

Alcatraz Light Station Then, Now, Next...



THE **ALCATRAZ LIGHTHOUSE** PRESERVATION PROJECT

The Alcatraz Lighthouse Preservation Project is led by the US Lighthouse Society in collaboration with the US Coast Guard, the National Parks Service, and the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy.

Significant as Aid to Navigation



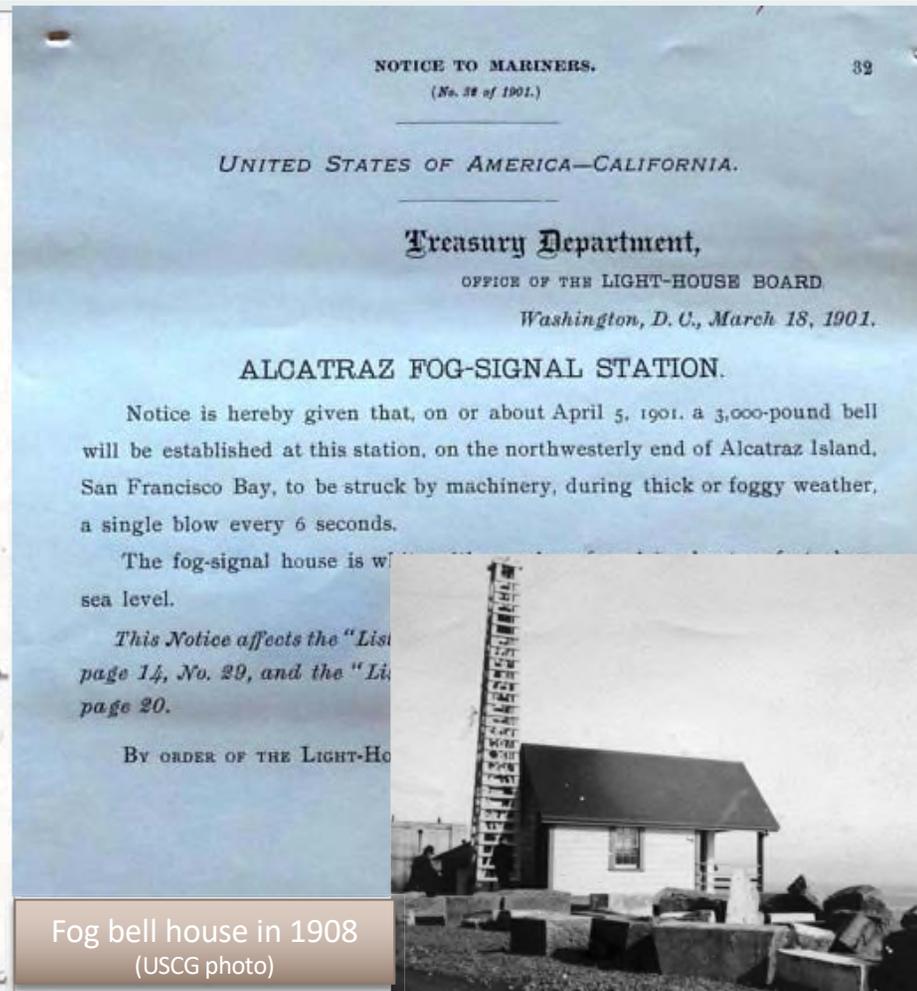
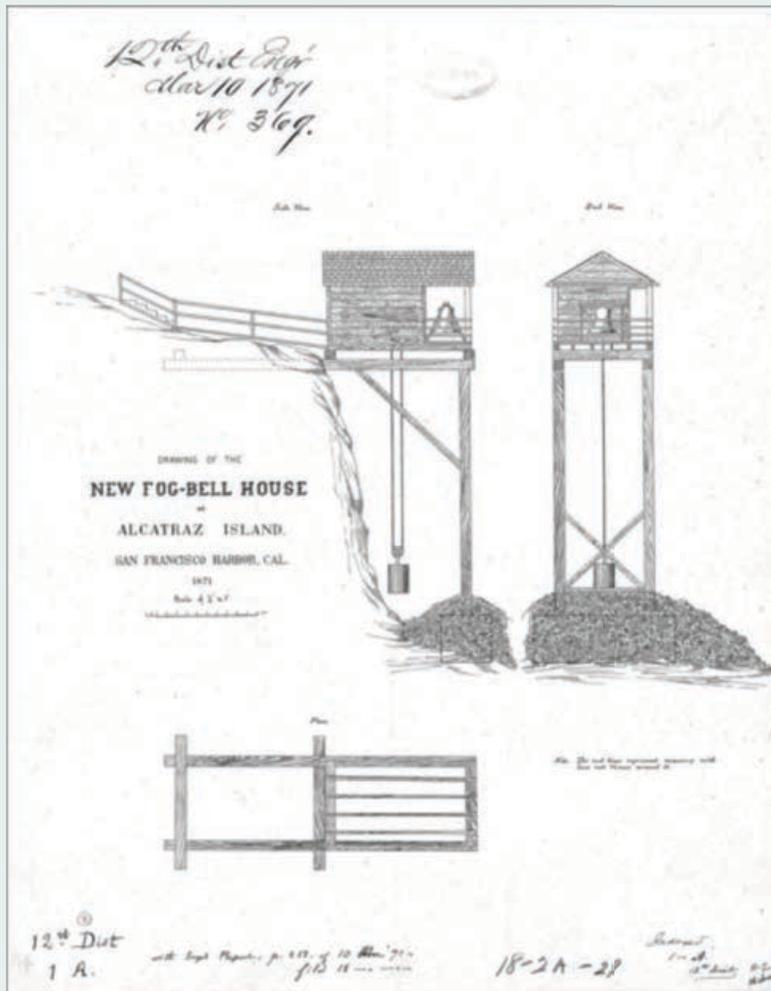
Although the need for a lighthouse on Alcatraz was indicated as early as 1846, it was increased shipping into San Francisco Bay during the Gold Rush that prompted a Congressional appropriation. This 1859 survey of San Francisco Bay shows the beginnings of the system of aids to navigation needed to guide ships from the Pacific Ocean, over the Golden Gate, and into San Francisco.

