L.J. Quinn's Lighthouse[i]

The legend of Richard Turner Quinn

Born September 7, 1857, the oldest son of Sir Robert Quinn, a British soldier and Elizabeth Turner Quinn, a wealthy aristocrat.

Richard Turner Quinn proved to be a disappointment to his father, who wanted him to be a soldier. Richard preferred the pen and tended to spend hours writing. Woefully, his stories were rampant with plagiarism and he was forced to flee the Empire.

When he arrived at the Immigration office, he was asked his name and trade. "I'm Quinn the writer," he replied. Unfortunately, the clerk thought he said fighter, so Richard was sent to Oakland to capture and kill the coast's most notorious pirates, Perilous Pete and his wife Mary Lou. They were widely feared and their sailing vessel the Sea Jay was known in all the seven seas.

It was known that their hideout was somewhere near Oakland, hidden in a peaceful estuary. More because he wished for more materials for his stories than for his bravery, Richard led a small band of fighters to the pirates' lair and dealt a final blow to those infamous cutthroats. Actually, the mighty Quinn, as he was now know, had set Perilous Pete and Mary Lou adrift in a dinghy, knowing that they would return and provide his a wonderful conclusion to his story.

The authorities thought that it was strange that the mighty Quinn volunteered to be the only keeper of the lighthouse, built on the site of the pirate's den, yet he remained there for forty years. He kept an eternal watch, always waiting for the pirates to return, always waiting for that final episode, To this day, whenever a sailing boats approaches, all eyes turn to look, as if the ghost of Richard Turner Quinn makes everyone a part of his vigil.

The Quinn Lighthouse

The building, which is now a restaurant and pub, was constructed in by the U.S. Lighthouse Service 1903, as the Oakland Harbor Entrance Lighthouse. It cost $19,000 and replaced the original 1890 structure that had been badly damaged by marine borers. The lighthouse was located on the north side of the entrance to the Oakland Estuary and served as a house for two lighthouse keepers and their families until the lighthouse service became part of the Coast Guard in 1939. From 1939 until the structure was moved to it present location in 1965 the families of the keepers lived ashore.

Originally the lantern-room contained a 5th Order Fresnel lens which produced a flashing white light every 5 seconds that could be seen for 14 miles. A giant 3,500 lb. Fog bell was located on the porch and struck every 5 second during periods of fog. In 1918, the fog signal was changed from a bell to an air powered diaphone fog signal which sounded a 2 second blast every 15 second.[ii]

The Oakland Harbor

By the 1880s, Oakland had become a harbor of importance. Ships of every seafaring nation used the estuary know as San Antonio Creek and navigate its narrow channel as far as the foot of Broadway. As is tru today, Oakland harbor was a place know for efficiency. Bids for construction of a new lighthouse were opened in July 1889, and work was commenced in September. By November, the structure was completed. It was a small structure, just a cottage actually, with a lantern-room on top. The whole station sat on tall piles, and at low tide, the lighthouse appeared to be on stilts. The light was first exhibited January 27, 1890.

It was rather picturesque, standing 240 feet off the tip of the jetty, completely surrounded by water. When keepers rowed out to the station, they had a feeling of isolation, although they were located between two of the largest cities on the Pacific Coast.

Rowing was something the keepers at Oakland Harbor light did a lot of. Not just to go into town for supplies and mail, but also to tend the sought jetty light across the Oakland Estuary and at times the red lantern a mile to the east. When the keepers were not rowing to the other lights, they had to tend a white, fixed, fifth order lens in the lighthouse and rewind the weight which powered the mechanical striker on the station's 3,500-pound fog bell.

The fog bell was unforgettable. It hung less that a dozen feet on the other side of the wall form the bed of the keeper and his wife. Its presence was unmistakable in thick weather. Given the fact that the lighthouse "oscillated" in high winds, it must have been something to be there on a stormy night with the fog bell pounding and the station wavering in the wind.

