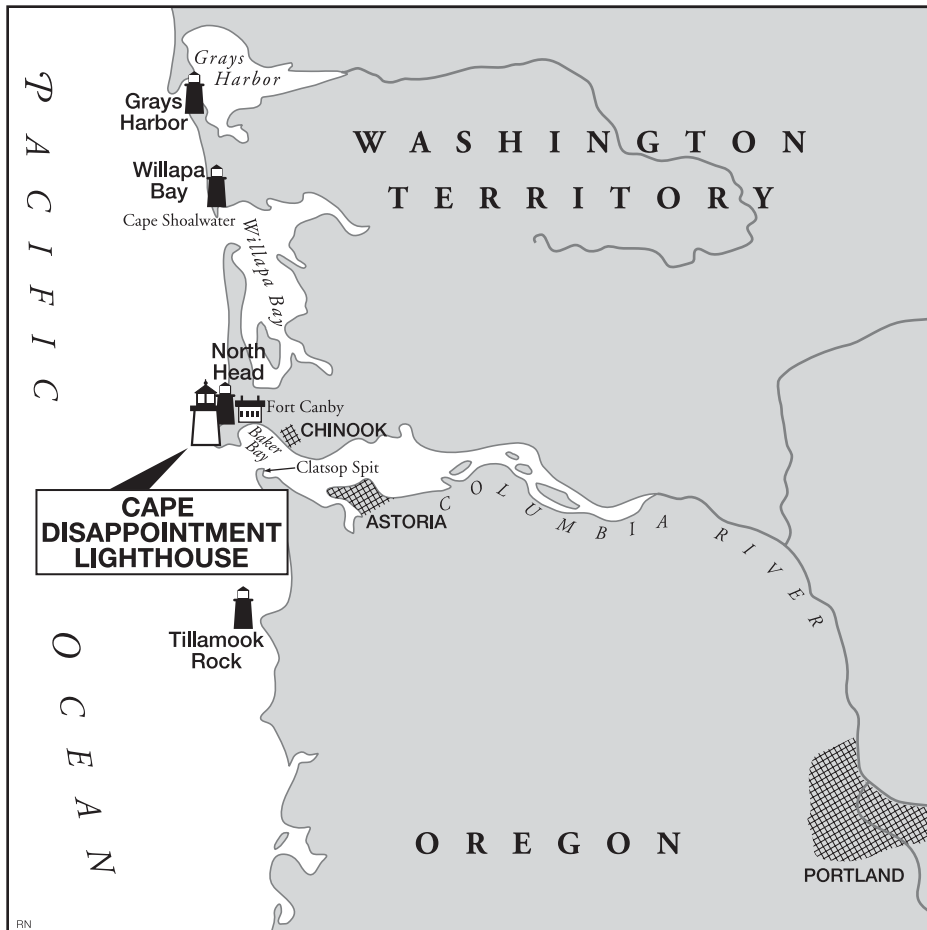
1849, Britain sent Lt Henry Marre and Marvan Vavasour to survey the mouth of the river and to make recommendations about where to erect a battery of guns on the bluff. While they were surveying the area they met the American James Saule who claimed possession of the area.. Concurrent with this Britain also ordered Skene Ogden, commandant of Fort Vancouver, to establish a pilot lookout station and a trading post.

Ogden paid Saule for his squatter's rights only to learn later that the land belonged to two other Americans, Newton Wheeler and William McDaniel. He then paid off those two and erected a dwelling and warehouse which was used by the Hudson Bay Company until 1850. Meanwhile Marre and Marvan submitted a recommendation that the Cape Disappointment highland be equipped with three batteries of heavy guns. However, the Treaty of Ghett of 1846 awarded the lands south of the 49th parallel to the United States and this recommendation was never acted on.

In 1850, an early type of coast pilot recommended that mariners entering the *Columbia* River first pass close aboard Sand Island and then use three tall spruce trees, which had been trimmed at the top as a range, to safely cross the bar and enter the river. Mariners would line the three trees up at a distance of five miles from the mouth of the river and steer on them until safely across the bar.

Back in 1846, Lt William McArthur, Captain of the Coast Survey vessel *Ewing* recommended that a lighthouse be established on the southwest slope of the head of Cape Disappointment. He also stated that the structure should not be constructed of wood due to the proximity of numerous trees and the potential for fire. Lt Hartman Bache surveyed the entire west coast after McArthur and designated eight sites for an initial string of west coast lighthouses. Seven sites were selected in California and one in Washington Territory, at Cape Disappointment. Actually, at that time the cape was known as Cape Hancock.

Initially, the contract of the west coast allotted \$15,000 for lighthouses at San Diego, Point Conception, Monterey (Point Pinos), the Farallon Islands, Alcatraz and Fort Point, the last two in San Francisco Bay or a total of \$90,000. The same act authorized \$53,140 for a lighthouse at Cape Disappointment, at an island off Cape Flattery and at New Dungeness, as well as some buoys for the *Columbia* River.

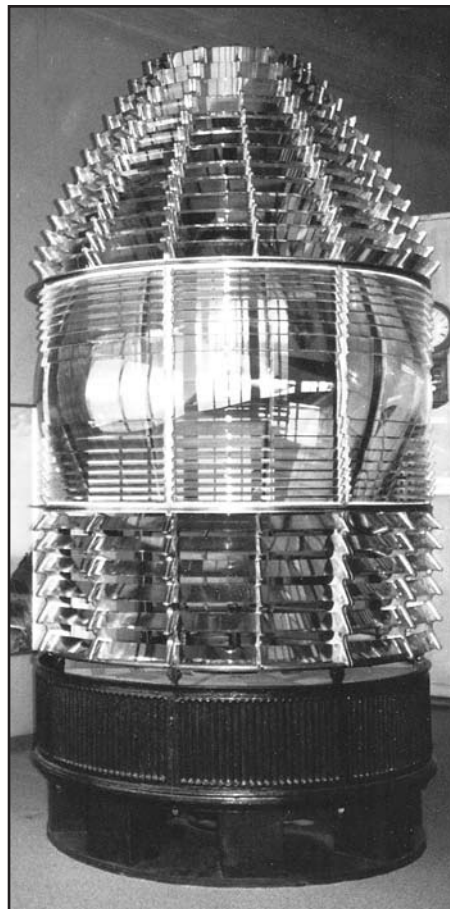
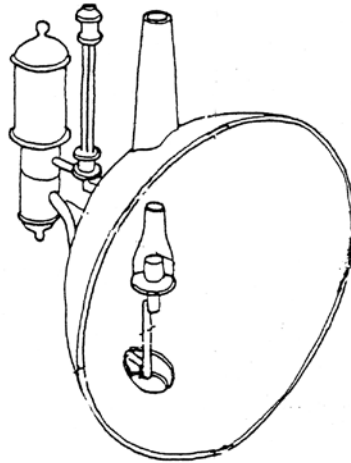
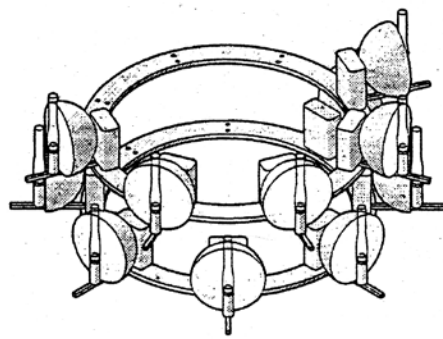


