

# The Beacon

## PIEDRAS BLANCAS LIGHT STATION OUTSTANDING NATURAL AREA

VOL. 9 ISSUE 2

APRIL-JUNE, 2016

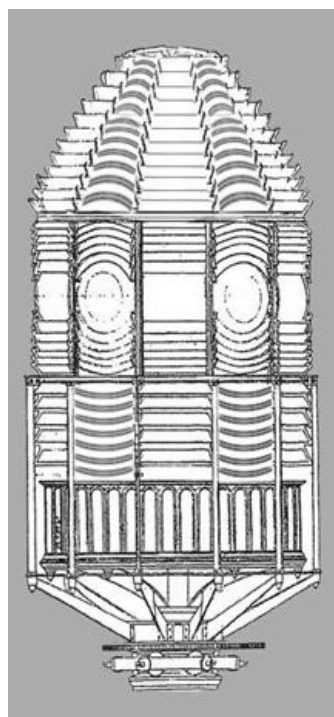
### ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO AT PIEDRAS BLANCAS

In 1916, the Piedras Blancas light characteristic changed from *fixed and flashing* every 15 seconds to a *group flashing white*. The new group flashing pattern was 2 white flashes every 15 seconds, with darkness in between. Each flash was 0.5 second in duration. There were several reasons why the change was made.

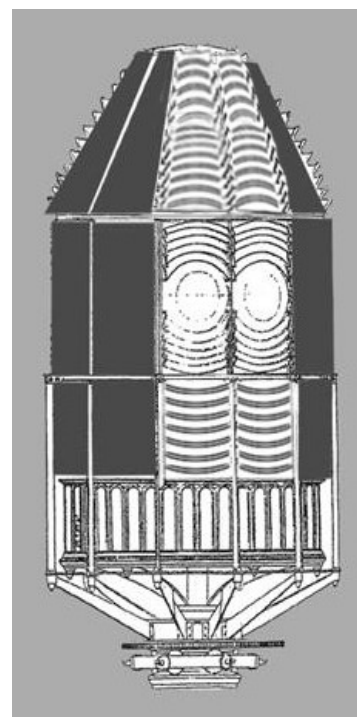
Documents from 1911 state the Piedras Blancas light was causing more trouble than all the other revolving lights in the district combined. It was referred to as "old fashioned." Removal of half of the panels lightened the lens considerably.

There was also concern about whether the Piedras Blancas light pattern could be confused with the Point Sur light pattern, which alternated red and white flashes every 15 seconds. United States Senator Perkins, and Mr. Mattson, San Francisco Chamber of Commerce President and "leading steamship man", contended that all lighthouses at points where vessels change course should be equipped with first class flashing lights. They also felt that, at a distance of 10 miles, it was almost impossible to distinguish a red light from a white one. Not everyone agreed with the need to change the Piedras Blancas characteristic, but the decision was made to do so and it did create a very different pattern from Point Sur.

The cost of the brass panels placed in the lens in 1916 to create the eclipse (dark) part of the light pattern was \$835.50.



Above:  
The original configuration of the Piedras Blancas first order lens created a fixed and flashing light pattern, with a flash every 15 seconds.



Above:  
In 1916, the horizontal prisms and lenses were removed and replaced with brass panels. The bull's eye panels were placed side by side, creating a double flash every 15 seconds.

Computer art by Mark Arnold



Piedras Blancas Light Station, 1916

Computer art by Mark Arnold



The Beacon is a joint publication of the Piedras Blancas Light Station Association and the Bureau of Land Management. The PBLSA is a non-profit partner of the BLM and provides support for the restoration, conservation, interpretation, and stewardship of the unique natural, historical, and cultural resources at the Piedras Blancas Light Station. © Copyright 2016



## UNIFORMS

Beginning in 1883, keepers were instructed to wear a prescribed uniform at all times, with the exception that the coat was to be taken off and a regulation apron worn when cleaning. The Lighthouse Service required that no watches, jewelry, belt buckles, or sharp objects be worn while cleaning and polishing the lens. The glass was the heart of the lighthouse and if it were scratched or chipped it would lose its effectiveness.

