

Mayo's Beach Lighthouse in Wellfleet, Massachusetts, as it appeared in 1915. The light station was discontinued in 1922. In 1923 the tower was removed from the site when the keeper's house was sold at auction. In 1925 the tower was shipped to California.

New England Lighthouse Thought To Have Been Destroyed Found Standing In California

By: Colleen MacNeney

The Mayo's Beach Lighthouse that was established in Wellfleet, Massachusetts was thought to have been demolished in 1939; at least that's what everyone thought. However, the tower was actually removed from the site when the keeper's house was sold at auction in 1923. That tower is still standing today, an amazing 2,764 miles from the original location where it was built in 1881. And, I was part of the team that rediscovered the facts that will forever change and correct the history of these two historic light stations

The Lighthouse People, Bob and Sandra Shanklin, are my parents, who were the first, and perhaps the only, people to have photographed every standing lighthouse in the United States of America, including Alaska, Hawaii and Puerto Rico. Since that quest was completed these amazing and dedicated people started another quest; to digitize and secure any and all archival lighthouse photos in the United States. From time to time I have been fortunate enough to volunteer and join them on this quest to save lighthouse photos for historians and future generations

On one such journey was last year to the U.S. Coast Guard Historian's office in Washington D.C, Unbeknownst to me at the time, we stumbled upon an interesting notation on a photograph I was scanning.

The photograph was in the California file of the Point Montara Lighthouse. It was a black and white photo, showing an old tower in need of repair with this handwritten notation underneath it: "*This tower formerly used at Mayo Beach, 2d District.*" It was dated 1928.

I thought it was an interesting old photograph, but didn't think much of it, as every photo I had been scanning was an old photograph or document, and I simply went on to the next file and photo. My job that day was not to stop and analyze, but to scan as much as possible as time and our finances would allow.

However, after we got home, as my parents looked at the photo, my Dad's face started to have an expression of surprise and Mom burst out with, "Oh my gosh!" They knew we had uncovered some otherwise lost lighthouse history. But, we needed facts to substantiate it. We've learned from past experience that a notation written on an old photograph does not always make that notation the gospel.

So on my next adventure to Washington D.C., my new quest was to find out if indeed the Point Montara, CA. Lighthouse came from Mayo's Beach, MA.

But first I needed to do some legwork. Everything I found about the Point Montara Lighthouse in books and on the web, said it was a new tower that was built in 1928. A 30' high, conical, cast iron tower.

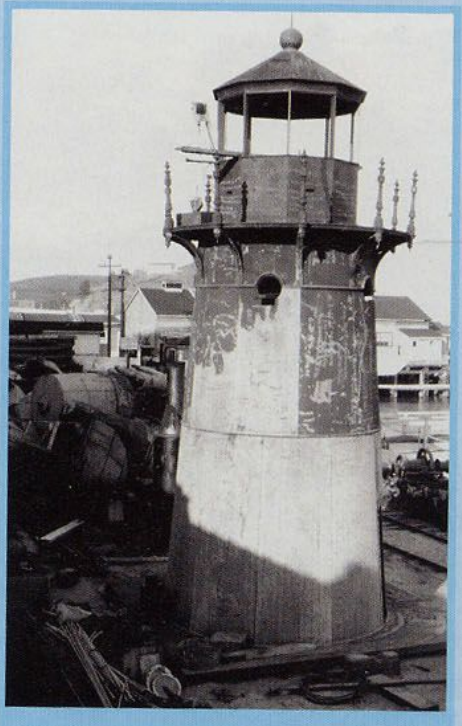
All the research on the web and from books all had the same story about Mayo's Beach Lighthouse; that it was a 30' high conical cast iron tower, discontinued in 1922, sold at auction in 1923, and the tower was torn down or removed in 1939. This information did not indicate that the notation on the suspect photo was correct - the dates did not match. So off I went back to the Coast Guard Historian's Office to revisit said photograph.

Upon pulling the Point Montara file again, I found the photograph had these additional quotations: "See 18th's letter of 4-27-28 (493-E)", "Filed 5-17-28", and on the back "Cast iron tower for Pt. Montara", and stamped "Lighthouse Superintendent Dec 17, 1927, San Francisco".