There were some improprieties after the contract was let and a Senate Select Committee investigated (see *The Keeper's Log* Vol. VII #2 and 3). The contract was eventually given to another contractor, Gibbons & Kelly of Baltimore, MD. The new contract included the above mentioned for California, plus the Cape Disappointment lighthouse (\$53,000) and added a lighthouse at Humboldt Bay adding another \$15,000 to the pot. The Humboldt Bay lighthouse appropriation was approved March 3, 1851.

Gibbons and Kelley loaded the ship *Oriole* with all the necessary supplies to construct the eight light stations save the material for the exterior walls. They were instructed they could use either brick, rubble stone or granite for that purpose, which ever was cheapest and locally available.

The *Oriole* reached California early in 1853. Construction crews were landed at several sites so that work could proceed concurrently. Leaving California the vessel arrived off Cape Hancock (Disappointment) on September 18, 1853. Because of the heavy surf and dangerous bar conditions the *Oriole* waited off-shore for eight days. Finally, not willing to wait any longer the Captain attempted to cross the bar. Under shortened sail the *Oriole* made slow headway against the ebb tide when suddenly there was a shift in the wind. The skipper instructed the crew to climb aloft and make more sail, but no sooner than the sails were unfurled than they were becalmed and the currents started to set the vessel down on a nearby shoal. Heavily weighted with cargo, the hull splintered and the rudder was dislodged. Then the tide changed and the *Oriole* was carried off into deeper water. Soon the hull started filling with water. The Captain ordered abandon ship and all 32 people on board took to the boats. As soon as they pushed off in the ship's small boats the bark rolled over on her beams ends and disappeared beneath the surface taking all the cargo with her. Fortunately the crew and passengers were all saved.

A second shipment of materials arrived in 1854. During that year the newly installed Lighthouse Board decided that they would replace all the existing reflector systems of lighting with the French Fresnel lens. A change order was issued to the contractor advising him not to construct the reflector systems, and that he would be sent Fresnel lenses for all eight west coast lighthouses. The change order also required that any of the old style lantern rooms



already completed would have to be torn down and replaced by the Board's new design. In many cases, like Cape Disappointment, the large 1st order Fresnel lens would not have fit in the original lantern room design anyway.

The construction of the Cape Hancock (Disappointment) lighthouse was a tedious task. An oxen trail had to be cut through the forest along a steep slope. Curious Indians from the area gathered to watch the strange work of the white man. Unlike other tribes in the Pacific Northwest, the tribes around the Columbia River were friendly, as they had previously been to Lewis and Clark, and they assisted the work crew.

**Top left – A chandelier of eleven parabolic reflectors and oil lamps.**

**Center left – A parabolic reflector and gravity fed oil lamp.**

**Bottom left – The fixed 1st order Fresnel lens used in the Cape Disappointment and, later, North Head Lighthouses is now on display at the Fort Canby Museum. It is six feet in diameter and originally the fixed white light could be seen for 22 miles. Photo by Julie Hunt.**

The design for all the west coast lighthouses was created in Washington before the board took over. It incorporated a tower within a 1 ½ story dwelling. However, at two of the sites there wasn't room at the tower location for the combination tower and dwelling. At the Farallons (off San Francisco, CA) and at Cape Disappointment, the dwelling was constructed away from the tower.

The Fresnel lens first went into operation at Cape Hancock on October 1, 1856. The first keeper was John Boyle and his correspondence with the first Superintendent for the lighthouses of the west coast, Major Hartman Bache, and subsequent superintendents, gives one the flavor of what it was like to live in the remote area and on the Columbia River. Fort Canby was on the north side of the river, along with the light station. On the other side of the river was Astoria, a city established by John Jacob Astor for fur trading. By the time the light station was established, a Collector of Customs was installed at Astoria.

John Boyd arrived and took charge even before the lens had been installed.

[The Society was fortunate to receive two 'letter books' pertaining to the Cape Disap-

pointment Light Station, known as Cape Hancock back then. One journal contains copies of letter from Keeper Boyd to the 12th District Inspector in San Francisco, the other, letters from the inspector to Boyd. Following are excerpts from those letters from when the station was opened in 1856 until the mid 1860s. The correspondence shows the bleakness of life at Cape Disappointment (Cape Hancock). Although there was an Army post located nearby on the Cape, and the town of Astoria across the Bay, living at the lighthouse was a lonely affair. There was no depot or convenience store where the keepers could obtain supplies. And even if they could they had no money with which to purchase needed articles. In fact for a period of almost a year their wages were in arrears. Everything had to be ordered from San Francisco; cleaning rags, corn brooms, pieces of metal, glass chimneys for the lamp in the lens, etc.

All the letters begin with a formal salutation and are signed off by both parties with a formal statement such as, "I am, sir, very respectfully, your most obedient servant." In the interest of space we have foregone the lengthy salutations and closings. Additionally, we occasionally include merely a synopsis of what was written.

**O**n May 24, 1856, Maj. Bache wrote to Boyd, "Sir: A party under the charge of Robert Russell will leave here [San Francisco] on Monday in the Barque *Punomawana* to make the necessary alterations, etc., and place the Lantern and apparatus on the Light Tower at Cape Hancock.

You will please accommodate him in the keeper's dwelling, and afford Mr. Russell every assistance in your power in the execution of his duties. Mr. Russell will deliver to you oil butts, drip pans, blankets, stationary, etc. for which you will sign triplicate receipts. You will also sign similar receipts for all accessories of the lighting apparatus and other public property at the close of operations."

Your Obedt Servant,  
Hartman Bache

[We believe that Mr. Russell was the District Engineer, serving under Major Hartman Bache]

In November, Bache wrote again:

"Sir: In case the yoke of oxen and wagon left at the Cape by Mr. Russell are not already sold, you will retain and take charge of them until further instructed upon the subject.

Mr. Russell is of the opinion the oxen may be kept in the grass in the vicinity of the station."

