

The Beacon

PIEDRAS BLANCAS LIGHT STATION OUTSTANDING NATURAL AREA

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JANUARY-MARCH, 2016

WHY IS THE FOG SIGNAL BUILDING ON THE NATIONAL REGISTER?

Fog signal buildings were built to house the machinery that created sound signals to aid safe maritime navigation during foggy weather. Built in 1905 and first put into operation in 1906, the Piedras Blancas fog signal building is similar to other fog signal buildings in California in that it is a large industrial room with exposed beams and double doors. So what makes the Piedras Blancas fog signal building special and why is it listed on the National Register? The answers are found within the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, dated September 3, 1991.

"The Piedras Blancas fog signal building is very different from other California fog signal buildings in its outstanding level of architectural sophistication. Most fog signal buildings were largely unadorned, reflecting their utilitarian usage. The Piedras Blancas fog signal building is a careful and studied blend of Romanesque Revival and Neo-Classical themes that were popular at the turn of the century."

Romanesque features include the semicircular arches. The pediment formed by the triangular gable ends and the brick cornice show a Neo-Classical sensitivity. The architect even included a lunette of recessed brick in the

pediment. Other outstanding features include the brick cornice with corbeled dentils and the brick water table along the building's base. The National Register states:

"The interior displays a concern for aesthetics rarely found in California fog signal buildings. The massive exposed attic beams are varnished to a high sheen and each cross beam is bisected by a large wooden teardrop ornament. This building is arguably the most architecturally interesting fog signal building in California if not the entire country. It is in very good condition and its integrity is intact."

Unfortunately, the condition of the fog signal building deteriorated during the 25 years since the last statement was written. The good news is that restoration began in 2010 with removal of lead-based paint. In following years, the windows were restored and concrete curbing was poured below soil level, around the perimeter of the building, for stabilization.

Much remains to be done including structural reinforcement and repair of the roof, flooring, and brick walls. Watch for updates on restoration progress of this architecturally and historically significant structure.



Above: The exterior details noted here are what make the PBLS fog signal building so unique.



Above: Exposed attic beams and decorative teardrop ornaments contribute to the aesthetics of the interior.



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



WORK OF THE KEEPERS

TRIMMING THE WICKS

Some people are aware of the term “wickie” used in reference to lighthouse keepers, but few realize that word is only appropriately applied to keepers during a certain time period. The term “wickie” goes back to the Argand lamps and reflectors used prior to the invention of the Fresnel lens. Argand lamps required constant attention to keep the wicks properly trimmed so the lamps didn’t smoke, hence the name “wickie.” While Fresnel lenses required attention, trimming the wicks was no longer the issue that it was with the Argand lens.

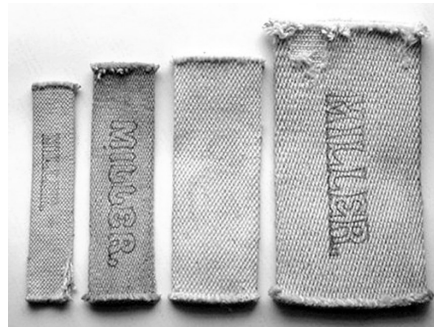
Keepers were given very specific instructions on how to do all tasks, including trimming the wicks. The “Instructions to Light-keepers” July, 1881, provides insight into what the keepers had to do to light the Funck’s hydraulic float lamp used in the Piedras Blancas first order lens from 1880-1887. Great care had to be taken to raise the wicks gradually and lower the chimney until the flame was at its best, which was at the end of about half an hour. Making sure the flame burned clear and at its full height, with no smoky points, required careful attention.

About ten minutes before sunrise, the flow of oil was ceased, the damper opened, and the flame was allowed to burn itself out. Then the chimney was removed and wrapped in flannel until it cooled. The task of trimming the wick required nothing more than simply wiping ash from the wicks. No other trimming was required. With a goose feather, or any feather sufficiently long, the air spaces in the burner were cleaned.