Original Optic was a 3rd Order Fresnel Lens Manufactured in France



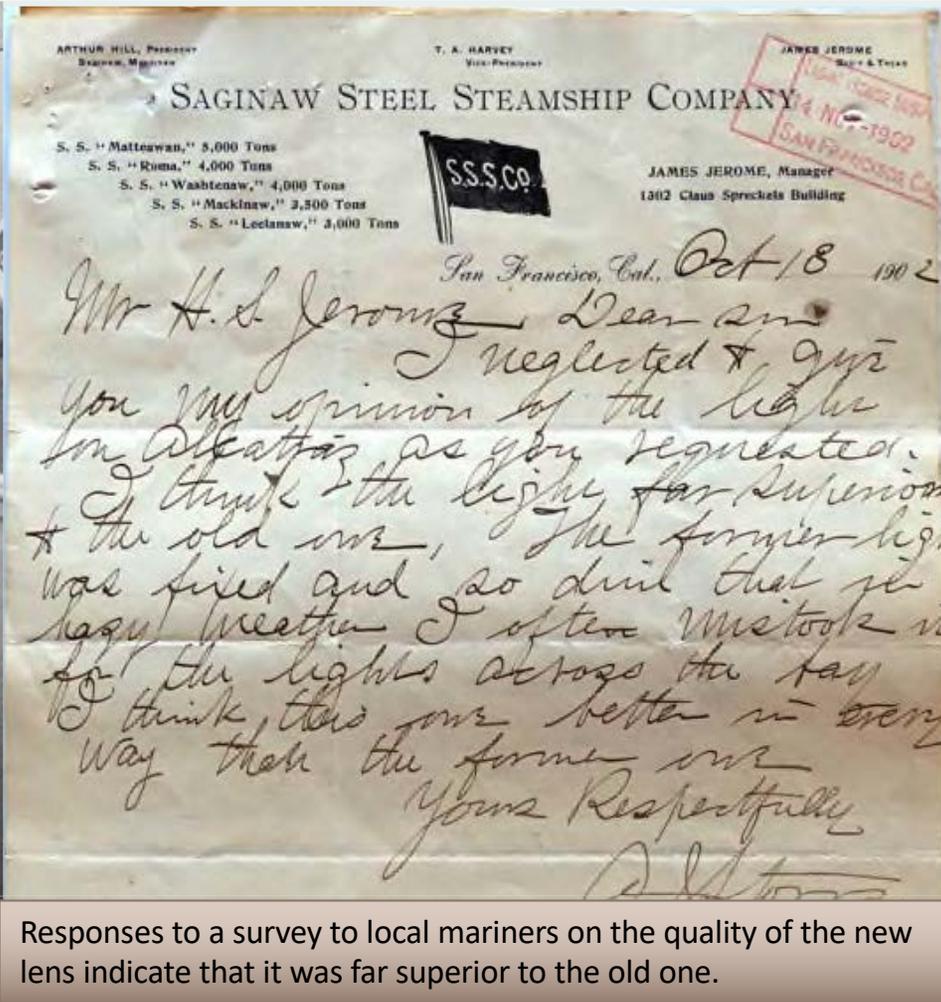
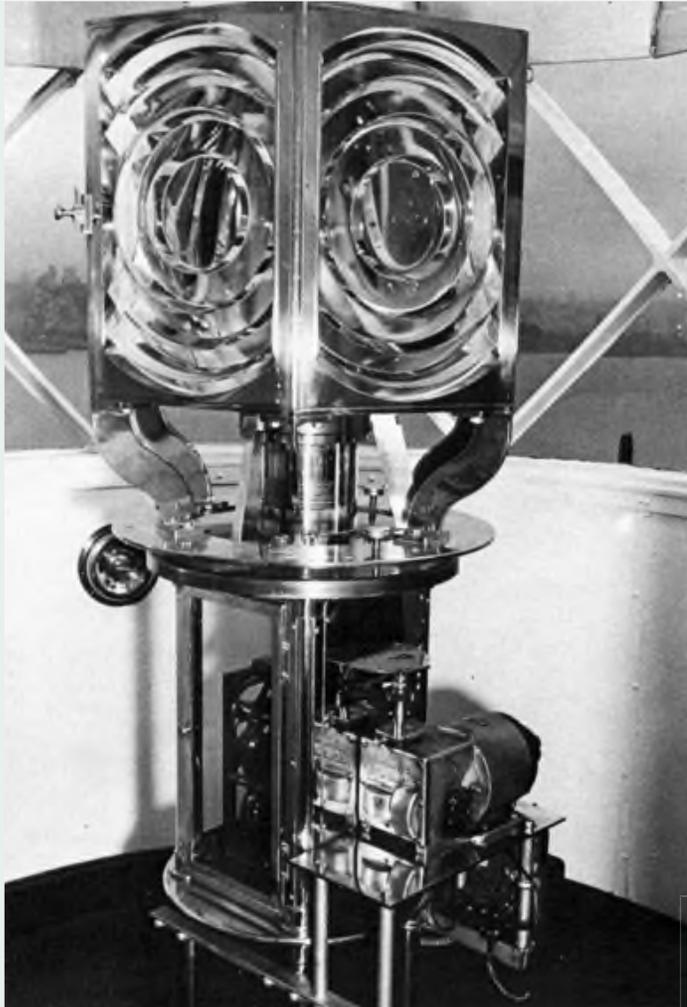
The newly formed Light-House Board (USLHB) insisted on a superior Fresnel lens. A *Notice to Mariners* (NTM) indicated that on June 1, 1854, “a *Fixed Light* “ was shown “160 feet above the level of the sea . . . visible in all directions, and in the ordinary state of atmosphere, should be seen at the distance of 12 miles off the Heads.”

Fog Signal Station



The need for a fog signal was determined early on. The drawing on the left is the bell tower built on the southern end of Alcatraz in 1871. The keepers were responsible for keeping the bell wound and maintained in addition to keeping the light in the tower. The NTM seen here describes the second bell tower that was built on the northwesterly end of the island in 1901. Note the arrangement of the bell with its weight system inside a tower rather than hanging down over a cliff.