Bache

Keeper Boyd responded on November 14, 1856:

"Sir: Your communication of the 6th Inst. Was duly received. The oxen are still at the station, but not in as good condition as when Mr. Russell left. We intend to have them driven over on the peninsula, about five miles from this place, where they can subsist in the grass during the winter. A friend of mine promises to look after them. The success with the management of the light much better than I anticipated, and find that we can perform all the duties of a light keeper as well as an able man [keeper Boyd was in some way crippled]. We now have the clock and pumps to work admirably. [This was a 1st order fixed lens, but the oil reservoir had a clockwork system to work the oil pump]. The average consumption of oil is now about six quarts a night. With paint and putty we have made the lantern comparatively water tight.

There are many articles wanting at the station, but we will endeavor to get along with what we have until the close of the quarter. I have watched with the light every night that it was exhibited and can truly say it is very cold and uncomfortable, and if the weather becomes much colder I do not know what we shall do to keep ourselves from suffering. The oil is good and gives a good clear flame."

John Boyd

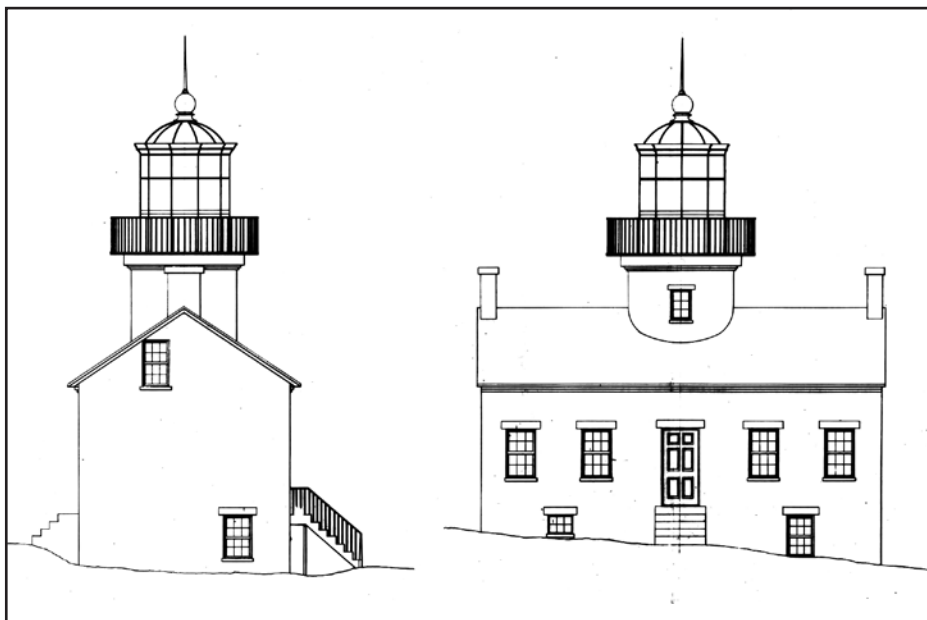
On November 20 he wrote to Bache again:

"Sir: As the winter advances we find it very damp, cold and uncomfortable watching with the light without a fire in the tower. As the dwelling is situated so far from the tower, those having the watch are obliged to sleep there. We require a small stove very much and shall suffer without one through long cold nights. One that we could heat oil and water on would be preferable. If we did not consider it absolutely necessary we would not asked to have it allowed.

If you deem our request a reasonable one, please have it forwarded on the next steamer"

Boyd

On December 2, 1856 Bache responded "Sir: I am in receipt of your letters of 14th and 20th ulto. I am pleased to learn you have made so good an arrangement for the keep and care of the oxen. Also, to find you succeed so well in managing the lamp and stopping the leaks in the lantern. Persevere in the use of putty



This design was provided for the original eight lighthouses constructed on the west coast. At Cape Disappointment there wasn't enough room on the headland for the dwelling portion which was located down slope away from the tower.

and paint, and you will eventually make the lantern perfectly tight.

I have, at your request, ordered a stove for the station. It will be taken to Astoria on the *Columbia* on her next trip. I designed the stove for use in the bell house. Mr. Russell has, at my command, made a tracing showing the position the stove is to have in it, with memoranda for use in setting it up, etc. I do not wish you to understand that I positively forbid the use of the stove in the tower, but it must be placed there only in case it will not answer the purposes in the bell house. The dust from the fire within the tower finds its way through the man hole and iron room into the lantern and is most injurious to the lens. It is difficult also to dispose of [situate] the stove pipe as to not interfere with the lantern – even in case the pipe is passed out horizontally – the smoke and dust would soil and discolor the tower – and to some extent obscure the light. I refer to a tower like that at Cape Hancock in which the only place which to set a stove is on the landing at the head of the stairs..."

Bache

To Bache January 2, 1857

"Sir: ...the receipts for the stove were signed and returned to your office. The stove arrived in good condition and has been set up according to instructions. We are grateful for it. ...You will perceive that in the later part of the month of Dec. the lamp consumed more oil per night than previous to that time. The cause is different management. We have opened the damper, raised the wicks and kept a larger flame. Mr. Franklin had instructed me to raise the flame by closing the damper and having the wick low, said this was the proper way to manage it, although it is reverse of the printed instructions. Closing the damper confines the heat on the tube irregularity in the flow of oil causes the flame to rise instantly and thus not have a chance to escape, breaks the chimney. This is the cause of so large a number of chimneys being broken. I received but little practical knowledge from Mr. F which Mr. Russell probably knows to be the case, The most complicated part of the lamps is the pumps, which he told me but little about. Since we have made the chance in the management we have broken no chimneys, have had a better light and it has given general satisfaction. We have been careful and have taken much pains to have a good light. ...the cellar [of the dwelling] has from two to three feet

of water in it

The Life Boat here in my charge has had no paint on for some time and requires painting. We will paint it if you will allow the material. The L.H. boat will also want painting in the spring. And there is much painting to do in the tower and dwelling. We shall probably require more lead and oil before the close of the quarter than we now have on hand..."

John Boyd

To Bache March 2, 1857

"Sir: Mr. Russell's letter of 31 December had just come to hand. Owing to the stormy weather we have been unable to cross the bay for the last month. Mr. R's letter speaks to the water in the cellar and said that you wished me to write you on the subject. The small pump in the reservoir is out of repair and even if it were in order, it is too small to pump the water out of the cellar and keep it out. It would but require a large rotary pump to be kept constantly at work to keep the water out during the rainy season such as the winters are.... How the water can be kept out I hardly know, unless the cellar can be cemented... there are now 14 inches of water in the cellar and it has been as high as three feet. It makes the house very damp and uncomfortable besides being entirely useless during the winter when we require a cellar most.

The oxen were well cared for during the cold weather. Were fed on hay. We continue to improve the management of the light, so

there can be no complaint in the light we show now..."

