

The Beacon

PIEDRAS BLANCAS LIGHT STATION OUTSTANDING NATURAL AREA

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THE TOWN OF SAN SIMEON WAS (AND IS!) IMPORTANT TO THE LIGHT STATION

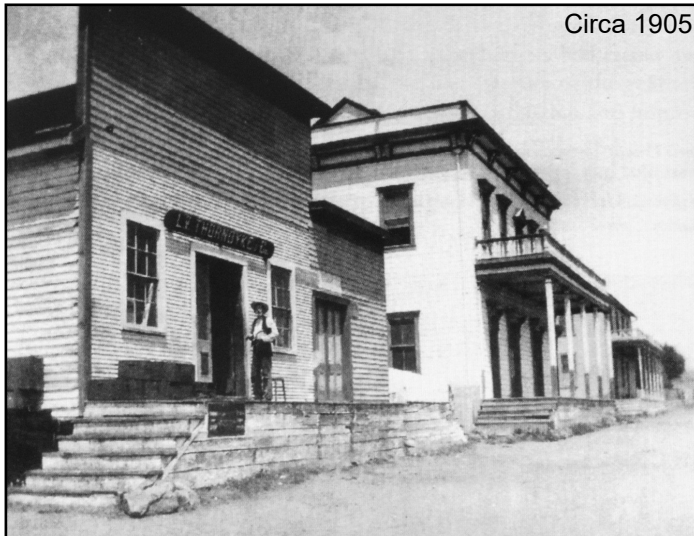
The village of San Simeon played an important role in the lives of the Piedras Blancas Light Station keepers and their families. The post office and nearest store were in this small enclave, just six miles down the road.

During the light station's construction boom (1905-1909) all materials used in the fog signal building, blacksmith shop, oil houses, barn, rain shed, and elevated water tower arrived at San Simeon and had to be hauled to the light station. Look closely at the pier photo to see tracks that guided a horse-drawn dray used to load and unload

Circa 1901



Circa 1905



cargo. Just think of all the bricks, lumber, cement and other supplies that were hauled off that pier!

At the time this 1905 photo was taken, the store at the left-hand corner was owned by former PBLS Keeper L.V. Thorndyke. It was operated by his son, Lorin Thorndyke Jr, who also managed the hotel next-door. Like many storefronts of that era, the buildings were elevated off the ground to allow easy unloading of merchandise from horse drawn wagons. Around 1910, the coastal steamers ceased calling at San Simeon and the hotels eventually closed.

In 1914, the Thorndyke store was sold to Pete Sebastian. It was still the hub of the village, housing the post office and offering gasoline to motorists. Today, Sebastian's is a popular stop for locals and visitors, and it still houses the post office where the light station's mail is delivered.

At one time there were several saloons in San Simeon. A token from N. Terrill's Saloon was found at the light station and is on display in the visitor center. The inscription reads: "GOOD FOR ONE DRINK OR CIGAR"

Photos courtesy of:

1901 Pier- SLO History Center

1905 photo- Debbie Soto, *Glimpses of a Bygone Era*

1920s photo- SLO History Center

1920s



The Beacon is a joint publication of the Piedras Blancas Light Station Association and the Bureau of Land Management. The PBLSA is a nonprofit 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 2018



VOLUNTEERS ARE THE HEARTBEAT OF THE LIGHT STATION

Volunteers play a significant role at Piedras Blancas Light Station. Whether you're retired looking for a way to give back to your community or a high school or college student seeking community service hours, we have a job for you! You could help with guiding or assisting tours, staffing our gift shop during tours, non-native plant eradication, general maintenance and community outreach. We're always recruiting new members to our non-profit board of directors, too. Put your skills and talents to work in this unique and beautiful place. For volunteer opportunities, email Jodie Nelson: jrnelson@blm.ca.gov

Cindy Maxwell (right) and her husband retired to Los Osos from Southern California three years ago. Cindy previously worked at the Monrovia Public Library and loved interacting with the community. She saw Piedras Blancas Light Station as a perfect place to combine her love of the outdoors while sharing the experience with the public.