1902 Improvements in Technology

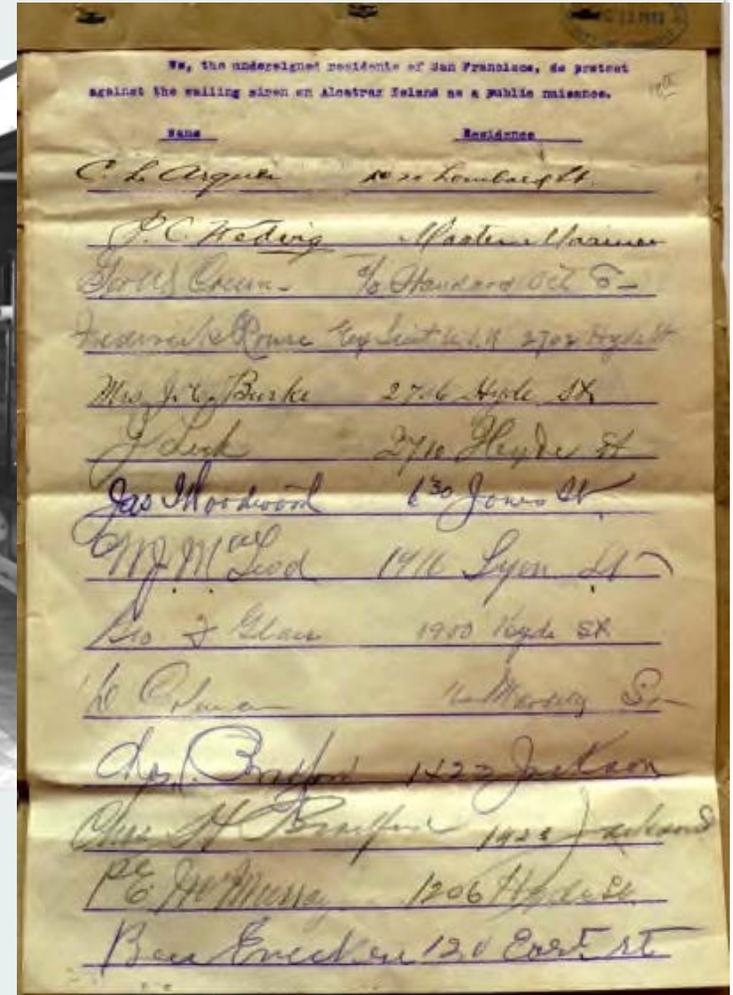
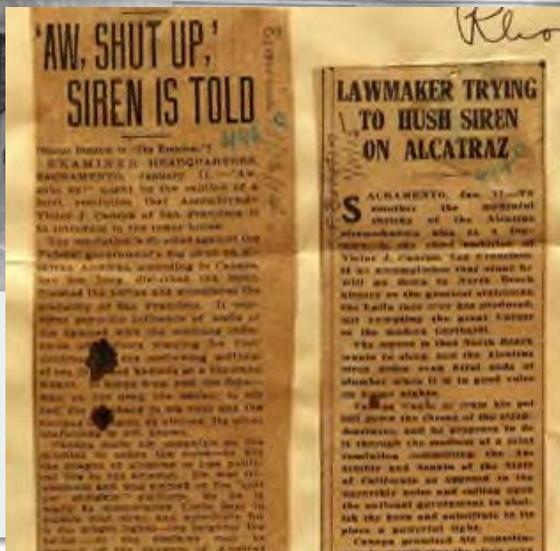


Responses to a survey to local mariners on the quality of the new lens indicate that it was far superior to the old one.

A new lens was installed in 1902 after a 1901 inspection report indicated “the third order light at this station is not satisfactory. It is a fixed white light, and off the bar cannot readily be distinguished from the electric lights back of it in Oakland and Berkeley.” A NTM indicated that, on or about September 6, 1902, the order of the light at the station will be changed from third to fourth, and its characteristic will be changed from fixed to flashing white every 15 seconds.

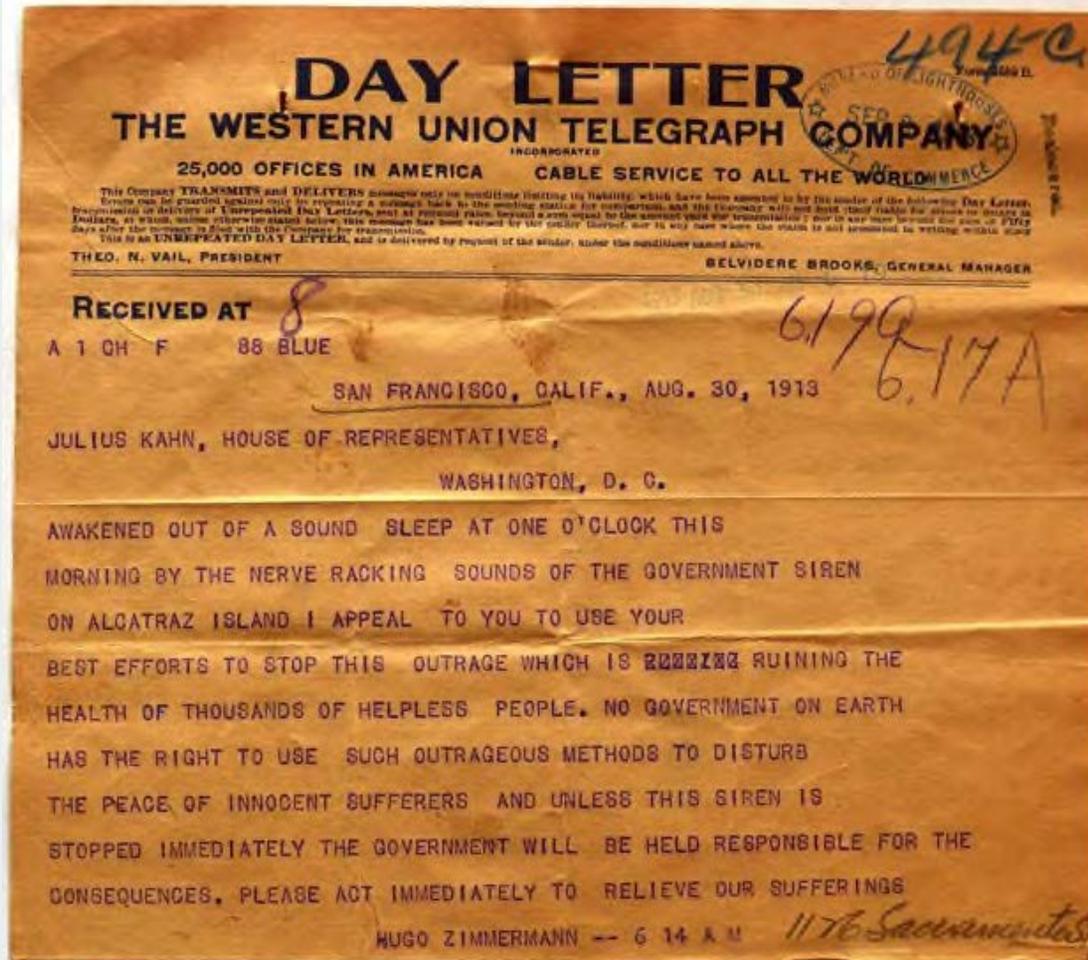
Fog Signal Technology Evolves

Timing device for electric sirens before installation



After the construction of a powerhouse brought electricity to the island in 1912, electricity powered the light. Electric sirens also replaced the fog bells, much to the dismay of local residents. Note newspaper articles and petition complaining about the noise.