Boyd

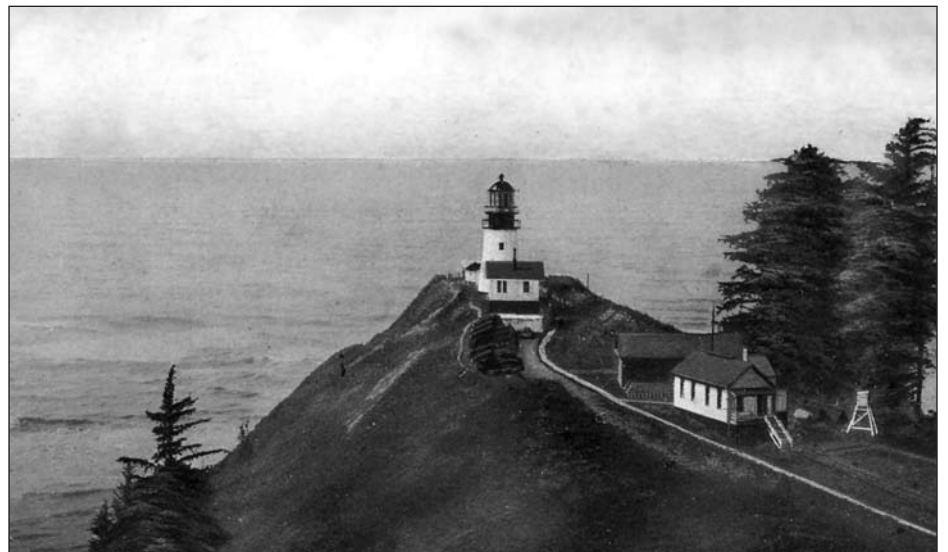
To Boyd February 24, 1857

"Sir: I am disposed to believe that the present winter has been remarkable for the high level of the tide waters of the Columbia, and that the cellar of the dwelling may not be overflowed, at least for the same extend for a long time to come...I propose to supply the station with the ordinary box pump used here to free cellars of water. I will see if I can procure one and if I can I will send it to you...As I can make no guess when oxen and wagon will be required for lighthouse purposes at Shoalwater Bay, you are authorized to sell those at Cape Hancock on the following terms: Cash price not less than \$125 for the wagon and \$100 for the oxen - the purchaser to receive them at the station, the above amounts to be deposited with the Collector at Astoria for transmission to me – the wagon and oxen not to be delivered until you receive a certificate from the Collector that the stipulated price has been deposited with him."

Hartman Bache

To Bache from Boyd March 11, 1857:

"Sir: Your communications of the 24 Ult. and 6 Inst. have come to hand, also the receipt for the pipe, pump, book, etc. We will use our endeavors to free the cellar and think that it can now be done as there is only about ten



**A turn-of-the-20th-century look at Cape Disappointment Lighthouse. The bell house can be seen just left of the tower. The house at right is probably the head keeper's dwelling. The structure next to it is a Weather Service "station," a rain gauge, wet and dry thermometers. Old post card dated 1909.**

inches in it....I know of no purchasers for the oxen at present, but will sell them at first opportunity. The wagon I can dispose of soon according to your instructions."

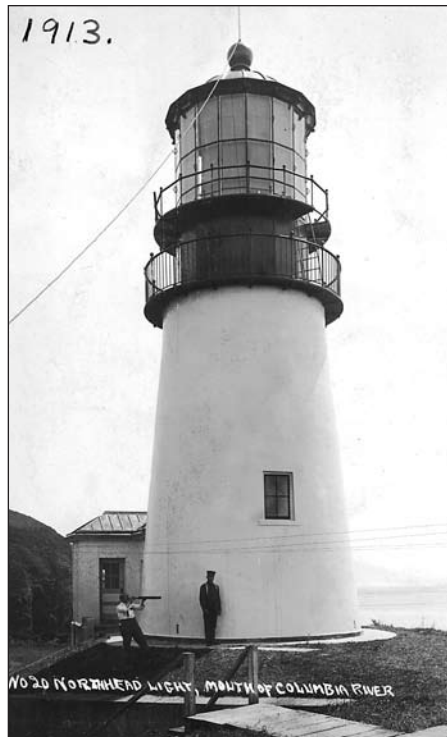
Boyd

**K**eepers Boyd continues to report his improvement in learning the ways of keeping the light station, but the cellar continues to be a problem. At the end of March he writes to Superintendent Hartman Bache, "Sir: In accordance with your instructions we set up the pump in the cellar and succeeded in pumping out the water in about four hours, but in a few hours there was the same quantity in it again. It will take one man to keep the pump in operation, and as we have much work to be done we have concluded to let it remain for present, but will give it our attention when we get through with our most urgent duties. We have thoroughly cleaned the paint work of the dwelling and repainted it, have also white washed all the rooms. Owing to the unfitness of the weather we have been unable to paint the life boat. . .we have not yet sold the wagon or the oxen. . .we shall require nothing for the next quarter except the vessels [of] about three gallons suitable for carrying the oil from the storehouse to the tower."

Boyd

Bache wrote back, "...I regret to learn that water should so soon overflow the cellar. I fear there is no cure for the evil, but to cement the cellar walls on the outside and to lay a brick floor in cement. I should judge from what you say of painting and whitewashing, that the dwelling must make a good appearance. It should be understood, however, that neither should be done oftener than is required for the reservation and cleanliness of the house. . .I have directed two buckets with covers to go up to you by the next steamer, as they are to carry oil from the store house to the light tower. I shall send them larger than three gallons each, with a yoke to go across the shoulders two buckets could be carried with more ease and indeed safely, then one bucket of even smaller size. Such a yoke you ought to be able to make at the station. . ."

In April, Boyd continues to report on his progress with painting the various buildings and improved management of the station. He also tells Bache that he sold the wagon to G.A. Holms on sight (sic) for \$130. He says that it would have brought more if it were taken



**Two keepers at Cape Disappointment. Old post card dated 1913.**

to Astoria, but that it would have been offset by the expense of transporting it there. And, "About ten days since the water left the cellar, we hope never to be allowed to return. If it cannot be cemented it would be better to fill it up than to have the water in it another winter."

On May 2, 1857 Bache writes Boyd, "... Bear in mind that when you paint – you paint the same color – no change of color can be made except by permission of this office. . .I am pleased to hear that the water has left the cellar, I cannot not hope, however, that it will not return. Something will have eventually to be done with regards to the overflow – and it may be that filling up the cellar will be the best thing."

Boyd responds to Bache's remark about changing the color of the buildings. "...We have changed the color of none of the buildings on the outside or inside, except around the service table under the lens, which we changed from red to white. The object in doing so was to throw more light into the room where the work is done. White being a better reflector than red, but if it is wrong we will change it as we do not wish to go contrary

to your instructions in anything connected to the station. . ."

Boyd must have a disability as in June he wrote, "...We have now got through with most of the work and have labored hard. Harder than we would have, had we been an able man, for one reason, that there can be no cause of complaint by some unfriendly persons in this vicinity. They have already got up a petition for my removal, but failed in accomplishing their object. As I am disabled from actual labor or from following up my profession I would like to hold this situation as long as I perform all that is required of me satisfactorily. . .the second assistant has left and a man who has a wife takes his place tomorrow."