Brian and Samantha Curtis are both chiropractors practicing in Grover Beach. Samantha focuses on pregnancy and pediatrics while Brian focuses on motorcycling and bicycling families. Samantha is originally from South Carolina and enjoys taking advantage of the natural environment in San Luis Obispo and annoying others with photos of their cat, Lloyd. Brian is a Cal Poly grad and enjoys life on two wheels, craft beer and serving his community. They both helped with our Hops for the Top event in October and Brian hopes to coordinate Eagle Scout and Venture Ranger projects at the light station in the future.



Welcome to the PBLS Team, Cindy, Samantha and Brian!

GRAY WHALES SWIM PAST PIEDRAS BLANCAS

Gray whales are being seen along the California coast, including off the point at Piedras Blancas. The gray whale has one of the longest migrations of any mammal, travelling from their feeding grounds in the Bering and Chukchi seas north of Alaska, to the warmer waters of Baja California, Mexico, for mating and breeding. The population may be seen on their southern route in December and January, and will come past California again in the spring as they travel north to their feeding grounds. From March – June, NOAA biologists will return to the Piedras Blancas Light Station to count the mothers and new calves as they travel north.



Gray whales are considered medium-sized whales, and can grow to be 45 feet in length. To identify these whales from shore, the gray whale does not have a dorsal fin, but rather a low “hump” and 6 – 12 “knuckles” along their spine. Their blows are usually low and puffy or heart-shaped due to the shape of their blow holes. (Overhead image of a gray whale migrating north past Point Piedras Blancas, CA. Photo taken from an unmanned hexacopter ~150ft above the whale. Flights over whales authorized by NFS permit #19091)

LIGHTHOUSE NEIGHBORS

Point San Luis Lighthouse

(58 miles south of PBLS)

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

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: PointSur.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



RESTORATION HAS BEGUN ON THE 112 YEAR OLD FOG SIGNAL BUILDING

In late November 2017, Wellsona Iron & Engineering began restoration work of the fog signal building, built in 1906. Over the years, the FSB has housed a 10-inch whistle, a two-toned diaphone, and later, a diaphragm. A more in-depth update on the progress will be in our next newsletter.

Throughout the restoration process, the fog signal building will remain open during tours as safety will allow.



Above: Note the vertical crack from the arched window up to the roof.

Right: Cracks in the brick will be repaired and the walls will be reinforced. A new roof will also be added.



LOCAL FOURTH GRADERS ENJOY FIELD TRIPS AT THE LIGHT STATION

The Bureau of Land Management and the Piedras Blancas Light Station Association have partnered again with local schools to continue our fourth grade field trip program for the 2017/2018 school year. We really love working with our local students to teach them about lighthouses and natural history. This year, our interns Mike and Brenna took over the classroom presentations. It was great seeing the fourth graders greet Mike and Brenna like old friends when the students arrived at the light station for their field trip. And we send our gratitude to the Cambria Community Council for their generous grant to help offset transportation costs to bus the students to the light station.

HAPPY 143RD BIRTHDAY, PIEDRAS BLANCAS LIGHT STATION!

Join us as we wish Piedras Blancas Light Station a happy birthday during our regularly scheduled tours on Saturday, February 17th.

In 1869, two shipwrecks occurred nearby that highlighted the need for a lighthouse in the area. In August 1869, the *Harlech Castle* struck a submerged rock about one and a half miles north of Piedras Blancas. Two crewmen drowned. On a foggy night in October of that same year, the *Sierra Nevada* struck a reef about three miles north of Piedras Blancas. All 78 people on board survived after spending the night at sea in lifeboats before they could row to San Simeon in the morning.

Beginning in the Spring of 1874, the US Corps of Engineers and a crew of 25-35 men completed the lighthouse in just ten months. The lantern was first lit on February 15, 1875. The original lens now stands along Main Street in Cambria.