Fog Signals Not Favored By All



Here is a telegram sent to Representative Julius Kahn in Washington D.C. Various modifications to the sirens were made but they never really fixed the problem. Recommendations to replace the sirens entirely was always deemed too expensive. As long as the seafaring community agreed that the sirens were the most efficient signal, the status quo was maintained despite political interference. Finally in 1938, the sirens were replaced with diaphone horns as part of a WPA public works project.

Keepers at Alcatraz



Thirteen principal keepers were appointed under the USLHB between 1854 and 1909, and 40 assistant keepers. A second assistant keeper position was created in 1901 when the 2nd fog bell was added to their duties. Most men filling 2nd assistant position lasted less than a year. Many were promoted or transferred to other stations, implying that Alcatraz was considered an initial “training” stop in a keeper’s career. The small size of the keepers dwelling was likely also a factor. Even with the additions you see in this photo, it would be a rather tight fit for three keepers and their families.

Keepers at Alcatraz

PK.

Post Office Department,
TOPOGRAPHER'S OFFICE,
Washington, D. C., *June 11, 1897*

Sir:
To enable the Topographer of this Department to determine, with as much accuracy as possible, the relative positions of Post Offices, so that they may be correctly delineated on its maps, the Postmaster General requests you care fully to answer the questions below, and furnish the diagram on the other side, returning the same as soon as possible, received by your signature and dated under cover to the Topographer's Office, Post Office Department.
Respectfully, Sir,

To POSTMASTER AT *Alcatraz*
San Francisco
California

The (P. O. Dept.) name of my Office is *Alcatraz, California*.
If the town, village, or site of the Post Office be known by another name than that of the Post Office, state that other name here: *Alcatraz Island, California*.
The P. O. is situated in the *unincorporated* quarter of Section No. *1*, in Township *34 S.* (north or south), Range *12 W.* (east or west), County of *San Francisco*, State of *California*.
The name of the most prominent river near it is *Marquardt's River*.
The name of the nearest creek is *Oakland Creek*.
This Office is *1.9* miles from said river, on the *west* side of it, and is *7* miles from said nearest creek, on the *west* side of it.
My Office is on Mail Route No. *1* *via* *San Francisco*.
My Office is a Special Office supplied from *San Francisco*, *Cal.* miles distant.
The name of the nearest Office on my route is *San Francisco, Cal.*, and its distance is *1.9* miles, by the traveled road, in *west* direction from this, my Office.
The name of the nearest Office, on the same route, on the other side, is *Angel Island, Cal.*, and its distance is *1.9* miles in *west* direction from this, my Office.
The name of the nearest Office of the route is *San Francisco, Cal.*, and its distance by the most direct road is *7* miles in *west* direction from this, my Office.
The name of the nearest railroad is *San Francisco & North Pacific R.R.*.
If on the line of or near the railroad, on which side and how far from the track is your Office located? *at or near road:*

(Signature of Postmaster) *Benj. Leeds*
(Date) *July 12, 1897*

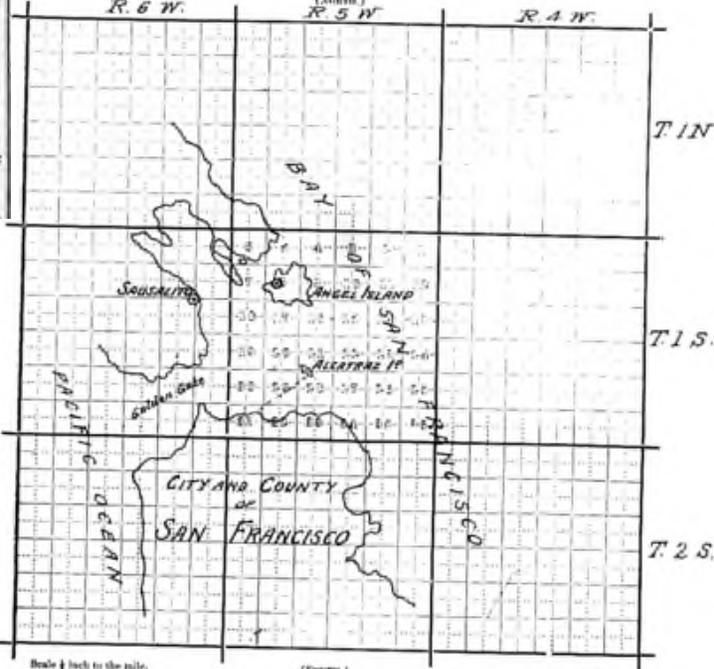
Topographer P. O. Dep.



Captain Leeds, Keeper of Alcatraz Island Lighthouse.
[Drawn from a photograph.]

Diagram showing the site of the *Alcatraz* Post Office in Township *21* (N. S.), Range *5* (W.), of *Principal Meridian*, County of *San Francisco*, State of *California*, with the adjacent Townships and Post Offices.

It is requested that the exact site of your Post Office, as also the roads to the adjoining Offices, and the rivers and creeks, be marked on this diagram, to be returned as soon as possible to the Topographer's Office, Post Office Department. If on, or near a railroad, mark the railroad and adjacent Station accurately.
In localities not surveyed by the U. S. Land Office, a sketch map is requested.