Boyd remarks in a July 2, 1857 letter, "...We now have a woman in the house who keeps it nice and clean and in order. She is the wife of the second assistant. I wish to say a few words about the cellar. One of the masons who built the first tower thinks he can cement the cellar and make it perfectly water tight. He says he will do it by contract and if he fails to make it water proof he will forfeit the amount he is to receive for the job. He lives about ten miles from the station, is an honest and industrious man and a good citizen. . ."

Boyd also remarked about the bell fog signal at the station, "It is not rung when we can see beyond the outer breakers which are about three miles distant. I presume that it is proper to say here that it cannot be heard half that distance, except if it is perfectly calm, nor can it be heard in the channel opposite the tower with a light breeze blowing from the southward. . ."

Bache responded on 13 July, "Was aware that the bell could not be heard very far. The height and form of the head, taken in connection with the direction of the wind, no doubt principally explains this – the roar of the surf also has something to do with it. . .it is gratifying to learn that you now have no trouble with the management of the light, and that the house is kept clean and in order –to the presence of a woman – the wife of the second assistant." Bache is intrigued by the mason's proposal and ends his letter, "...I regret that you have not been able to sell the oxen. If they are not sold by next season, there may be a use for them at Shoalwater Bay –where I propose to build a lighthouse."

A lighthouse was constructed at Shoalwater Bay the following year (1858). The name was later changed to Willapa Bay Light House.

The mason, Mr. Caruthers, submitted a proposal to seal the cellar. He would furnish all labor and materials, except ten barrels of concrete, which he wanted the government to send from San Francisco to Astoria. He will warrant his work and wait until it is proven to keep the water out at which point he will be paid \$400. If it is necessary, he wanted to use bricks left at the station by Mr. Russell. His plan was to take up to two feet of sand out of the center of the cellar and layer shale, clay and shale in the hole capping it with cement. He would cement the walls as well.

Boyd submitted this proposal to Bache and remarked in the letter that he paid local Indians \$5 to drive the oxen over to Mr. Edwards place and that he was paying Mr. Edwards \$1 a month to tend to them. The reason he was having a hard time selling them is that they were too old to work and the cost of beef was low [for eating] and they were too far from market.

The negotiations between Bache and Caruthers, through keeper Boyd, took so long that by the time all were in agreement (mid August 1857), Caruthers stated that it was now too late in the season to perform the work, the cement wouldn't have time to properly dry before the onset of the rainy season. He proposed delaying until the next spring.

In September, Boyd wrote Bache regarding the broken level and non receipt of a replacement. "...The other level was broken by the first assistant. He says he knocked it off the center of the burner, when centering lines, accidentally. Whether it was the result of an accident I am unable to say, for he has broken many things that seem to have been done intentionally. I intend to soon state some facts necessitating this man that perhaps it was my duty to have informed you long ago. He is here by the recommendation and advice of Gen. Adair, but I think we cannot suffer him to remain much longer." He also remarks that the bell now seems to be of assistance to the pilots, helping them locate the channel as they watch for vessels entering and leaving. He also requests a small soldering iron and aprons for the keepers along with other supplies.

In October, the letters regard supplies, new thoughts about the cellar from Mr. Cruthers and that the assistant which he complained about was discharged by General Aikens. Correspondence in November, December and January mention the oxen [Bache is now certain he will construct a new lighthouse at Shoal-

water Bay, WA], supplies and the fact that the purser on the steamer from San Francisco continually fails to read the bills of laden and off loads oil and other supplies for Cape Disappointment at Portland in lieu of Astoria.

To Bache February 4, 1858

Sir: "...The assistants are becoming very much dissatisfied in consequence of not receiving their money. One, the second, intends to leave in April. None of us have received a dollar of our salaries since last June and are annoyed very much by this. Our provision bills are unpaid. Small as our salaries are it seems we might be paid once a quarter, at least, unless the government is insolvent, and if it is not then there is wrong somewhere. We all earn our salaries here and I think that in all justice it should be paid when due. Gen. Adair says he has received no money from Washington for this purpose – and if not, the fault must be there. May we ask you sir, to aid us in obtaining our rights.

Mr. Edwards does not work the oxen now, has turned them out on the range." Keeper Boyd then lists the supplies he requires; 300 gallons of sperm oil, keg of white lead, 12 pounds of green paint, 3 gals of paint oil, 2 qts. spirit of turpentine, 2 paint brushes – med. Size, ½ doz. papers tripoli, ½ doz. Sheets of emery paper, ½ doz., vials of clock oil, one yard of broad cloth for oil filter, 1 box lamp and 2

pieces of sponge.

To Boyd February 24, 1858

"Sir: ...I propose to send up 600 gallons of oil – more than a year's supply – by the Barque *Jane A. Flakenburg*, Captain Flannel, which I understand is now on her way down here. The smaller store will go up at the same time. As green does not bear exposure to the salt atmosphere as well as red, you will please paint the lantern, where it is now green, of that colour. No green will therefore be sent, and only two vials of clock oil, as this quantity is quite sufficient for a year. . . I have written to the Light House Board calling attention to your statement that no payment has been made to you or your assistants since June.

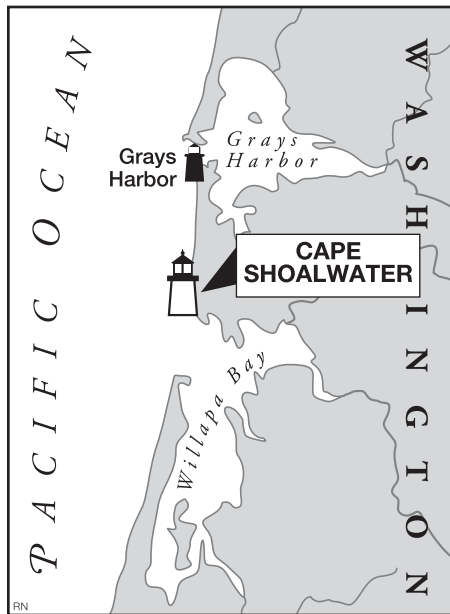
Hartman Bache"

Boyd writes back and thanks Bache for his effort to secure their pay. But at the end of March he writes, "Sir, it becomes my duty to report to you the change of keepers at this station. On the 15th Charles Green, second assistant, resigned, on account of the compensation being too small. Robert Greenlaw of Oregon was chosen to fill the place of Charles Green and has entered upon his duties."