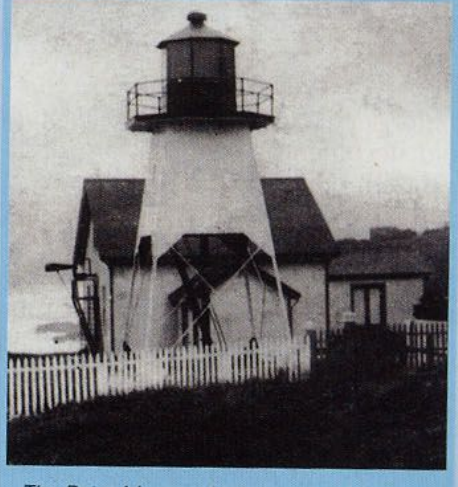
Hmmm, very interesting!

Next I searched through the Bulletins of the Lighthouse Bureau and the Annual Reports from 1921 to 1930, looking for any information or cost reports regarding the transfer of the tower from Mayo's Point to Point Montara, or the cost of building the new Point Montara Lighthouse. Nothing! No cost reports, no annual reports, no notations in the bulletins! This was not to be unexpected. Anyone who researches lighthouse history soon realizes that if you really want the true facts, you need to be a





The Mayo's Beach Lighthouse Tower from Massachusetts, as it appeared, in April of 1928 in California, shortly before it became the Point Montara Lighthouse.



The Point Montara Lighthouse in Montara, California, as shown here was erected in 1912. Point Montara was originally built as a fog signal station in 1875. A light hung from a post was added in 1900. It served until the tower shown here was built in 1912. This tower was demolished in 1928 and replaced by a tower that once stood as the Mayo's Beach Lighthouse in Massachusetts. Photograph courtesy of the United States Lighthouse Society (www.uslhs.org)



The Point Montara Light Station in California from a 1961 Coast Guard photograph.

history detective and go through lots of old documents, some that are disorganized, others that are hard to read, and even then, you may never find all the missing pieces to the puzzle.

So, I was off to The National Archives to see if I could find the letter that the photograph notations referred to and anything else that would prove or disprove the transfer.

By now it was my last day in town and time was running out to find the facts. Thank goodness I ran into our good friend and lighthouse historian Candace Clifford at the National Archives! It's very confusing trying to figure out what documents you want, when the pull times are, rules, etc., so she helped me immensely by pointing me in the right directions. I was able to get three pull times and six groups of document files.

A little note aside: As I was looking through books, web sites, photographs, and documents, I found three different ways to write Mayos Beach. I had to know, is it "Mayo Beach", "Mayos Beach", or "Mayo's Beach"? According to the document at the National Archives, "STATE OF MASSACHUSETTS, File No. 45, TITLE PAPERS, OF *Mayo's Beach*..." It is *Mayo's Beach*.

Now back to my main paper chase:

- Site files (1790-1939), nothing.
- Lighthouse Station Logs (1872-1947), nothing.
- Clippings from annual reports (1800-1939), nothing.
- Bulletins of the Lighthouse Bureau (1912-1939), nothing.
- Lighthouse Station Logs (1872-1947), nothing.

Where is the information I need? Then finally, STEE-RIKE! In Correspondence files (1911-1939), yes!!!

The elusive letter "493-E" noted on the original photograph with an attached note.

493-E: "Plans and specs. for standard towers", "May 5, 1928", "...relating to a tower transferred to the 18th District by the 2d Superintendent."

Attached was a handwritten note:

"May 4/28", "The tower referred to in 18th's April 27, is the old Mayo Beach tower which 2nd transferred to here in 1925." Unfortunately, I couldn't make out the name of the signature. But, I had the document right there in front of me.

And then one more bit of proof surfaced.

Correspondence 493-A:

"May 25th, 1928", "RECOMMENDATION AS TO AIDS TO NAVIGATION", "The following recommendation is submitted for the consideration of the Bureau:

1. Name of aid: Point Montara Light Station

2. Locality: Seacoast, Pacific Coast, California; adjacent to entrance to San Francisco Harbor.

3. Proposed action: Erect cast iron tower and lantern (cast iron tower and lantern received from Second Lighthouse District in June 1925, transferred as Surplus Property).