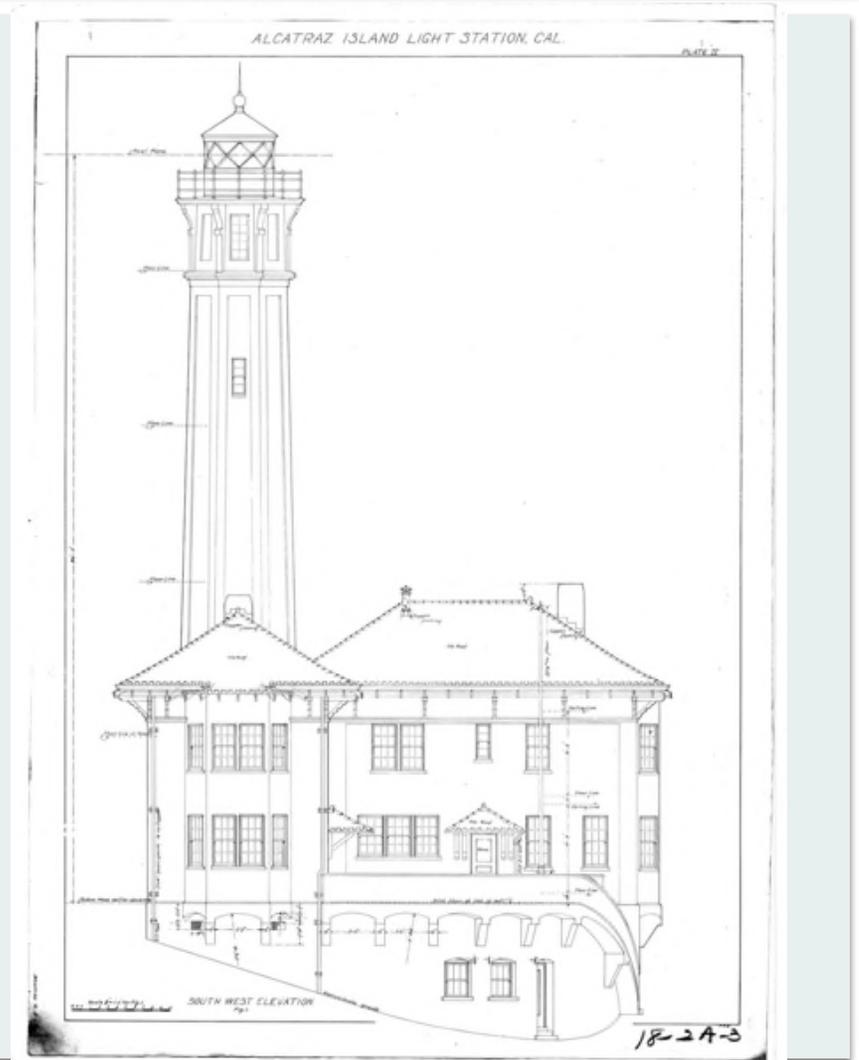
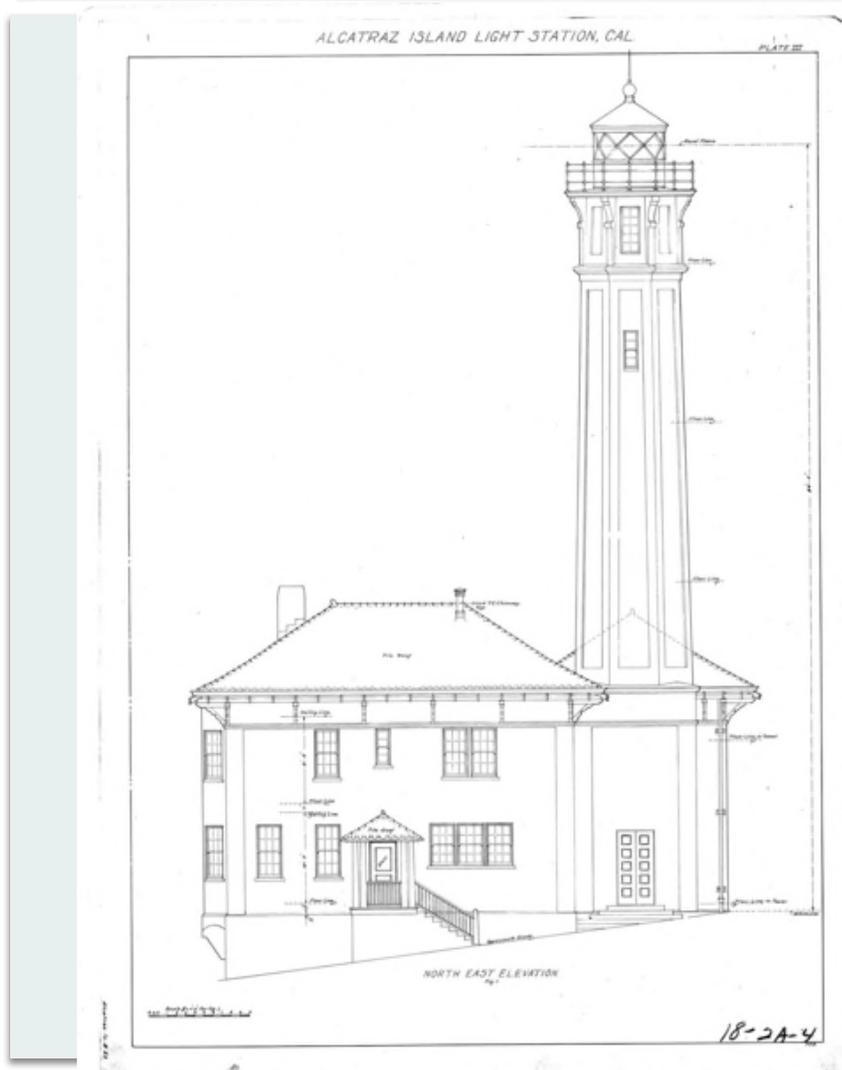


Scale 4 inch to the mile. (South.)

Mail Route.

Early on, the keepers interacted with the military families on the island. Keeper Amasa Bushnell actually served as the island's first postmaster and many other keepers followed him in that position. Keeper Benjamin Leeds submitted these documents to the Post Office Department in 1897.