A prescribed brown work suit was to be worn when working outdoors. Keepers were warned that the uniform regulation would be strictly enforced. In 1886, a general order declared that, "... in the future, if any keeper or assistant keeper is found out of uniform, or reported for being out of uniform on the lighthouse reservation, that fact shall be reported to the Lighthouse Board and the guilty party will be dismissed for disobedience of orders."



We have no photos of the "prescribed brown work suit," but do have the photo, at left, of a keeper in overalls, obviously involved with doing dirty work. He probably donned his hat for the benefit of the photographer.

Regulations stated: "Citizen's clothing may be worn by keepers while off the reservation on private business. The wearing of part citizen's clothing and part uniform is strictly prohibited at all times, either the fatigue uniform or the dress uniform must be worn."



Above: L.V. Thorndyke Jr., in dress uniform. Photo courtesy of Donna Jean Schneider.

In 1885, the dress uniform consisted of coat, hat, vest, pants, buttons, and collar devices. The vest, trousers, cap, and jacket were to be navy blue. There were precise instructions regarding the placement of buttons and ornaments. The cost of the uniform in Philadelphia was \$22 and \$26 in San Francisco. Other items that had to be purchased were shirt, tie, and black shoes. Keepers also had to buy their work clothes.

## STANDING SHIFTS

One of the routine jobs of the keepers was to stand watch at night in the lighthouse to make sure the light was working properly and shining brightly. The 1881 Instructions to Light-keepers states: *"The keeper on watch must remain in the watch room and give continuous attention to the light while he is on duty."* Imagine how monotonous that could be!

The keepers rotated shifts. If they stood the first shift one night, they stood the second shift the next night, and so on. An advantage to this rotation pattern is that the keeper who had the final shift, and extinguished the light in the morning, was on duty for the first shift, lighting it again that evening. He was responsible for getting everything ready for himself. That was motivation to do the job right.

Prior to 1906, there were three keepers at Piedras Blancas so the night was divided into three shifts. We are fortunate to have a watch record from December 1881-April 1882. At that time, the first shift began about a half hour prior to sunset. The second shift was from 10:00-2:00. The third shift worked until sunrise and then had to get the light ready for the next lighting. The hours would have been shorter during the summer nights and longer during the winter, reflecting how many hours of darkness there were. Each keeper recorded what time he came on shift, what happened during his shift, weather notes, and who relieved him. Sometimes it was necessary to trim the wicks in the middle of the night. It was not uncommon to have to replace a broken chimney (lamp glass).

In 1906, a fourth keeper was added and the shifts were divided between all four. Records from 1928 show the watches kept in the lighthouse during that era were from sunset to 9:00, 9:00-12:00, 12:00-3:00, and 3:00 to sunrise. There was also a fog watch during the daytime that was divided between the four keepers.

### ***For information on Piedras Blancas Light Station***

[www.piedrasblancas.org](http://www.piedrasblancas.org)  
or [www.piedrasblancas.gov](http://www.piedrasblancas.gov)



*On February 13, the 141st birthday of the lighthouse was celebrated with a living history tour attended by 142 visitors. At left, Linda Waring doing laundry and John Bosworth as a painter. At right, Jackie Howland and Sandy Bosworth portraying keeper's wives.*



## BLM UPDATE

Ryan Cooper, Park Manager

Spring has sprung and things are buzzing out here at the light station. Sure, the plants and animals are busy during the spring, but I was talking about the people.

Tours have been jam packed and we are looking forward to a busy summer with tours every day except Sundays and Wednesdays from June 15 - August 31. Come out and visit us in May and June to enjoy brilliant displays of wildflowers.

The NOAA Whale Count Team arrived in late March to begin their annual gray whale count. The Ventana Wilderness Society's condor monitors have been staying at the Light Station on a regular basis to monitor the newly released condors in San Simeon. And we are looking forward to hiring a few interns to help with tours and maintenance during the summer.

Piedras Blancas has been a busy location, but we like it that way. The Light Station is a special place and we want to share it with everyone. My hearty thanks go to our hard working volunteers that do everything from guide tours to pull weeds. They are an integral part of what keeps the light station up and running and we are lucky to have such a dedicated group that love Piedras Blancas.

