



# The Beacon

PIEDRAS BLANCAS LIGHT STATION OUTSTANDING NATURAL AREA  
~PART OF THE CALIFORNIA COASTAL NATIONAL MONUMENT~

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## FUTURE OF PBLS FRESNEL LENS UNDER DISCUSSION

Conversations have begun in earnest about the future of the historic Piedras Blancas Light Station First Order Fresnel Lens currently on display in Cambria next to the Pinedorado grounds. The lens was removed from the PBLS lighthouse tower in 1949, then placed on display in Cambria. The current enclosure on Main Street was completed in 1994. The lens belongs to the United States Coast Guard, and the USCG lease to the current caretakers, the Cambria Lions Club, expired in March, 2021. Since the Lions Club is not interested in renewing the lease, the BLM, with the support and the participation of the PBLSA, has been discussing the future of the lens with the Coast Guard.



*The Piedras Blancas Light Station Fresnel lens in Cambria, 2021.*

The PBLSA has had a long-standing interest in the lens. In 2018 the Association, with the permission of the Lions Club, organized volunteers to clean the lens and clockworks. That same year the PBLSA Board of Directors hired the nation's premier lampist, James Woodward, to prepare a report on the condition of the lens and make recommendations for its protection and conservation. In 2020 and 2021, the Association commissioned two more reports—one on the structural condition of the current lens enclosure and another for a rehabilitation concept design

and cost estimate to bring the enclosure up to acceptable standards.

Much more work remains to be done before the future of the lens comes into focus. First and foremost, broad input needs to be gathered from the community about keeping the lens on display in Cambria or eventually repatriating it to a new museum-grade housing at Piedras Blancas. Meanwhile, discussions continue with the Coast Guard, the BLM, and the PBLSA, as well as other community partners and stake-

holders. Stay tuned.

We welcome ideas and comments from PBLSA members about the fate of this important Central Coast heritage treasure and how its legacy can best be served. Write us at [contact.pblsa@gmail.com](mailto:contact.pblsa@gmail.com).

### TRIVIA TIME

When was the PBLS light first lit?

*The lighthouse was completed in 1874 but not lit until 1875.*



*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.

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## RESOLUTION COMMENDING HOLLY GANT

At the September 22 meeting of the PBLSA Board of Directors, the board voted to approve a resolution commending Holly Gant for her 10 years of service to PBLSA as an Administrative and Project Associate. Holly and her husband moved back to her hometown of San Diego in April of this year, and she is much missed.

Holly started at the light station as a volunteer pulling weeds, working in the gift shop, and assisting with tours. As a part-time employee, Holly managed the gift shop and office tasks like bookkeeping and maintaining the membership database. Under her management, the gift shop inventory grew and diversified. Holly was responsible for commissioning items like the watercolor art of the light station by James Mann and the popular custom model of the lighthouse. She also designed and maintained the Association's website, adding features like the online gift shop and the webcam that offers views of the light station and the surrounding landscape to the world. Holly also took over editorship of *The Beacon* and helped ensure the success of many fundraising initiatives and community outreach events. Holly served the Association well as a devotee of public lands conservation. We wish her well in her new endeavors!



*Holly helped clean the Fresnel lens in 2018.*

### VISIT THE LIGHT STATION ANY TIME, DAY OR NIGHT . . .

. . . with our newly upgraded live webcam, courtesy of Surflife. Enjoy a new, sharper view of the light station grounds, the beaches to the north and south, and the waves crashing on the rocks offshore. Look for elephant seals on the beach and pelicans and seagulls perched on the rocks. Whether it's a foggy morning or a moonlit night, check us out:

[pedrasblancas.org/webcam](http://pedrasblancas.org/webcam)



### JOIN THE PBLSA BOARD MEETINGS ON THE 4TH WEDNESDAY OF EVERY MONTH

The Piedras Blancas Light Station Association meets on the 4th Wednesday of the month at 6 p.m. (except for November and December). Due to COVID concerns, we are currently holding virtual Zoom meetings.

The public is always welcome to listen, ask questions, or voice concerns, so please email us if you would like to participate. Meeting minutes are published on the [pedrasblancas.org](http://pedrasblancas.org) website on the About Us page.

The board consists of people from varied backgrounds and education who live in different parts of the county. We are always open to speaking with anyone who is interested in becoming a board member. Please email if you are interested in the board or have questions concerning the Light Station: [contact.pblsa@gmail.com](mailto:contact.pblsa@gmail.com).

### 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, visit:  
[PointSanLuisLighthouse.org](http://PointSanLuisLighthouse.org)  
or call 805-540-5771.

#### Point Sur Light Station

(65 miles north of PBLs)  
Visit their website: [PointSur.org](http://PointSur.org) or call 831-625-4419 for the current tour schedule. No reservations; first come, first served.

#### Point Pinos Lighthouse

(90 miles north of PBLs)  
Located in Pacific Grove. Open Saturdays and Sundays 1 - 3 p.m. Tours are outside on the lighthouse grounds. For more information, visit: [PointPinosLighthouse.org](http://PointPinosLighthouse.org).