New Technology Used for 1909 Tower



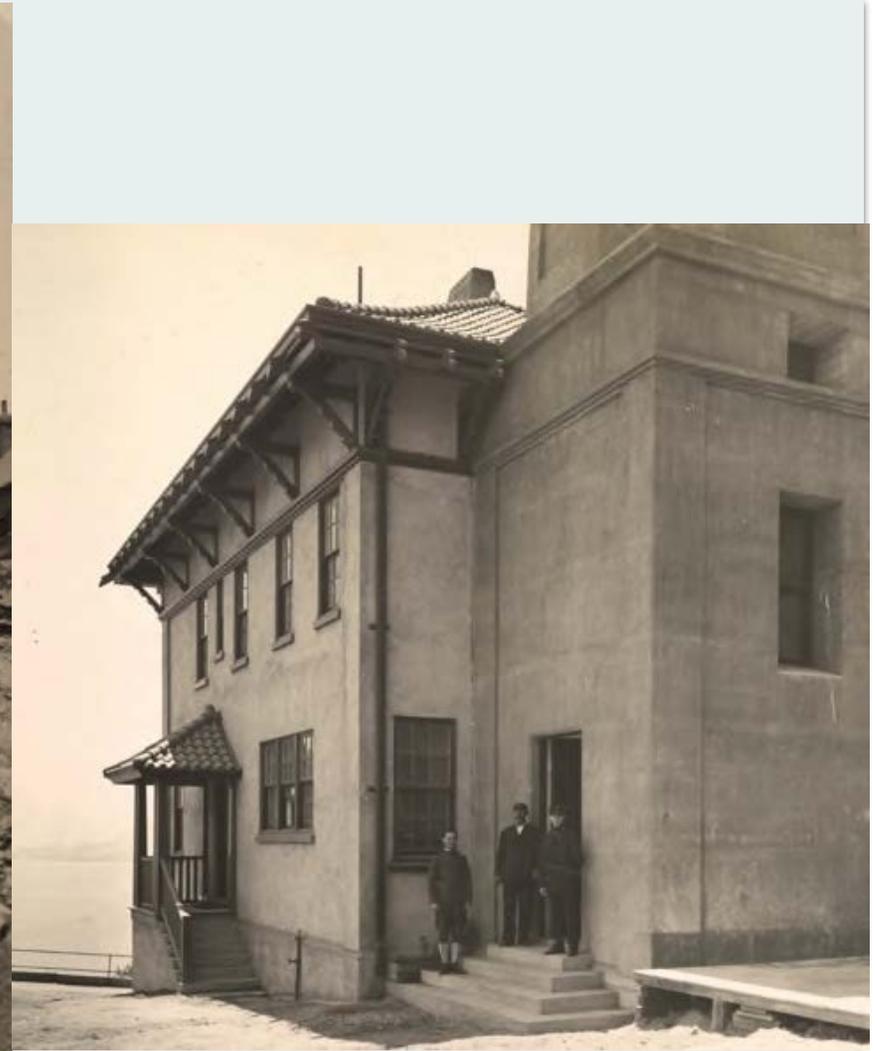
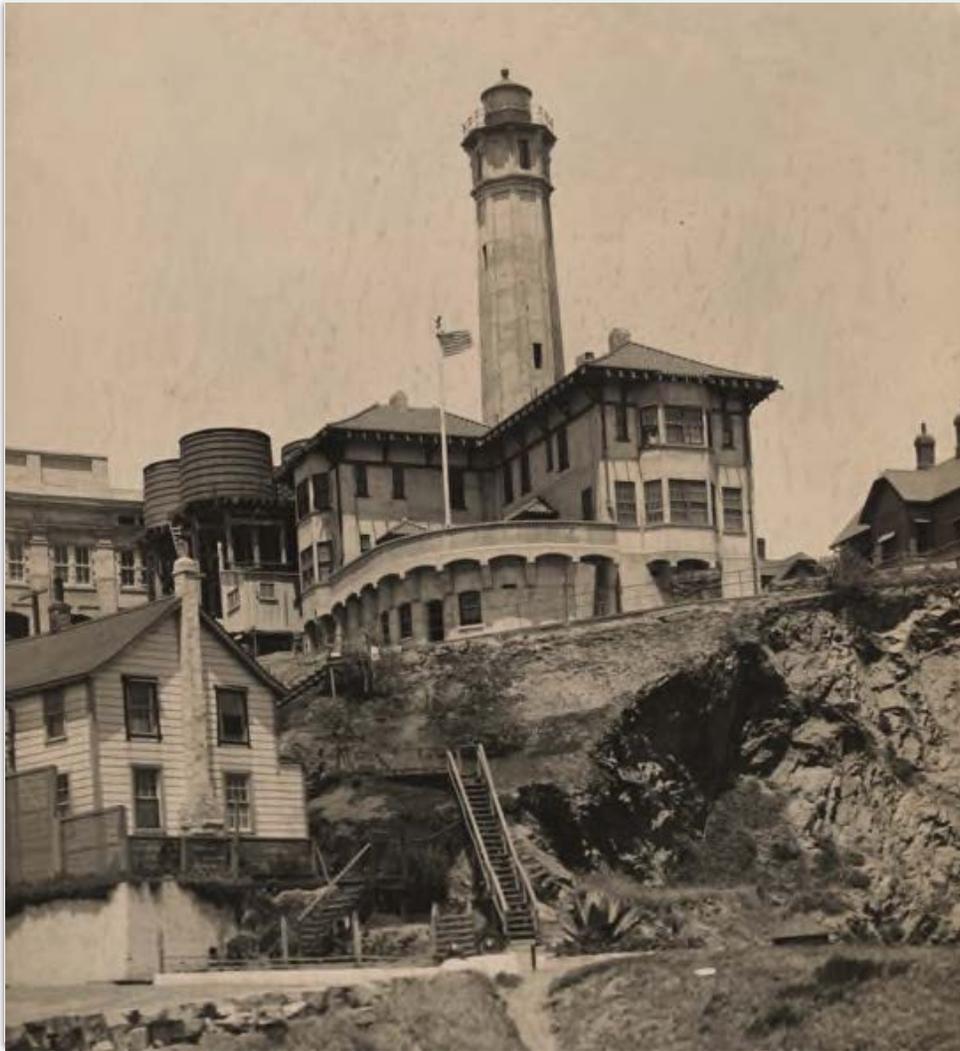
Plans for a new cellblock led to the construction of a new tower in 1909. The old tower, that had received minor damage in the 1906 earthquake, was replaced with a tower of reinforced concrete to better withstand future earthquakes; this was seen as the best material for the new tower at Alcatraz.

New Tower Under Construction



The new lighthouse tower under construction in 1909.

Tower Completed in 1909



The tower was completed and the light activated on Dec. 1, 1909. The keepers dwellings were completed a few months later. The three keepers no doubt enjoyed their roomier modern dwellings and increased privacy.

Alcatraz Keepers - 1922



The keeper's logs indicate that the lighthouse keepers still interacted with the community of families on the island. A lot of this freedom changed however when the Bureau of Prisons took over the military facility in 1933. Restrictions on movements increased. Many benefits, such as access to the military commissary, disappeared.

Keepers at Alcatraz

THE SAN FRANCISCO EXAMINER, TUESDAY, MAY 24, 1934

Felons' Barrage of Weights Fail A Rifleman Kills One In Roof Top Battle

How Convicts Fled

BREAK AT ISLAND PRISON

'TOUGH' LUCAS QUILTS COLD
12 Other Inmates Refuse to Join Break Try

The officers were simply too fast for them.
It was shortly after 3 o'clock that the top of escapees attempted this break, according to Warden Johnston.
The men were at work on the top floor of the wood-working shop, which is the large structure on the extreme tip of the island nearest the lighthouse.
GUARD UNARMED.
On duty there as guard, but unarmed because he was working on the floor with the prisoners, was Supt. Custodian Cline. He was carrying the usual assortment of prisoners' work.
Suddenly the top opened. They brought a hammer down with crashing force on Cline's head, but his assailants, as he lay motionless, struck him.
Frank, Lucas and Johnson climbed out through one of the big openings of the shop, and made their way to the top of the structure, bravely intending to overpower the armed guard as they along the roadway which runs the roof and immediately above guard towers around about the surface of the island.
FRANK PHOTOGRAPHED
A group of the guards from



Fog Signal

(COPY MADE) 4446
DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
Lighthouse Service
Alcatraz
May 26, 1934

Superintendent of Lighthouses,
San Francisco, California.