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## PLANT TALK

The months of April, May, and June provide great opportunities to view native plants in bloom at the Piedras Blancas Light Station. Over 60 species of native plants have been identified at the light station. The most numerous include seaside woolly yarrow, seaside poppies, white yarrow, and seaside daisies. This glorious display is all the more amazing considering the fact that when the Bureau of Land Management took over managing the light station in 2001, non-native plants predominated the landscape. A massive volunteer, staff, and community effort was responsible for this vegetative miracle.

Terminology is important in understanding the plants at PBLs. *Native plants* are those present before the arrival of Europeans. *Weeds* are unwanted plants. What is a weed is a matter of definition. Each of us decides what is unwanted in our own gardens. At Piedras Blancas, the definition of a weed is a non-native plant. *Wildflowers* are those that grow on their own; they aren't planted. Not all wildflowers are native. Some "wildflowers" are non-native plants. The terms native plants and wildflowers are not synonymous.

Native plants are important because they provide food and shelter for native animals. Our goal at the Piedras Blancas Light Station is 100% restoration of native plants.



## PBLSA UPDATE

Jackie Howland, Chair

*Watch our progress!*

In February, the PBLSA Board of Directors voted to allocate funding to reconstruct the 1911 entrance gate. Architectural plans have been drawn, the Bureau of Land Management archeologist has approved the project, and Dan Murphy of Wellsona Engineering and board member David Cooper have begun to work on site measurements.

In the coming months you will see construction equipment and workers busy erecting the new gate. Not only will the gate serve as a focal point to the Light Station entrance, it will serve as a memorial to former station manager Jim Boucher. We expect construction and dedication of the gate to be finished by late spring/early summer.



Current view from the entrance road



Entrance gate built in 1911 that will be replicated

Piedras Blancas Light Station Association board members welcome your comments or questions.

Phone 805-927-3719 or email: [contact.pblsa@gmail.com](mailto:contact.pblsa@gmail.com)

Board meetings are held at the Rabobank in Cambria at 6 PM on the fourth Wednesday of every month.

The public is welcome and encouraged to participate.



## PIEDRAS BLANCAS LIGHT STATION TOURS

Tours are offered year-round on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. From June 15 through August 31, tours are offered daily except Wednesdays and Sundays. There are no tours on federal holidays. Tours last about 2 hours and include the historic Piedras Blancas lighthouse and support buildings along with a half mile interpretive trail that provides spectacular ocean views and opportunities to view wildlife. Meet at the former Piedras Blancas Motel located 1.5 miles north of the light station at 9:45 AM.

***Please do not wait at the gate to the light station!***

For information, email [piedrasblancastours@gmail.com](mailto:piedrasblancastours@gmail.com)  
or call 805-927-7361

Groups of 10 or more  
please make advance  
arrangements.

\$10 for adults, \$5  
ages 6-17, no fee for  
children 5 and under.

Tours may be  
cancelled on the day  
of the tour due to  
inclement weather.



Dress warmly and wear comfortable  
walking shoes. No pets!

PBLS Association  
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805-927-3719  
[membership.pblsa@gmail.com](mailto:membership.pblsa@gmail.com)



All memberships include the quarterly newsletter. Your dues help with the maintenance and restoration of the Piedras Blancas Light Station.

- \_\_\_ \$50 Friend of the Lighthouse  
(1 complimentary tour )
- \_\_\_ \$100 Acting Keeper  
(2 complimentary tours )
- \_\_\_ \$250 Assistant Keeper  
(4 complimentary tours)
- \_\_\_ \$500 Principal Keeper  
(engraved brick)
- \_\_\_ \$1000 Superintendent of Lights  
(engraved brick & private tour for up to 6)

***Help restore  
and preserve  
Piedras Blancas  
Light Station  
by joining  
PBLSA***

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Please make check payable to PBLSA  
You may also join online at [piedrasblancas.org](http://piedrasblancas.org)

***Thank you for your support!***

PIEDRAS BLANCAS LIGHT STATION ASSOCIATION  
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