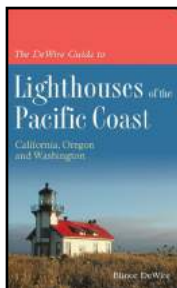
# GIFT SHOP UPDATES

CONSIDER THE PBL'S GIFT SHOP FOR ALL THE LIGHTHOUSE LOVERS ON YOUR LIST!

## NEW ITEMS:

- \* *The DeWire Guide to Lighthouses of the Pacific Coast* by Elinor DeWire

Learn about lighthouses in California, Oregon, and Washington, as well as stories about everyday life, from earthquake damage to lighthouse pets.



- \* Updated coffee mugs, with the light station logo in navy blue and the same large, comfortable handle.



- \* Monarch butterfly model kits, to complement our popular metal lighthouse kits. A great gift for kids 14 and up!



We've also restocked our magnets, hats, shirts, and more. See everything on the revamped gift shop website: **[shop.piedrasblancas.org](http://shop.piedrasblancas.org)**.

## NEW PBLSA MEMBER BENEFIT!

Join the Piedras Blancas Light Station Association and get 10% off all gift shop purchases!\*



Simply enter coupon code: **MEMBER** in your shopping cart at [shop.piedrasblancas.org](http://shop.piedrasblancas.org), or let the gift shop volunteer know that you are a member the next time you visit the light station.

*\*Does not apply to donations, engraved bricks, memberships, or tour fees.*

To join PBLSA, complete and mail the form on the back of *The Beacon*, or join at [shop.piedrasblancas.org](http://shop.piedrasblancas.org).

Questions about your membership status? Email us at [membership.pblsa@gmail.com](mailto:membership.pblsa@gmail.com).

Thank you for supporting the light station!

## WELCOME TO THE LIGHT STATION'S NEW GIFT SHOP MANAGER

If you toured the light station this summer or fall, you may have noticed a new face in the gift shop. Cressant Swarts started in late June as the Gift Shop Manager, succeeding Holly Gant in organizing and ordering for the gift shop. She has worked to revamp the inventory system to increase efficiency and added more of the store selection to the online gift shop. Look for new items coming soon!

"We are so fortunate," remarked the chair of the PBLSA Board of Directors, "to have someone with Cressant's skills, experience, and dedication to public lands conservation. We warmly welcome her to our team."

In 2016, Cressant and her husband moved from Iowa to Humboldt County, where she worked as an office technician for California State Parks. While in Iowa, she worked as an administrative assistant and later as a public librarian after receiving her master's degree. Cressant is new to the Central Coast but is fascinated by the history of the light station and the diversity of the wildlife in the surrounding Coastal Monument. Welcome!

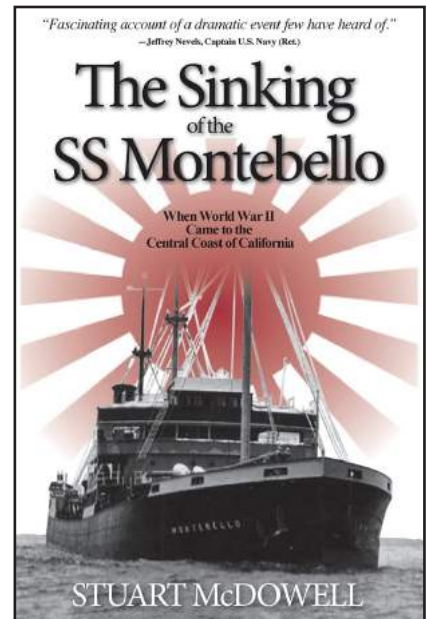


Photo by Gary O'Neill.

## THE SINKING OF THE SS MONTEBELLO: BOOK REVIEW

The Piedras Blancas gift shop is now carrying a recently released book on the sinking of the SS Montebello by a Japanese submarine off the coast of Cambria on December 23, 1941. The Montebello was owned by Union Oil and was carrying over three million gallons of Santa Maria crude oil. The author, Stuart McDowell, has written a highly readable and deeply researched book on the subject. McDowell's book is a compelling and fascinating account of enemy attacks along the west coast shortly after Pearl Harbor, which most people are not aware of. Dive into this book and you won't be disappointed! It's a story that reads like a novel, filled with danger, interesting characters, the sinking of a ship and the rescue of the frightened crew, and it ends with courtroom drama. Oh, let's not forget the local heroes who rescued some of the crew!

*The Sinking of the SS Montebello* by Stuart McDowell is available at the Piedras Blancas gift shop and online at [shop.piedrasblancas.org](http://shop.piedrasblancas.org).



Another great source of information on the sinking of the Montebello is the NOAA website:  
<https://montereybay.noaa.gov/maritime/frmontebello.html>.



*The SS Montebello. Photo from the Cambria Historical Society.*



*Norman Francis and son, circa WWII.*

## UNCOVERED HISTORY OF THE LIGHT STATION: NORMAN FRANCIS' COURT TESTIMONY

Stuart McDowell very generously shared court testimony he found as he researched *The Sinking of the SS Montebello*. The testimony was part of a trial that occurred in 1946 between Union Oil and the War Damage Commission, where Union Oil claimed compensation that would have been due if the Montebello was sunk within three miles of land. One of the government witnesses was Norman Francis, Officer-in-Charge of the Piedras Blancas Light Station.

