



AMERICA'S LIGHTHOUSES

F. Ross Holland, Jr.
Dover Books, Paperback — 1988
Book Review by Frank Perry

A while back, Frank Perry wrote this review of the then-new paperback printing of Ross Holland's *America's Lighthouses*. It was superseded by one for Frank's own book, *East Brother Island*. Now we have an opportunity to pay proper respect to both authors. Holland's work continues to be one of the most consistently requested books we sell. Many visitors come into our library carrying a dog-eared copy, telling us the book led them into a never-ending fascination with lighthouses. And Perry's review still holds true. As he says:

"Several years ago, when I first became interested in lighthouses and decided to write a book on a lighthouse near my home in California, I began searching for books on the history of lighthouses in the United States. One particular book caught my fancy: *America's Lighthouses* by Francis Ross Holland. I found myself repeatedly checking it out of the library. Finally, I decided to purchase a copy and discovered, much to my dismay, that it was out of print. Happily, it is again available, for it deserves a place on every lighthouse historian's bookshelf.

"Holland does not pretend to tell the history of each lighthouse in the United States, though he does list most of them. In fact, readers hoping to learn specifics about a lighthouse in their area may be disappointed. The greatest usefulness of Holland's book lies, instead, in its overview of the history of America's lighthouse system as a whole. For this reason, the book is a valuable resource no matter which individual lighthouse interests you most. My own interest in the subject began with just one lighthouse. But soon I learned — thanks to this book — that it is important to look at the big picture as well.

"Holland begins with a brief history of lighthouses in other countries and of those in colonial America. He then devotes a chapter to each of the following: the light (including the history of fuels, lamps, and lenses), the administration of lighthouses in the U.S., the keepers' work, and life of the keepers. There is also a short chapter on 'The Lightship,' and one on 'Fog Signals, Buoys, and River Lights.'

"The rest of the book is devoted to highlights from individual lighthouse histories, arranged by different sections of the country. Even here, Holland has not lost sight of his overview approach and summarizes lighthouse development within each geographic region.

"Holland's approach is scholarly yet readable, and the book is filled with the kind of fascinating information that makes the study of lighthouses so enjoyable. The book also includes lists of references for each chapter, many photographs, and some fine reproductions of lighthouse plans."

During a recent (May 21) phone visit with Ross Holland, he told us:

"I had written *America's Lighthouses* with the hope that it would provide background information to permit the curator, site interpreter, the writer and the buff who was dealing with an individual lighthouse to put his or her special study into the context of the development of lighthouses and how they were operated and managed in this country over the years. The book has given me a great deal of satisfaction — not only because it is regarded by histori-

ans as the standard work on the subject, but more so because of the lighthouse aficionados who tell me how the book has affected them."

With the publisher's practice of buying a property and reprinting it as a direct copy, making as few changes as possible to cut costs, Dover retained a few errors, long-ago recognized and acknowledged — such as a caption on page 196 incorrectly identifying the Farallon Islands off San Francisco as Hilo Bay in Hawaii. But the good news is that it made *America's Lighthouses*, still the only 'broad brush' book of its kind, available to us for a mere \$10.95 per copy (plus S & H through our Keeper's Library.)