On April 9, 1858 Major Bache writes Boyd that his quarterly reports of the last two quarters are in error as, the return of the 2nd quarter has a remaining in store, "one vial



The Cape Shoalwater Lighthouse, later renamed the Willapa Bay Lighthouse. The structure at left may be a lookout tower to watch for vessels in trouble when the bar channel is rough. Note the keeper by the front door. The station eventually succumbed to erosion. U. S. Coast Guard photo.



clock oil, while the return of the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter takes up two vials of clock oil as “in store last return.” Also, “Two feather brushes should have been entered in ‘Return of 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter’ as ‘received in this quarter.’”

On April 10, 1858 Boyd writes Bache, “...I fear that I shall be unable to bring the oil to the station [from Astoria] as I told you last fall. In the first place, the casks are too large to manage in the L.H. Boat, which would require us to make six trips to Astoria at an expense of two dollars each time. The assistants are unwilling to incur this expense, and to hire a man to go in the boat would cost more than the freight from Astoria to here amounts to. If twenty gallon casks, such as were sent last August, had been sent we could have boated it over. Under the circumstances then, sir, will you pay the expense from Astoria to the station, and excuse me for failing to fulfill my promise?”

I wish to make a request with regards to our dwelling. There is about a foot of water in the cellar, making the house as you doubtlessly already know very damp and uncomfortable and it is not only disagreeable but unhealthy during the winter. I have made no complaint before, but have borne the inconveniences year after year hoping that something would be done to make our dwelling more comfortable, and supposed that the cellar would have been cemented last summer. What we ask is that you will fill up the cellar about 3 ½ feet, that being as high as the water rises since the ditch was made. Thus we would still have room to keep our vegetables from frost in the winter.”

The bell house has not been used as a

sleeping compartment owing to it being too open and cold. During the storms the rains beat in, in such a manner that no one could think of sleeping there. The first winter we slept in the tower. Those having the watch should sleep on the site, for third of a mile is too far to walk on a winter night. To build a small house near the tower for a sleeping compartment where we could have a stove in cold weather, would not only allow us to attend the light much better, but afford us much comfort....”

Boyd

Correspondence between Major Bache and Keeper Boyd continued through the rest of 1858 regarding supplies, errors and corrections to the quarterly returns (Boyd “...there is no place to list feather brushes on the returns..”), non receipt of pay (“We have received none of our money yet, and find it to be exceedingly vexing to be obliged to live on credit. The first assistant has become so dissatisfied that he is determined to leave as soon as he is paid what is due him. He has served faithfully for ten months without receiving any earnings except five dollars.”) and what to do about the water in the cellar.

Bache recommends building a new dwelling up on the Cape, near the tower. Boyd nixes the idea as a dwelling there would be too exposed to the weather. In the summer Bache asks Boyd to make certain measurements of the dwelling, perhaps to construct an addition.

To Bache August 20, 1858

“Sir: ...We have received none of our salary for five quarters and the assistants have got entirely out of patience waiting for it. And I should say here that in consequence of not receiving any pay for their services they have become very careless and negligent in their duties.”

Boyd

In September Keeper Boyd, in anticipation of an addition to the dwelling, asks how rooms should be allotted to the keepers. Bache responded, “There is no given allotment of rooms to the different keepers, but should be regulated by their condition, whether married or single. A keeper who is married and has his wife with him should have a room, the other two keepers, if single, to occupy a room together. If all the keepers at Cape Hancock were married it would be necessary to occupy one of the tower rooms, leaving but one room [in the dwelling] as a sitting room. Carrying out the above rules, the keeper should have

first choice, the 1st Assistant second choice.” He also remarked, “I have done all I can for you and the assistants in regard to your compensation. The Light House Board pointed out the remedy which I duly communicated to you. I can only express my regret that you all should so long be deprived of your just dues under the law and the appropriations.”

Bache

The situation regarding the ‘chain of command’ in the Lighthouse Service at that time (1850s) was a District Inspector in charge of operations of an area with an engineer (Army Corps of Topographical Engineers) as a technical assistant. However, the pay for keepers, as well as the receipt of supplies, was handled by the local Collector of Customs. In the case of the 12th District, the entire west coast (until 1860), all major ports had collectors (including Portland, OR and Sacramento, CA), but only those along the seacoast would have control over certain light stations: San Diego, Monterey, San Francisco, Humboldt Bay, Astoria, Seattle, etc..

To illustrate the exactness, or pettiness, of the Service, Major Bache complained to keeper Boyd in October of 1858 that the “...quantity of oil was set down as 176 gallons [for the quarter], whereas it should be 176 26/32 gallons.”

In October, tragedy strikes as keeper Boyd reports, “It is with deep regret that I have to inform you of the loss of the 2nd assistant and Light House Boat. On the 25th of October he left the station in the boat for Astoria for supplies. It was blowing a fresh breeze from the eastward and flood tide. We saw him from the tower until he got beyond Sand Island and supposed he was beyond all danger, but not far from where we saw him he was seen by a man on Chinook Point to capsize and managing to climb on the bottom of it. This man hastened to Chinook, three miles distant, and immediately sent a canoe with three Indians to his assistance, but before they could reach him the boat drifted into the breakers and nothing more has been seen or heard of Harrington since. We got another assistant the first inst. We shall require another boat for the station, but it should be a very different one from the one just lost. It should be a boat calculated for sailing rather than just rowing. It should be decked over both fore and aft and have washboards all around her – larger than the one we had and capable of going in rough water...”

Boyd



From November 1858 to March 1859 correspondence between Inspector Bache and keeper Boyd, in addition to the usual quarterly reports and supply requisitions, discuss the design of the new boat and whether a new dwelling will finally be constructed.

At the end of February Bache writes, "Sir; You must be sensible that I have done everything in my power to get the salaries for yourself and assistants paid, and I am now pleased to advise you that you will shortly receive them. The last mail brought me a letter from the Light House Board. . .from which I extract the following [from the Lighthouse Board]; 'I find that although you were proposed to be the proper person to pay the salaries of the Cape Hancock, no money has been sent to you for that purpose. Will you therefore be kind enough to mention what Collector of Customs is the best person to make the payment in question, and if you have time before your relief of duty, and if you have time before your relief of duty in the L.H. Establishment you are authorized to pay the Cape Hancock keepers yourself from funds in your hand on account of the General Appropriations for lighthouses, should you have sufficient for the purpose.' But Bache reported to the Board that he had neither the funds nor the time to pay them. He instructed Boyd and his assistants to fill out their 'accounts due' paperwork and be ready for the time when the Collector summoned them for payment.

On March 10, 1859 Keeper Boyd wrote Bache, "...Myself and assistants feel very, very grateful to you for interesting yourself so much on our behalf. If we could serve you in any way or repay the kindness we would be most happy to do so. But all we can do now is give you our sincere thanks which I trust you will accept. The whole amount due is about \$3,500 [for all the keepers] – my friends here do not like to have the care of so much money and to purchase drafts there in Oregon costs 2%, which to us is quite an item. I have been offered free passage down and back and would like to go down [to San Francisco] and claim the money as it would cost less than sending for it. I think I can get Mr. Green to take my place for a fortnight, as he was an assistant here six months..."