AS if that wasn't enough the Southern Pacific Railroad's 294-foot long, side wheel paddle ferry *Newark* paid a visit to the lighthouse. The *Newark* was a big steamer with 42-foot diameter paddle wheels; some historians say they were the largest paddle wheels ever used on any ferryboat in the world. On the morning of December 1, 1890,

Keeper Charles McCarthy and Assistant Hermann Engel were on duty. But it was Engel's wife, Freda, who first saw the ferryboat coming. The *Newark* rammed the already shaky beacon, smashing a pile and a platform brace. The ferry's captain cussed out the light keepers and backed off, even though the navigational aids were working and he 'd done the damage. The patient keepers filed a report and Assistant Keeper Engel soon took his vigilant bride and transferred to firmer ground at Point Bonita lighthouse on the mainland.

The fact that the sentinel stood on wooden stilts in 13 feet of water was shortly to lead to its downfall. The piles were becoming unstable by the early 1890s. To remedy this, stone was quarried on Yerba Buena Island at the Lighthouse Depot and transported by schooner to Oakland. The stone was placed around the piles to increase their stability, and the beacon gained a few more years of life. However, by 1903, the entire station was in danger of falling into San Francisco Bay. Teredos, underwater shipworms that work similar to termites, had been busily gnawing on the pile foundation.

A new station had to be built, and it had to be done utilizing a less appetizing means of support. The Lighthouse Service was more than equal to the task. Big, concrete filled cylinders, four feet in diameter wre erected. In the center of each of the cylinders, three sturdy pine piles were driven clear through the cylinders and the muddy Bay bottom down to bedrock. On top of the cylinders, a decking of steel beams was erected. The steel beams were linked by concrete aches. This was as worm-proof a foundation as the lighthouse engineers could provide and it worked admirably. In fact, the teredos never again bothered Oakland Harbor light station. They did, however, turn their attentions elsewhere. As later as World War I, wharves and piers would suddenly and mysteriously give way and fall into the Bay. Sabotage by enemy agents was whispered along the waterfront; but careful inspection proved that teredos, not spies, were guilty.

The second Oakland Harbor lighthouse was sturdy above water as well as below. It was a white, two-story frame building with a red roof and green window blinds. Two porches on serving each story completely surrounded the almost squire building. A short, share tower sat at the roof's very tip. The octagonal iron lantern room, painted black, held a French lens capable of casting a 44,000-candleower bean. The bell, monted on the side of the building, remained as the fog signal. The lower story contained storerooms, while the upper floor housed the keeper and his assistant.

After the new beacom began operation on July 11, 1903, the original lighthouse went dark and was declared a hazard to navigation. The flowing February, a "lighthouse auction" was held on the Alameda Mole. The local press claimed it was the first such auction in American history and termed it a "remarkable affair." The lucky bidder had 30 day to tear known the structure. He was required to remove everything, even the piles down as far as the rock.

The picturesque little sentinel had won the affection of Oaklanders, and the local press wrote:

> For many years this has been the guide of the night ferries, and during storm and fair weather, fog and moonlight, it has shone steadily and lighted the deep-ocean liner in and the crawling bay scow schooner by. Some time ago a new light farther out was built... the passing of the old light will be a source of regret to all lovers of the Bay, as it has grown into the affection of the constant use of it. The harbor light was the one of which the Oaklander's eye always turned on the night ferry, and its merry gleam lighted many a happy party on yachting back to port.

The second beacon soon alone.

Eventually, the new light's setting began to change. The city grew out to engulf it. The Western Pacific Railroad quite latterly built its ferry landing around the lighthouse. Ferryboats and trains soon puffed about the little beacon and keepers gained both a compensation and a distinction. The compensation factor was that they now could simply step off their porch onto the broad deck of the ferry slip and walk ashore. The rowboat remained but it use was much diminished. The distinction was that they became the only lighthouse in California with direct transcontinental train connections. It is not recorded how often, if ever, the wickers took advantage of their unparalleled transportation facilities, but the finest passenger trains of the day were but a few steps away.

The ferryboats and ships, however, could cause trouble at the lighthouse. On april 30, 1914, Assistant keeper Lambert R. Willard was on watch when a steamer with a big wake rushed by. A man in a small boat was capsized by the swell and was about to drown. Willard when to his rescue and pulled the man from the codl Bay waters.