The entire process of lighting and extinguishing the lamp required skill. The PBLS light had five concentric wicks. Each was sitting on its own holder.



Left: Replica 5-wick arrangement. Air flowed on both sides of each wick, but oil was supplied to all wicks in common. Think of a small pie pan full of oil with 10 concentric metal tubes setting on it and between each group of two tubes is a wick.



Left: Circular cotton wicks came in different sizes. The smallest was 1" in diameter, the largest was 4 3/8" in diameter. They were cut to about 4 1/2" high. The wick structure was immersed in the oil reservoir to about 2/3 of its height.

FUN FACTS

How much oil was required to produce the light depended on the time of year. The light was on longer during the winter months. The keepers filled the reservoir with enough oil to last one night plus a little more. The 1881 instructions lists the annual consumption of oil used in a first order Funck’s lamp to be 2,156 gallons. The consumption per hour was 16 gills (about 1/2 gallon).

TWILIGHT TOUR

On October 24th, over 60 visitors enjoyed the Twilight Tour. An enthusiastic group of 24 volunteers participated, many in period attire portraying life at the light station in 1909. Five volunteers from the Point San Luis Lighthouse joined in the fun as enactors in the historic district. A great time was had by all.



The laundry lady is always a popular enactment.



Twilight Tour Team, 2015

BIRTHDAY PARTY TOUR

The next living history tour will be on Saturday, February 13th, 2016, in celebration of the 142nd birthday of the lighthouse. On February 15, 1876, the Piedras Blancas light was first lit. If you would like to attend the Birthday Party Tour, meet at the former Piedras Blancas Motel by 9:45 a.m. This is a very popular tour so arrive early. Regular tour fees apply: \$10 adults \$5 ages 6-17



Above: Cypress wind hedge, 2015

CYPRESS WIND HEDGE RESTORATION

There is exciting restoration news. The replication of the cypress wind hedge is essentially complete. Cypress trees were initially planted at Piedras Blancas Light Station in the 1930s to shield the keepers and their families from strong winds. Wind is not uncommon at Piedras Blancas and even the cypress trees had trouble standing up to it; a fence had to be built to protect the trees! Coast Guard personnel kept the hedge neatly trimmed, but after the station was unmanned, the hedge grew out of control.

In 2004, Piedras Blancas volunteers began removing the old, overgrown cypress and planting young ones to replicate the hedge as an interpretive element. The cypress wind screen reinforces the fact that life at the light station was challenging and coping with strong wind was one of those challenges. Cypress is not native to Piedras Blancas. It is the only non-native plant encouraged to grow at the light station.



Above: In 2006, Bob Goss, Kenny Moore, and Abel Martinez removing an old stump in preparation of planting new trees.



Above: October 2015, Bob Dees and Ed Zirbel, removing the final old wood along the sidewalk hedge.

Many volunteers worked on the cypress wind hedge restoration effort over the years trimming, watering, weeding, and lovingly encouraging the replica plants. In addition, a new wind fence had to be constructed to protect the trees. In October 2015, Bob Dees, Ed Zirbel, and Ryan Cooper completed the final removal of old wood along the sidewalk, allowing the replica hedge to show well. Thank you to everyone who helped with this project between 2004-2015. Now the work of maintaining the hedge continues.



PARK MANAGER'S UPDATE

RYAN COOPER, BLM

Happy New Year! As we embark on 2016, it is fun to reflect on the past, but if we do it too much, we can lose focus on our goals for the future. The great American inventor and engineer Charles Kettering said, "Every time you tear a leaf off a calendar, you present a new place for new ideas and progress." Here is what I am predicting for the Light Station in 2016: the replica entry gate will be installed to honor former light station manager Jim Boucher, communication equipment will be placed into the replica water tower and the old communications tower will be removed, the walls of the Fog Signal Building will be stabilized, and the flagpole will be moved to its historical location.