Boyd

Bache replied, "...I would not advise you to come down here until you have heard of the arrival of funds. I will advise the auditor of the

Custom House to advise you immediately on the receipt..."

The replacement boat for the station arrived in good shape on March 21, 1858.

Over the next two years several different officers assumed the post of Inspector of the District. Bache was relieved by De Camp who was relieved after a short spell by Commander Boggs, who was relieved by Watson.

In December 1859 Boyd writes to De Camp, "...I see cord wood in the allowance for light keepers and I wish to ask you, sir, if we can have our wood allowance by government. I presume, sir, that you are aware that my salary has been reduced by two hundred dollars. As I am a cripple it is impossible for me to chop wood – and I find it a pretty heavy tax to buy it. This winter's wood cost me \$2.75 a cord."

In December 1859, Boyd had sold the empty oil barrels (as he did every year, sending the proceeds to the district office). But this year he wrote, "...I have sold the oil barrels to the amount of \$40. I wish to know from you, sir, if you will allow me use of the money to purchase a horse for the purpose of getting the oil up to the tower. I cannot feel that this is an unjust request, for I paid nearly double amount of interest on the money which I was obliged to borrow while my salary was withheld from me.

On February 20, 1860 Cdr. De Camp responded, "...I have to inform you that your request to use the proceeds from the sale of empty oil casks, for the purchase of a horse cannot be allowed."

Several letters later Boyd wrote to the Inspector, "...I think if you knew how hard it is in winter to carry the oil a third of a mile up hill to the tower, you would not hesitate in allowing us the horse..."

The letters during 1860 and 1861 consist of pleas for supplies, reports of supplies arriving damaged, incomplete or not the correct size.

In February of 1865, Boyd apparently complains that the firing of the Army's guns, located near the station, breaks the windows of the tower. He requests that the station be relocated. The District Engineer, Williamson, responds. "Sir; The Light House Board having notified me that it is their opinion that the removal of the Light House and Fog Signal at Cape Hancock is not advisable. All windows in the windows of the light house buildings to be opened and all precautions taken if possible to prevent injury to the lens, lamp and

other pieces of apparatus connected with the light house."

You are also directed to report the effect upon them of the firing as soon as practicable after it has occurred."

R.S. Williamson  
Dist. Engr.

Boyd respond, "Sir: Your letter of February 20th has been received. I will obey your directions with regard to opening the light house when the large guns are fired. I would mention that it is a fact noticed by all the keepers that the light house has rocked more during the present winter than ever before."

Boyd

Finally after seven years news arrives that the Board has approval an addition to the dwelling at Cape Hancock, now called Cape Disappointment. The District Engineer writes, "Sir: The Light House Board have approved a recommendation I have made with regard to an addition to your dwelling and a garden spot, and the work will be commenced at the end of the rainy season, say, the middle of May.

I have enclosed a list of the lumber that I have ordered for this purpose, which, when delivered, you will receive, take an account of, receipt for as actually delivered, and pile it up in some convenient place near your house to season as much as possible until wanted. The recommendation I made was to build a small addition to the west end of your house for the purpose of giving you two bedrooms to connect with your dining room. On examining more minutely the plan of your house I find that a one story structure adjoining the end of your house will be exceedingly low on account of the window in the end of the second story, and I therefore propose in making the addition as high as the house making a dormer window to give light to the middle room. I would like to know if the keepers who occupy the upper part of the house would like the arrangement and if there is any objection to it. . .There will be two or three carpenters and a mason employed for some time. What arrangements can be made for their accommodations while the work is being done?...Would it be desirable to have a fireplace in the addition?" [One would imagine that they might like a fireplace!].

Boyd writes back sending the dimensions requested, and information that there might be a small house available which was used by workers for the Army post and suggests a local

man as a source for obtaining the lumber, not realizing that the engineer's letter stated that he had **ordered** the lumber.

On April 10, Williamson writes back, "... In my letter of March 27 I said, 'I enclose a list of the lumber that I have ordered, etc. and I do not see how you could have mistaken this plain language. At the same time, what I wrote to you, I wrote to Captain Havel ordering the lumber; and if you have ordered from anyone else the order should be countermanded at once..."

Williamson

In May Boyd wrote, "... I dislike to make complaints about the assistants, but I think you will not blame me under the circumstances."

Mr. Wheeler, a carpenter, is here to commence building the addition to the dwelling, he wanted the assistants to dig the post holes to lay the foundation. C. Flores went to the work, but Henry Brown flatly refused. I told him to bring up the lumber which was landed yesterday and he said it was not his work. This was not his first refusal of duty and he has been very disrespectful since he came here. ...he says he is ready to leave at any time. Anderson, the man I first engaged, has requested me to take him the first vacancy."

Boyd

On October 26, 1865 Keeper Boyd died on duty and was replaced by J.W. Munson who was given a salary of \$1,000 a year. Earlier Boyd's salary had been reduced from \$1,000 to \$800. He never saw or enjoyed the completion of the addition to the dwelling.

The 1872 Annual Report of the Lighthouse Board Reported – There was commenced in August and completed in December, 1871, a new double frame dwelling for the keepers. The old fog bell frame having been shattered from a blast from a gun from a neighboring battery, in July, a new fog-bell house was built in August, 1871. A new oil house is needed at this station, and will be built during the present fiscal year. The Annual Report the next year stated, "A neat substantial oil-house has been erected at this station during the past year to take the place of the old oil-house, which was useless."

On October 13, 1880 the keeper wrote, "Steamer *St. Paul* with General Grant and party entered the north channel and passed close to the Light House at 7 a.m. I saluted her with flag and several strokes of the fog-bell and



**Victorian ladies visiting the Cape Disappointment Lighthouse. Date unknown, but this could be part of the President's party mentioned in the text. U. S. Lighthouse Society photo.**

in return they fired one salute from the steamer and passing in by the fort were saluted from the battery with 21 guns and proceed on her way up the river to Astoria and Portland."

October 15, 1880 – "At two p.m. the Steamer *White West* with the Presidential party onboard from Astoria landed here at the wharf and was received [by all] the officers and soldiers of this post selected from the batteries and escorted with all the officers in a line with a band of music and drove up to the light house and were saluted with flags from the top of the tower and striking of the fog-bell. The Presidential party, with all the ladies, visited the light house and all expressed themselves greatly pleased with the condition of everything appertaining to the light station and they all complemented us very highly with the good condition of the station. Afterwards they drove back down to the wharf and embarked on the *White West* and proceeded on their way back to Astoria."

Aug. 4, 1881 – Marriage at Light Keeper's dwelling house. James Anderson to Henrietta Sorenson, light breeze from S.W., very warm.