4. Necessity: The present light structural steel tower erected in 1912 has seriously disintegrated by action of salt spray so that is impracticable to keep in proper state of repair."

The facts were now clear and proven without a doubt. I had positive proof that the "old" tower from Mayo's Beach, MA was indeed the "new" tower erected in 1928 at Point Montara, CA.

History had indeed been rediscovered.

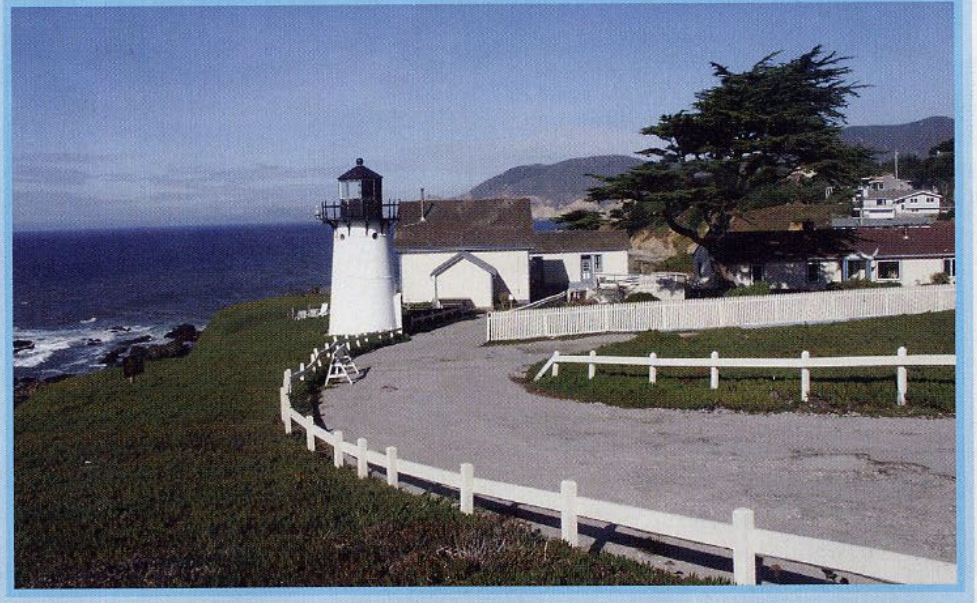
Now, wouldn't it be neat to locate photographs of the tower being moved from Massachusetts to California. Was it dismantled in sections and shipped, or was it shipped as one or two sections? More than likely it was shipped to California's Yerba Buena Lighthouse Depot and then on to Point Montara. Someone surely must have taken photographs.

Maybe my next research trip will uncover more hidden treasures that will help set history straight. And why not? My name is Colleen, and after all, I'm a Lighthouse People, too!



This circle is the only indication left showing where the Mayo's Beach Lighthouse once stood before it was moved to California. Photograph by Jeremy D'Entremont.

Today the Point Montara Lighthouse Station has been leased by the United States Coast Guard to the California Department of Parks and Recreation. It is now used as a youth hostel. The lens that was once in the tower is now owned by the San Mateo Historical Society and is on display at the library of the College of Notre Dame in Belmont, California. For more information you can write to Point Montara Light Station, P.O. Box 737, Montara, CA 94037. Photograph courtesy of Bob & Sandra Shanklin, "The Lighthouse People."



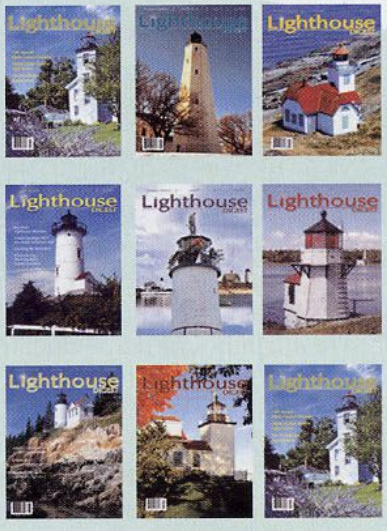
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