And 2016 is not only going to be about projects, but also about trying new things like specialty tours. The Photo Tour in November 2015 was a great success and we plan on doing it again. This year there may be a wedding, an educational youth campout, and maybe even a wine tasting event to help raise funds for the Light Station Association. We will be doing these new events while holding onto the traditions of the past like the Sunset Tours, National Lighthouse Day, and the Whale Watching Tour.

While this year is going to be a busy one at the Light Station, we need to make sure we are careful to fulfill our main goal, which is to protect and preserve the natural, cultural and historic qualities of the Piedras Blancas Light Station, while allowing the public to enjoy those qualities in new, progressive, and traditional ways.



ASSOCIATION UPDATE

JACKIE HOWLAND, CHAIR

Piedras Blancas Light Station Association is a 501(c)(3) non-profit association that was created to directly support the Bureau of Land Management in its quest to maintain and restore Piedras Blancas Light Station. The Board of Directors consists of volunteers with varied backgrounds that share a common love for the light station.

A few of the projects we have been working on in the past year are: completing the study of retrofitting the Fog Signal Building to bring it to modern seismic standards, authorizing a seismic study of the lighthouse and developing options for its restoration, and spearheading the efforts to restore the entrance gate in memory of former park manager Jim Boucher. Any of these projects alone would be a mighty task for the volunteers that serve on the Board, but we continue to work diligently to make our vision come to fruition.

I would like to highlight and thank the following members who serve on the Board– Jim Harris, Harry Thorpe, Tim Postiff, David Cooper, and John Brass. They serve selflessly and care deeply for the success of the light station. But we need your help – if you or someone you know has expertise in fundraising, grant writing or event planning, please contact me. We are always looking for new volunteers to join the Board of Directors and help us restore the light station.

About Jackie: Jackie joined the PBLSA Board of Directors in 2014 and became Chair in 2015. She has a master's degree from Pepperdine University and worked for nearly 30 years in education as a master and mentor teacher, district science coordinator, and a management analyst. As a professional development coordinator and later as director of a \$14 million dollar grant, she trained and brought science to over 200,000 students throughout Orange County, California. Jackie hopes the light station will continue to be an historically significant piece of California history.



BRICK LIGHTHOUSE PATH MARKS A MILESTONE

The engraved bricks that line the path below the lighthouse have been very popular with light station visitors. Since the idea began in 2013, we have raised nearly \$21,000 toward restoration of the light station! They are a creative way to remember a loved one or commemorate an anniversary, birthday or even your visit to the light station. Thank you to the 200+ people who have purchased a brick and helped our restoration efforts.

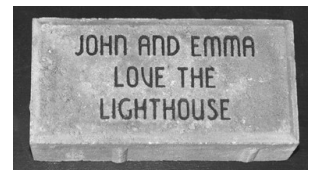
Piedras Blancas Light Station Association board members welcome your comments or questions.
Phone 805-927-3719 or email: contact.pblsa@gmail.com
Board meetings are held at the Rabobank in Cambria at 6 PM on the fourth Wednesday of every month.
The public is welcome and encouraged to participate.

GIFT SHOP ITEMS ARE AVAILABLE ONLINE!

PIEDRASBLANCAS.ORG

JOIN US ON THE PATH TO RESTORATION

Your purchase of a personalized, engraved brick will help with restoration of the light station. It will also be viewed by generations of lighthouse lovers, who will enjoy and appreciate your contribution.



Mail form to:
PBLSA
P.O. Box 127
San Simeon, CA
93452

Or order online:
piedrasblancas.org

To order by phone:
805-927-3719

Thank you!

Maximum of three lines. Each line can have up to 16 characters, including spaces and punctuation. All letters are capitalized. Not all three lines have to be used. You may purchase multiple bricks. Minimum donation \$100.