Sir:

Following the receipt of circular letter #161 in regards to salary increases and in view of what happened here on Alcatraz Island yesterday, May 23rd, when there was an attempted jail delivery with one guard killed, one convict killed, one wounded and another captured, I feel that this is an opportune time to recommend a salary increase for the personnel at this station. I do not recommend it because of any physical labor or watch duties, but of the danger to life or injury involved.

The duties of the keepers here necessitate our passing through the gates into the prison yard, then through another gate of which we carry the keys for two padlocks, in order to reach the north and siren house. This procedure creates a great risk in the event of a jail break at the time of passing through the prison yard. We could be apprehended for the keys and used as shields, putting us in direct line of fire from the guard's guns. Mercy is not expected from the convicts as they are not men but something inhuman and devilish.

Yesterday Mr. Schneider the first assistant, and Mr. Tyrrell were working on the siren house roof directly under the escaping convicts who were attempting to capture a guard who opened fire on them. Mr. Schneider or Mr. Tyrrell could have easily been shot.

The conditions here, I believe are recognized by the Department of Justice as not existing in any other prison in the United States. Therefore the guards are given special compensations such as free uniforms, shoes, socks, shirts, shoe repairing, cleaning and pressing of uniforms, commissary supplies at reduced rates. Their homes are furnished with government owned furniture, electric refrigeration or ice, gas, lights, steam heat and laundry service. Their entrance salary is \$1560 per annum.

Although our risks are not as great as the guards, nevertheless we are subjected to these same dangers, and I feel that this station should be in a special class of its own and compensated accordingly.

To emphasize more clearly the point of this letter I am enclosing a newspaper clipping of the exact location where the shooting occurred.

We sincerely hope this meets with your approval.

Respectfully,
H. DAVIS (Signed)

Even though the light station was quite separate from the prison, there were reports of dangerous episodes. Keeper Henry Davis forwarded this article and described how the keepers were caught in the cross fire when working on the fog signal roof. He and the other keepers felt they should have a pay increase for hazardous duty. The Lighthouse Service denied their request, but a discussion about automating the station ensued. Objections from the shipping community stopped these discussions. In 1939 the USCG took over the administration of lighthouses.

Keepers and Their Families at Alcatraz



Keeper Henry Davis retired in 1950 and First Assistant Edward H. Schneider was promoted to principal keeper. Schneider had been assistant keeper from 1936 to 1950, and second assistant keeper from 1931 to 1936. A newspaper article was written on his long tenure in 1954, including photos of him, his grandson Robert and Assistant Keeper John Winert, his wife Betty and son Guy.

Light Automated - Keepers Depart in 1963

SF Chronicle 3-8-63

Alcatraz

Lonesome Light

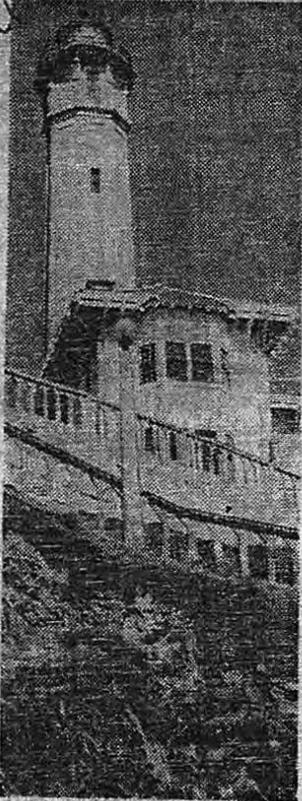
By Jack Foisie

Alcatraz Light—the oldest navigational aid for mariners on the Pacific Coast—is going modern.

The Coast Guard yesterday disclosed plans to remove the last of the lighthouse keepers who for 108 years have tended the glowing beacon atop the tower perched on the highest part of the grim island.

For 108 years, daily without a miss, men have climbed 112 steps before dusk and dawn to light or extinguish the

See Page 14, Col. 2



It has never failed

San Francisco, Calif.
News-Call-Bulletin
(Cir. D. 190,760 - S. 162,823)

NOV 22 1963

Allen's P.C.B. Est. 1888



Coastguardman Norman Fornachon polishes Alcatraz light

The Lighthouse Keeper Bids Alcatraz Farewell

The Coast Guard has removed its last lighthouse keeper from Alcatraz Island, home of the oldest lighthouse on the Pacific coast.

From now on, the lighthouse will be operated by remote control from the Coast Guard station near Ft. Point on the mainland at San Francisco.

Norman Fornachon, 33, was the last keeper of the Alcatraz Light. His family's belongings were taken from the island Thursday.

Their departure leaves only four families on the island that once was the site of America's most famous

lished at Alcatraz in 1854. It was manned by the U. S. Lighthouse Service until that organization was merged with the Coast Guard.

The present light tower was built in 1909.

Fornachon said remote control operation of the light actually was begun last month, but he stayed on to make sure everything worked properly.

He will move now to lighthouse duty at San Luis Obispo, with his wife, Judith, and their children, Michael, 3, and Melba Jean, 15 months.

The first lighthouse on the West Coast was established at Alcatraz in 1854.

The prison closes in 1963 and the Coast Guard automates the station. The light and southern fog signal remain but the full-time keepers leave the island.

The first lighthouse on the West Coast was established at Alcatraz in 1854.

Indian Occupation of Alcatraz Island 1969 - 1971



On November 20, 1969, a group of Native Americans known as the “Indians of All Tribes” began to occupy Alcatraz Island. Their intention was to Build a Native American Studies center, spiritual center, an ecology center, and an American Indian Museum.

Fire Burns Warden's House and Keepers Quarters



Los Angeles, Calif.
Times
(Cl) © 938,918 - 2 1,289,488
JUN 14 1971
Allen's P.C.S. Est. 1891

The Indians lose again as the U.S. Coast Guard invades Alcatraz and recaptures it for the federal government. A force of 33 marshals lead the invasion from San Francisco and, without resistance, removed the 15 Indian holdouts remaining on the island and established command. These boats were used to transport the Indians, who had held the Alcatraz island for 19 months, to a hotel.