On August 26, 1923, Keeper Charles H.A. Brooke was on watch at Oakland Harbor. A strong west wind was lowing and small craft were on the Bay, a combination that could mean trouble. Suddenly, Brooke saw a fisherman's skiff capsize near the north jetty while attempting to sail up San Antonio creek to Oakland. Brook went to his and saved the fisherman from drowning. The keeper was later commended for his action in the "Lighthouse Service Bulletin."

But usually, life was rather pleasant at the Oakland Harbor light station. Noise was generally the keepers' only complaint, especially as Alameda Naval Air Station began to develop. Keepers seemed to be "rewarded" with duty at Oakland after years of hardship at isolated offshore stations such as St. George Reef or Mile Rocks. Both the electrification of the light and the substitution of compressed air diaphone figo horns for the bell make life easer for the wickers.

Gerhard Jaehne and Myron Edgington were typical of the station's keepers. Jaehne was born in Germany in 1885 and went to see at 14, serving aboard sailing ships for many nationalities and rounding Cape Horn four times. As steam replace sail, he "swallowed the anchor" and took up homesteading in Montana. He still looked to the sea; but now with a wife and children, he had reasons to stay ashore. Light keeping seemed an answer. After a stint at lonely St. George Reef, where no families were allowed, he was transferred to Point Reyes and spent the remainder of his career at family stations. By the 1940's, his children were grown, and he and Mrs. Jaehne were assigned Oakland Harbor as their last station.

Jaehne's assistant, Myron Edgington, had likewise, come to the station when he was well into his fifties. He as served some years in the Navy before entering the Lighthouse Service. He began his career at solitary Mile Rocks, was later transferred to Point Vicenti, and finally ended up at Oakland Harbor.

Both Edgington and the Jaehnes were thoroughly adjusted to light keeping. Duties and accommodations were evenly divided. Each man daily stood 12-hour watches. Likewise, the upper story of the lighthouse was divided into two comfortable apartments. The station was immaculately kept, and Mrs. Jaehne was well-know for her fine cooking. Except for an occasional movie or shopping trip, they seldom went anywhere. Both men were deeply interested in their hobbies. Jaehne made pencil sketches and painted with oils and watercolors. Edgington was devoted to the old seafaring pastime of macramé and made beautiful mats and tablecloths.

By the 1950's, Edgington had assumed command of the light station, assisted by two young Coast Guardsman. A visiting hours schedule was set up, and on weekends and holidays afternoons, the public could tour the facility. Despite its proximity to Oakland (the fog single could be heard downtown), the policy was apparently not too well publicized, and it was six years before a curious citizen arrived for a visit. The long awaited visitor turned out to be a reporter from the Oakland Tribune, and soon, the little beacon became well known. Edgington spent the last years at the light guiding countless Oakland school children through the lighthouse.

As long as Edgington remained, the station continued to evidence the high standards of the old-time keepers. The brass and paint work glistened and the light operated flawlessly. When two Navy plunged into the Bay not far from the light, Edgington organized his two assistants and led a heroic rescue attempt.

However, time was running out both for the veterans and the old Lighthouse Service and for Oakland Harbor light. In 1966, the old lens went dark after an automatic beacon ws placed atop a big, upright taken in front of the station. Unfortunately, the lantern room was removed to be installed at the new Mark Abbot memorial Lighthouse in Santa Cruz.

With automation, the Coast Guard no longer needed the old sentinel. The lighthouse was sold to a restaurant firm for a bargain prince of one dollar. The restaurant people paint the Murphy-Pacific Corporation $22,144 to move the lighthouse six mile down the Oakland Estuary to Embarcadero Cove opposite Coast Guard island. Using a gigantic crane and barges, the job was successfully completed.

Today, the lovely old structure is a restaurant called Quinn's Lighthouse. It is located at 1951 Embarcadero Street, Oakland and makes a pleasant top in on of the nicest sections of the East By waterfront.