Line 1																	
Line 2																	
Line 3																	

I am paying by check (Made out to PBLSA) ☐ MasterCard ☐ or Visa ☐

MC or Visa number: _____ cvv _____ Expiration date _____

Donor's name _____ Phone _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

ANIMAL BYTES

GREAT WHITE EGRET BY PHIL ADAMS, VOLUNTEER

The most elegant bird we see at Piedras Blancas is the Great White Egret. It has a tall stature and beautiful white plumage, along with a striking yellow beak and black legs. It has an intent posture and quiet demeanor when foraging. Long periods of what seems to be inactivity are observed when the egret is hunting. It will coil its neck waiting for something edible to reveal itself, then the egret strikes out with its long neck to capture the food. In addition to feeding on land, it also can be seen walking on top of offshore kelp looking for prey in the top surface of the seaweed.



SPOTLIGHT ON VOLUNTEERS: GARY O'NEILL



Gary O'Neill joined the Piedras Blancas Light Station volunteer family in March, 2015, and quickly became invaluable. You will see him helping with tours, either as a guide or assistant. Gary is also a talented photographer.

If you are on a tour with Gary, you are in for a real treat. He has an extraordinary ability to spot wildlife. If there are any whales around, Gary will find them!

Thank you, Gary!

KID'S CORNER

We love hearing from children. Recently three 4th grade classes from Del Mar Elementary School in Morro Bay visited the light station. The students sent wonderful thank you letters about their field trip. Below is just a sampling of their messages.

My favorite part is going into the lighthouse, ringing the bell, washing the laundry, using the binoculars to see the elephant seals, and going into the building to learn about the animals and when we walked the trail.

Sincerely, from Christal

My favorite part was using the binoculars to see the seals. I learned a lot of stuff like how whales eat.

Sincerely, Ben

I really liked doing all the activities like the bell and going into the lighthouse. I learned a lot of new things and did a lot of new things. I also loved using the binoculars. Thank you for showing us the lighthouse. It was so fun!

Sincerely, Marion

Thank you for telling us about the wildlife and letting us see the animals. It was awesome. Also thank you for letting us into the huge lighthouse. It was awesome.

From Tyler

My favorite part of the field trip was ringing the bell, I rung it the loudest. I also like it when we dried the cloth. The thing I really enjoyed was going in the lighthouse. It was one of the best field trips yet. From, Kathleen

Thank you for your time to take us on the awesome field trip! I enjoyed ringing the big bell. It was fun watching my classmates sound the bell. I also enjoyed blowing down the lighthouse shapes. I loved watching the waves crash on the rocks. I saw a lot of wildlife at the lighthouse. I liked feeling the baleen. Sincerely, Noah

It was very kind to show us the room with all the sea creatures skulls, that was my favorite. One reason the room was my favorite is because I loves seeing the way whales baleen works. I would love to go there again with my parents. Sincerely, Macy

For information on Piedras Blancas Light Station
piedrasblancas.org piedrasblancas.gov

LIGHTHOUSE NEIGHBORS

Point Sur Lightstation

(65 miles north of PBLs)

From November through March tours are offered at 10 AM on Saturdays and Sundays and at 1 PM on Wednesdays. During the summer there are additional days and times. For a complete listing of tours: pointstur.org or call 831-625-4419

Point Pinos Lighthouse

(90 miles north of PBLs)

Located in Pacific Grove, open Thursday through Monday, 1 PM - 4 PM. For more information: ci.pg.ca.us/lighthouse

Point San Luis Lighthouse

(58 miles south of PBLs)

Located in Avila Beach. For a complete listing of guided tours and to reserve a ride on the shuttle, visit: sanluislighthouse.com or call 805-540-5771

PIEDRAS BLANCAS LIGHT STATION TOURS

Tours are offered year-round on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. 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
or call 805-927-7361



Groups of ten or more please
make advance arrangements.

\$10 for adults \$5 ages 6-17
No fee for children 5 and under

Dress warmly and wear
comfortable walking shoes.
Sorry, no pets!

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

PBLS Association
P.O. Box 127
San Simeon, CA 93452-0127
805-927-3719
membership.pblsa@gmail.com



All memberships include the quarterly newsletter and knowledge you are helping with restoration and maintenance 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
Thank you for your support!

Piedras Blancas Light Station Association
P.O. Box 127
San Simeon, CA
93452-0127