Oct. 30, 1882 – Mrs. Anderson's birthday, 26 years old, presented with a fine large album from Mr. James Anderson.

Dec. 18, 1882 – Marriage at Light Keeper's dwelling house. Mr. L.E. Hanum of Pacific

County, W.T., to Miss Mary Anderson of Fort Canby, Pacific County by the Reverend Mr. Scooth, Chaplin of Fort Canby,

May 6, 1883 – "A black bear was seen on the road near the light station. The soldiers surrounded the place and killed it. About four dozen rounds were fired at him before he surrendered."

Keeper's Log – "September 4, 1883 – At 2 p.m. the sound of heavy guns was heard from the direction of Clatsop Spit. The densest fog and [sic] smook as there has been known for years hung over the river. The tugs *Pioneer*, *Columbia* and *Brenham* were lying here in the Bay when the firing was heard and immediately started for the scene of the disaster with the Life Boat in tow. Captain Harris, in command, found the steamship *Queen of the Pacific* ashore on Clatsop Spit. They immediately began taking passengers off and transferring them from the life boat to the tugs who landed them safely at Astoria. It was high tide when the vessel ran onto the spit with a very light breeze from the S.W.. The crew immediately began throwing the cargo overboard in hopes that they could get the ship off, but to no purpose."

Sept. 5 – "All the tugs and other small steamers, together with the Life Boat, was lying here all night to render assistance if needed. At 6 o'clock a.m. the tug boat *Columbia* was dispatched from the *Queen* to Fort Canby for a company of soldiers to go the vessel and assist in throwing the cargo overboard. A large force of men was also sent from Astoria and immediately set to work. The tide was rising and would be high at half past 2 p.m.

All preparations were made to have everything in readiness. Hawsers were passed from the tugs *Columbia* and *Pioneer*. The tug *Astoria* was placed in tandem with the *Columbia* and the *Brenham* with the *Pioneer*, to double their pulling power. At 2 p.m. the word was given 'all ready' and together with a cheer, with the entire united force she swung off into deep water and steamed for Astoria."

Dec. 15, 1883 – "A more beautiful sunset could never have been witnessed as last night, so brilliant clouds and the horizon all around for a great distance with all imaginable colors of all kinds as ever the eye could behold until about 20 minutes after the setting of the sun, when all changed. Changed lighthouse lamp and burner."

Dec. 17 – "Born at light keeper's dwelling at 3 a.m. to the wife of James Anderson, a daughter".

May 28, 1884 – “James Anderson, the principal keeper of this station, having obtained a leave of absence of four months, left by steamer *General Miles* at the hour of 2 o'clock p.m. with his family consisting of wife and five children for Denmark: their native land. He left his brother W. Anderson, of Oysterville, in charge of his personal effects, also to take his place in care of the light. Myself assuming the duties of principal keeper.”

E.A. Woodruff.

Oct. 13, 1884 – “Infant daughter of James Anderson and Henrietta Anderson died at 4 a.m. this morning at Fort Canby, aged 9 months 26 days. Peace be with her soul.” The next July keeper Anderson wrote, “July 26, 1885 – Died at keeper’s dwelling house infant child of James Anderson at 4 o'clock p.m. Henrietta Marie Anderson, age 5 months and 15 days.”

In 1889, the Lighthouse Board decided that the location of the light at Cape Disappointment was inadequate to serve coastal navigation to the north. It was fine for vessels approaching and entering the Columbia River, but was obscured to the north. The Board wrote to Congress, “The present light at Cape Disappointment is inadequate for the purposes of commerce and navigation. It is believed that if North Head [just around the corner to the north] is marked by a 1st order light, and the proposed light-stations at Grays Harbor and Destruction Island are completed, that the Pacific Coast will be well supplied with lights of the first order from Cape Flattery to Tillamook Rock. Proper measures should be taken for the establishment of a first order light at North Head. This, it is estimated, will cost \$50,000. It is recommended therefore that this sum be appropriated for this purpose. When this light is established the first order light at Cape Disappointment will no longer be necessary, and it is proposed then to reduce it to a light of the fourth order. It will then be sufficient to benefit vessels close to the bar outside and vessels in the Columbia River.”

The Board made the above appeal for the next four years, finally on August 18, 1894, the Report read, “...Toward establishing a first order light on North Head, Cape Disappointment and coast of Washington, twenty-five thousand dollars and the total cost of said light-house under a contract which is hereby authorized therefore, shall not exceed fifty-thousand dollars.” In March of the next year



**The 4th order lens in the Cape Disappointment lantern room. The panel at left is red glass which gives a red and white flashing characteristic. Photographer and date unknown.**



**North Head Lighthouse which replaced Cape Disappointment as the major seacoast light in the area on May 16, 1898. USLHS photo 1977.**

the additional \$25,000 was appropriated and the Board remarked, “...A survey was made for a wagon road to the site of the proposed station and a trail was cut through the dense growth of timber and brush along the line of the survey.” In 1896, drawings and specifications were made.

Report of the Lighthouse Board to Congress 1898 – “The contractors for furnishing the metal work delivered it on August 15, 1897, 173 days after the expiration of the time for the completion of their contract, incurring a penalty for delay of \$4,325, or \$160 in excess of the amount they were to receive under the contract. ...The station was completed on April 10, 1898, and it went into commission on May 16, 1898. ...The first-order apparatus was removed [from Cape Disappointment] and transferred to North Head Light-station and a fourth-order illuminating apparatus, showing red and white flashes alternately, having an interval between flashes of fifteen seconds, was permanently established here of February 17, 1898.”

When World War II was declared in 1941 the Cape Disappointment, and other coastal lights, were extinguished. Shortly thereafter, on December 10, a distress call was received from the SS *Mauna Ala*. She was bound for Honolulu with a cargo of Christmas trees, but returned to the mainland. The Captain was unaware of the blackout and the ship ran aground on the south entrance to the Columbia River. All aboard were saved, but the cargo was lost. After this incident the coastal lights were relit, although some had reduced range and an occasional blackout.

In November 1965, the Coast Guard issued a Notice to Mariners that they were going to discontinue the Cape Disappointment light saying the “...Columbia River is adequately marked by the Columbia River Lightship and entrance range lights.” The Columbia River Bar Pilots objected and the Cape Disappointment flashing red and white light remains to this day.



Right – 15-inch guns were installed near the Cape Disappointment tower sometime early in the 20th century, possibly during World War I. USLHS photo, date unknown.

Below – An Army Gunners Mate inspecting his coastal guns. USLHS photo, date unknown.



Right – The Cape Disappointment tower circa 1931. Note that a masonry watch house has replaced the wooden watch house as seen in the photo above. The small structure at right is a Coast Guard lookout station watching for vessels in trouble on the dangerous Columbia Bar Channel. USLHS photo.