---

[i] Information supplied by L.J. Quinn's Lighthouse Embarcadero Cove's Historic Restaurant & Pub.
51 Embarcadero Cove, Oakland CA 94606. 510-536-2050.
Extracted from materials written by Wayne Wheeler, President, United States. Lighthouse Society,
244 Kearny St. 5th Floor, San Francisco, CA 94108.

The first Oakland Lighthouse was built on wooden pilings and lighted January 27, 1890, displaying a fifth order light and 3,500 pound fogbell. Teredos and shipworms infested the piles after a decade, and though large rock was used to stabilize the foundation, by 1903 the damage threatened to topple the lighthouse. Appropriations were then made for a new Oakland Harbor Light. This time, concrete filled cylinders were used under the foundation. The new lighthouse was a two-story frame structure with short tower and iron lantern house at the peak of the hipped roof. It began operation July 11, 1903, as the old lighthouse was torn down and the wooden piling removed. As time went by, urban sprawl doomed the lighthouse. The Western Pacific Railroad Ferry slip surrounded the entire structure as ferryboats zoomed by on either side, day and night. Eventually the light became surplus to the needs of the Coast Guard.

OAKLAND HARBOR

1877

—. *Oakland Harbor, San Francisco Bay, California.*—Congress has appropriated considerable money for making a harbor at Oakland. The general plan has been to make two parallel training-walls, 750 feet apart and some two miles long, between which the mud is to be dredged out so as to admit of the passage of ships of considerable size into the harbor, which has considerable capacity and depth of water. The entrance to this long, narrow passage is difficult to find in thick, foggy weather; and when the north training-wall is sufficiently completed to admit of a small structure for a keeper's dwelling and to sustain a fog-bell, the advantages to Oakland will be great. An appropriation of $5,000 for the establishment of such a fog-bell at the western extremity of the northern training-wall is therefore recommended.

1878

——. *Oakland Harbor, San Francisco Bay, California.*—Congress has appropriated considerable money for making a harbor at Oakland. The general plan has been to make two parallel training-walls, 750 feet apart and some two miles long, between which the mud is to be dredged out so as to admit of the passage of ships of considerable size into the harbor, which has considerable capacity and depth of water. The entrance to this long, narrow passage is difficult to find in thick, foggy weather; and when the north training-wall is sufficiently completed to admit of a small structure for a keeper's dwelling and to sustain a fog-bell, the advantages to Oakland will be great. An appropriation of $5,000 for the establishment of such a fog-bell at the western extremity of the northern training-wall is therefore recommended.

1879

——. *Oakland Harbor, California.*—Congress appropriated $5,000 for a small light-house and fog-signal, to be placed at the end of the north training-wall of this harbor, but in consequence of the uncertainty of the title to the land on which it is desirable to place the light, this work has not been commenced. The Central Pacific Railroad Company, which is particularly interested in having a secure passage for their vessels to Oakland, have, however, established two small lights and bells, one at the present extremity of the wall, and one about midway between that point and the town. The walls are about two miles long, and 750 feet apart.

1880

—. *Oakland Harbor, San Francisco Bay, California.*—Congress, at its session of 1878–'79, appropriated $5,000 for the establishment of a small light and fog-bell, on the end of the north training-wall of this harbor; but owing to the uncertainty of the title of the government to the site of the training-wall, the erection of the light-house and fog-bell structures was postponed. The honorable the Attorney-General of the United States has recently given it as his opinion that the government title to the site is valid; hence, no obstacle is now presented to prevent the commencement of the work, which will be done as soon as the plans are determined upon.

1889

696. *Oakland Harbor, California.*—Plans and specifications for the establishment of this station were prepared. Proposals were advertised for doing the work and will be opened July 31, 1889.