POINT SUR LIGHTHOUSE: OUR NEIGHBOR TO THE NORTH

Photos and article courtesy of Carol O'Neil

In 1889, at the Paris factory of Barbier & Fenestra, a huge First Order Fresnel Lens was completed. The lens was made of 568 pieces of glass, hand-ground and arranged into bronze frameworks. Each panel of prisms precisely bent the light from kerosene lamps into a single beam, concentrating it so it would shine 23 miles out to sea from Point Sur Lighthouse, its destination. The 12 panels around the light source made 12 beams of light. The glass lens with its large turning mechanism made an 18 foot high, 7,230 pound, state-of-the-art piece of equipment for guiding ships along the coast.

This Fresnel lens was packed into crates, loaded onto a ship and sent 'round the Horn to San Francisco. From there it was put onto a smaller coastal ship



The First Order Fresnel lens was housed in the Maritime Museum of Monterey since 1992.

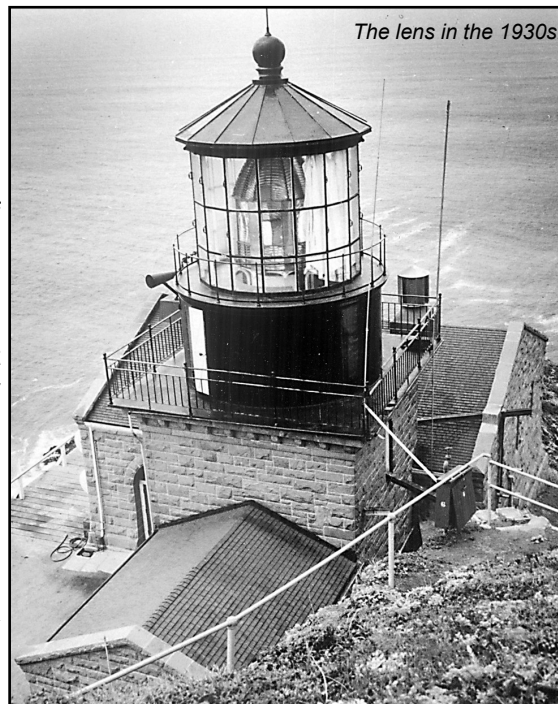
and offloaded to "surf boats" at the mouth of the Big Sur River and floated ashore. The crates were put on wagons, hauled three miles across the sand flats to the base of Point Sur, where they were put on a hoist railway, dragged up and over the top of Point Sur's 360' moro rock and out to the lighthouse 1000 feet to the north. The lens was installed in the lighthouse lantern and officially lit on August 1, 1889. It stayed in service until an automated aero-beacon light replaced it in 1972. It had a fine run of 83 years in continuous service.

Not finished with its travels, the lens was again disassembled by volunteers and the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) in 1978, and moved to the Allen Knight Museum in Monterey. (The Coast Guard retains ownership of all large Fresnel lenses in the United States.) It was moved again in 1992 to the Maritime Museum of Monterey, and there it remained. That museum has since been repurposed, and the lens is no longer well displayed. The USCG has recently agreed to loan the lens to California State Parks for placement back into the lantern of Point Sur's Lighthouse. Repatriation of the lens is doubly exciting because the USCG rarely allows a Fresnel lens to be put back in place in a lighthouse tower. Expertise from State Park professionals and funding from Point Sur's cooperating association, the Central Coast Lighthouse Keepers (CCLK), convinced the Coast Guard that the tower's lantern could be maintained as museum space (where most lenses are displayed). Displaying the lens in its historic setting is the right thing to do.

All of this will cost money, but the opportunity is exciting. The lighthouse will be evaluated structurally, and restored, if necessary. Instead of a working environment, it will be a museum with light and humidity levels mitigated to museum standards.

Crates were constructed by volunteers, and in early December, the lens was disassembled and moved. A "Lampist" approved by the Coast Guard, along with a professional colleague and a few Point Sur Volunteers, disassembled the lens and moved it to a State Parks' temperature-controlled, secure location for repair work. It will eventually be moved back into Point Sur's tower where we hope it will stay for a very long time.

Fundraising will begin in earnest when all the evaluations and estimates are completed. You can help by volunteering at Point Sur, joining CCLK, or making a tax deductible donation so we can bring this Fresnel lens home. Go to www.pointsur.org for more information and to make a donation.



The lens in the 1930s.

TRIVIA TIME

What state has the most lighthouses?