Included in the testimony is information not previously included in the light station's archives. Around 4:00 on the morning of

December 23, 1941, Francis received a call that there was submarine action in the area. He set up an observation using six men on duty at the station: two soldiers, two seamen, Francis, and the first assistant lighthouse keeper. The soldiers were at the top of the lighthouse and at the base. The two seamen and two keepers were also at the base of the tower. Each man was given a direction to face. Around 5:30 a.m., Francis observed a gun flash. Visibility was poor because it was raining, but several others saw the flash as well. Nothing else was visible. Norman Francis "unconsciously" made note of the

direction, which was later useful in trying to locate the wreck.

After exhaustive efforts to locate the wreckage of the Montebello, it was determined that the ship went down 6.5 miles off the coast of Cambria and 8.75 miles south of the light station, in a depth of about 900 feet.

Before receiving the court testimony from Stuart, we did not know there was coast watch personnel stationed at Piedras Blancas so quickly after Pearl Harbor. Nor did we know there was an observation team posted on the morning of December 23 to witness the attack on the SS Montebello.



## A GIFT OF HISTORY: THORNDYKE BED ON LOAN BY FAMILY

From BLM Manager Ryan Cooper

When working at a light station you get all kinds of interesting phone calls, from couples wanting to get married at the lighthouse to people wanting to film movies on the light station grounds. Recently, someone even asked if they could film themselves racing their off-highway vehicle around the lighthouse. (The answer was no.) Questions like these are all part of the job.

Earlier this fall, we received a call from someone who said they had a Piedras Blancas Lighthouse artifact we may be interested in. After playing some phone tag, I finally got in touch with Maureen Thorndyke DaShiell, granddaughter of Lorin V. Thorndyke. One of the most prominent lighthouse keepers at Piedras Blancas, Thorndyke served from 1879 until 1906. His son, John Emory Thorndyke, also served at PBLS in 1903. Maureen said she had a bed that had been purchased and used by Lorin Thorndyke while he was the principal lighthouse keeper, and the family would like to loan the bed to the Light Station so it could be preserved and displayed.

The bed is now at the Light Station in storage waiting for an appropriate place to display this historical treasure. One possibility is a replica of the Victorian duplex that once housed the Thorndyke family, scheduled for a future restoration project.



The following is what Maureen passed along about the history of the bed:

"While serving as the lighthouse keeper at Piedras Blancas, Capt. Thorndyke traveled to San Francisco to buy the bed from a hotel that was selling its furniture. He brought the bed back to the lighthouse, where it stayed until he retired. Upon retirement, he took the bed with him. Over the years, Lorin and Maude took the bed with them as they moved from location to location. The bed finally ended up in Cayucos at the ranch of Lorin Thorndyke III where his wife Meta stored it in the basement."

The PBLSA and the BLM would like to thank the Thorndyke family, especially Maureen, for reaching out to us with this bit of history tied to the Piedras Blancas Light Station.

### COOKING AT THE LIGHTHOUSE

#### Fruit Cake

1 cup shortening	1-1/2 cups brown sugar
4 eggs	3 cups flour
1 teaspoon baking powder	2 teaspoons salt
2 teaspoons cinnamon	1 teaspoon allspice
1 teaspoon ground cloves	1 cup cider
1 cup chopped citron	1 cup raisins
2 cups candied fruits, chopped	3 cups nuts
1 cup chopped figs	1 cup chopped dates

Mix shortening, sugar and egg yolks together well. Sift together spices, salt, baking powder and two cups of the flour and add alternately with the cider. Mix fruits and nuts with remaining flour and add. Finally fold in egg whites, beaten stiff, and bake in a very slow oven for about four hours. (A slow oven is approximately 225°F.)



From the recipe book of Maud Rogers Thorndyke, daughter-in-law of Principal Keeper Lorin V. Thorndyke.

Excerpted with permission from Beverly Praver's cookbook *Dinner at the Lighthouse*, available at the Piedras Blancas gift shop and online at [shop.piedrasblancas.org](http://shop.piedrasblancas.org).

## 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 two 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. Make your reservations online through our website, [piedrasblancas.org](http://piedrasblancas.org). Meet at the former Piedras Blancas Motel located 1.5 miles north of the light station at 9:45 a.m.

**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 advanced 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  
P.O. Box 127  
San Simeon, CA 93452-0127  
805-927-3719  
[membership.pblsa@gmail.com](mailto: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)
- \_\_\_ Donation \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

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

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

Please make checks payable to PBLSA,  
or join online at [shop.piedrasblancas.org](http://shop.piedrasblancas.org).

**Thank you for your support!**



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and Instagram:  
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PIEDRAS BLANCAS LIGHT  
STATION ASSOCIATION  
P.O. BOX 127  
SAN SIMEON, CA 93452