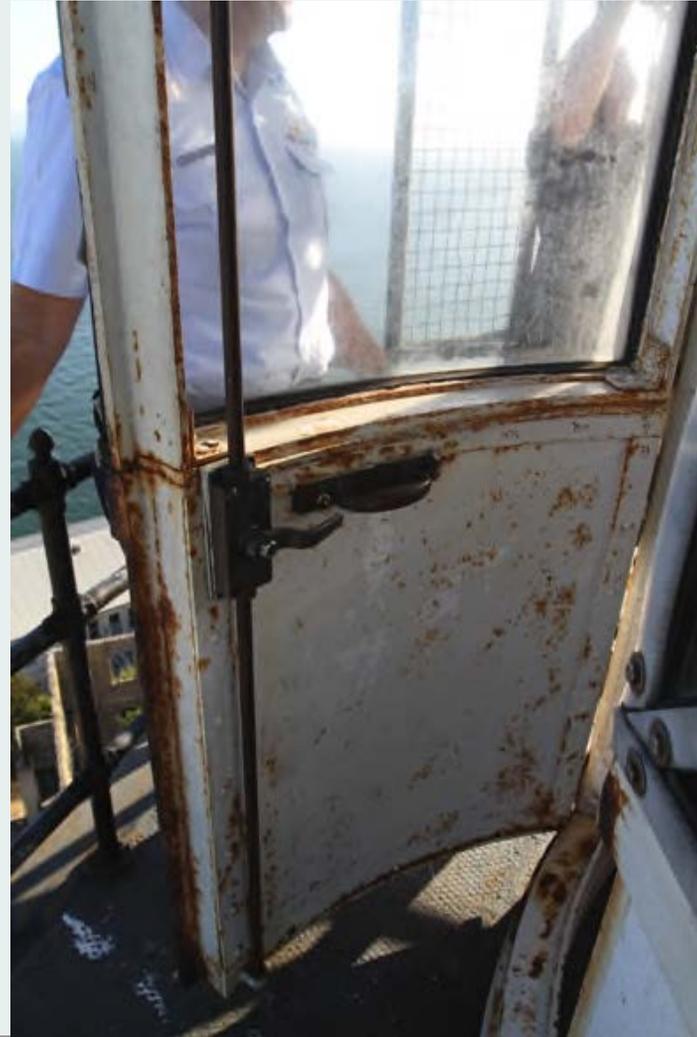
Although the Indian demonstration was initially peaceful, a fire of unknown origin broke out. After the fire burned down the warden's house and keeper's dwelling and knocked out the navigation light, the government intervened and removed the demonstrators. Upper right you can see the Coast Guard Vessels used to take the remaining Native Americans off the island. The light was restored.

The National Park Service Takes Over Alcatraz Island - 1972



Alcatraz Island becomes a unit of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, National Parks Service, in 1972.

Today the Lighthouse Needs Repair



Today, the century-old structure is showing its age very badly. Maintenance that has been deferred for too long has left the structure weakened with rust and decay.

Lighthouse Needs Repair Now



Everywhere you look, you see the ravages of time and weather and the corrosive salt air. If we do not act now to repair the structure, it may not survive for future generations.

Preservation for Future Generations Save Our Icon!

To learn more and to donate visit our Website at AlcatrazLighthouse.org
For questions and comments send an email to AlcatrazLighthouse@uslhs.org



THE
ALCATRAZ LIGHTHOUSE
PRESERVATION PROJECT

Please help us **Save Our Icon!** We need your contributions to do the work of repair and preservation now. To ensure that the historic Alcatraz Lighthouse will be there for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of those millions of people who visit the Island each year and for future generations.

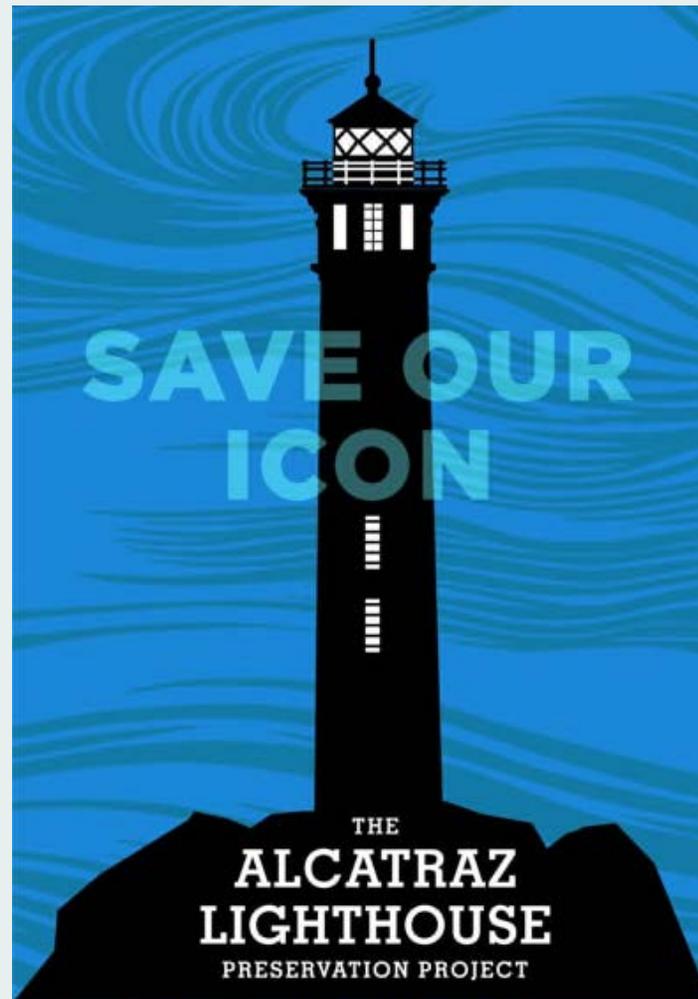
Credits

Photo Sources

Title	Photo Source
Significant as Aid to Navigation	Library of Congress
Cape Cod Design by Ammi B. Young	U.S. Lighthouse Society Archives
Original Optic was a 3rd Order Fresnel Lens Manufactured in France	National Archives LG-26
Fog Signal Station	National Archives
1902 Improvements in Technology	National Archives
Fog Signal Technology Evolves	National Archives LG-26 National Archives RG 26 Entry 50
Fog Signals Not Favored By All	National Archives RG 26 Entry 50
Keepers at Alcatraz	USCG Historian's Office
Tower Completed in 1909	National Archives LG-26xs
Keepers at Alcatraz	National Archives RG 26
Keepers at Alcatraz	National Archives RG 26
Keepers and Their Families at Alcatraz	U.S. Coast Guard Historians Office
Light Automated - Keepers Depart in 1963	U.S. Coast Guard Historians Office
Fire Burns Warden's House and Keepers Quarters	U.S. Coast Guard Historians Office
The National Park Service Takes Over Alcatraz Island - 1972	U.S. Coast Guard Historians Office

*Many thanks to Candace Clifford, U.S. Lighthouse Society Historian,
for creating this slide presentation.*

SAVE OUR ICON!



© 2018 U.S. Lighthouse Society; uslhs.org