- A. Maine
- B. Michigan
- C. California
- D. Washington

What is the name of the room where the Fresnel lens is located?

- A. The storm room
- B. The illumination room
- C. The lantern room
- D. The tower

Which lighthouse was the first to be built on the west coast of the United States?

- A. Battery Point
- B. Cape Disappointment
- C. Alcatraz Island
- D. Point Cabrillo

Answers: Michigan has 247, the lantern room, Alcatraz Island was completed in 1853

Find us on Facebook for news and upcoming events:
[@PiedrasBlancasLightStation](https://www.facebook.com/PiedrasBlancasLightStation)



STUDENT CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION HELPS THE LIGHT STATION

Every fall, a team of young people with the Student Conservation Association (SCA) or American Conservation Experience (ACE) work for a week at the light station to help with maintenance and restoration projects. This November, members of SCA helped us by removing ice plant and other invasive plants that were overgrowing a wetland. They also sanded and painted the watch room building, and improved fencing throughout the Outstanding Natural Area. These groups are always a huge help to us at the light station, and we are very grateful for their efforts.



Removing invasive plants

INTERN BRENNA HARE EXPLORES NEW ADVENTURES

Brenna came to us from the American Conservation Experience and began work as an intern at Piedras Blancas Light Station in July 2017. Brenna has been outstanding in all of her regular duties as a light station intern: organizing and giving tours, working in the gift shop, cleaning the historic buildings, and removing invasive plants.

Her energy and enthusiasm for the work and the people who visit the light station have been a wonderful addition to Piedras Blancas. She has gone above and beyond her regular duties. Brenna redesigned our printed media: rack cards, flyers, posters, etc. She and intern Mike Holley have made huge improvements to our trail, and organized and advertised our Hops for the Top fundraising event, which was a great success.

Brenna has accepted an internship on Sanibel Island, Florida, working with Sanibel Captiva Conservation Foundation. She will be learning about native flora of Florida, working on public education projects, propagating native vegetation in the Foundation nursery, and landscaping local residences and businesses. We will miss Brenna at the light station, but we all wish her happiness in her new adventures!

TRAIL MAINTENANCE IMPROVES THE TOUR EXPERIENCE



This fall, our 2017 interns Mike Holley and Brenna Hare made significant improvements to the small trail that circumnavigates the light station. Trimming plants and weeding is a regular task for our interns, and during the course of trail maintenance, Mike identified several areas that had begun to erode and needed repair. They used water and a vibraplate to compact decomposed granite for a smooth walkable surface that won't easily erode. Mike and Brenna have devoted a great deal of their time and energy to repair the trail and even added a shortcut to make access to parking and restrooms easier. The trail looks better than ever!

Left:

Decomposed granite helps smooth and stabilize the trail.

COOKING AT THE LIGHTHOUSE

This recipe is from Stephanie and Brian Thorndyke. Brian is a 5th generation Thorndyke and the great-great grandson of Captain Lorin Thorndyke (former PBLS keeper). Brian's wife Stephanie is a fifth cousin to the famed naturalist, John Muir.

Papa Muir's Meatloaf

1 pound lean ground meat
1 package hot n' spicy sausage
1/4 C Worcestershire sauce
3 Tbls garlic salt
1 Tbl crushed red pepper
4 strips of bacon



Mix together meat, sausage, Worcestershire, garlic salt and red pepper. Form into a loaf and place it in either a glass or metal loaf pan. Top with slices of bacon and bake at 350 for 40-45 minutes.

Excerpted with permission from Beverly Praver's cookbook "Dinner at the Lighthouse" available in our gift shop.

HAVE YOU SEEN OUR WEBCAM?

Since it was installed in 2016, many visitors have written to say how much they enjoy the live 270 degree view from the light station. You may see lounging elephant seals, blooming flowers and beautiful sunsets! Check us out:

piedrasblancas.org/webcam



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 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. Sorry, no pets!

PBLS Association
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membership.pblsa@gmail.com



All memberships include our 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: _____

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Please make check payable to PBLSA
You may also join online at piedrasblancas.org
Thank you for your support!



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