OAKLAND HARBOR

1890

792. *Oakland Harbor, California.*—The bids for the construction of this station were opened July 31, 1889, and contract made. Work was commenced in September and finished November 30, on which date it was accepted by the Government. On January 27, 1890, the light, which is a fixed white of the fifth order, illuminating the whole horizon, was exhibited, and the fog-signal was ready for service. This signal is a bell struck by clock-work once every five seconds. The station is a frame dwelling, surmounted by an iron lantern, and stands upon eleven piles driven 14 feet into the bottom of the bay, at a point west of and on a line with the north jetty of Oakland Harbor. On January 25 a range-light, consisting of a red lens lantern standing on a platform, was established on the north jetty about a mile east of the light-house.

1893

872, 873. *Oakland Harbor, entrance to Oakland Harbor, California.*—The Board decided to dispense with the inner red light, situated just outside the north training wall, about three-fourths of a mile to the eastward of the outer white light, and to establish instead a red light on the southern side of the entrance, in the prolongation of the south jetty, about 240 feet outside its outer end. The beacon consists of 4 piles standing in 13 feet of water at low tide, surmounted by a square structure about 7 feet wide by 7 feet high. This is covered with galvanized iron and is painted red. From the top of the beacon a red light will be shown from an 8-day lens lantern. The beacon will be ready for lighting at any time after the lantern is received.

1894

889. *Oakland Harbor, entrance to Oakland Harbor, California.*—The stability of the piles supporting this structure was increased and further oscillation was prevented by filling the space under the building with 2,000 tons of stone. This was quarried on Goat Island and was transported to the station in schooners. The depth of water being 13 feet, the slope of the rock filling carried the footings out so far the boats could not readily land at the existing steps. The difficulty was overcome by extending a platform from the gallery out over the rock and putting up a new ladder.

1897

1011. *Oakland Harbor, entrance to Oakland Harbor, California.*—The ntractor completed the improvements. Eight piles were driven on e northern side of the existing building, and on this foundation two oms were built, and the gallery was extended around the entire ilding. A 4,000-gallon tank was placed on the north side, and the 000-gallon tank, which formerly stood on the south side, was taken wn, as it seemed to interfere with the sound of the fog bell. Land- g steps were built. The structure carrying the red light marking e southern entrance to the jetties was protected from passing ves- ls by driving three clusters of three creosoted piles each on the bay d channel sides.

1899

27. *Oakland Harbor, entrance to San Antonio Creek, Oakland Harbor, California.*—An inclosed platform was built under the new portion of the dwelling to provide storage room. The piles supporting the old portion of the dwelling, which were nearly destroyed by *limnoria* and *teredo navalis*, were protected and strengthened by encasing them with concrete in wooden forms 3 feet in diameter by 6 feet high, thus placing a covering a foot thick over the damaged portion of the piles.

OAKLAND HARBOR

1902

34. Oakland Harbor, entrance to San Antonio Creek, Oakland Harbor, California.—The following is a copy of a letter dated March 12, 1902, from the Secretary of the Treasury to the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

This Department has the honor to state, at the instance of the Light-House Board, that a recent inspection of the light-house at the entrance to the jetties of Oakland Harbor, California, has developed the fact that its wooden pile foundation has deteriorated to such an extent as to render it liable to collapse at any time.

It is also found that the fog bell now in use at that light and fog-signal station is inadequate to meet the existing needs of navigation in that vicinity. The shipping interests of Oakland Harbor have reached large proportions in recent years, and the number of steamers, sailing vessels, ferryboats, and tugs passing in and out of the harbor is constantly increasing. Three ferryboats make regular trips during the night, and ought to have the service of an efficient fog-signal to aid their navigation.

The Light-House Board, at its session on March 3, 1902, considered the question of providing an efficient light and fog-signal station at Oakland Harbor, California, when it decided that a new structure ought to be built on the end of the jetty, just outside of the present light-house, and that a fog bell weighing about 4,000 pounds should be installed therein.

The Board estimates that a suitable structure can be built for a cost not exceeding $19,000, including the installation of the light and fog-signal apparatus. In view of the fact that the present structure is dangerously weak, the Board urges that prompt measures be taken to provide for a new and suitable one.

This Department concurs with the Board in this matter, and therefore has the honor to recommend that the necessary steps be taken, as soon as practicable, to provide an appropriation of $19,000 for this new light-house at Oakland Harbor, California.

By the act approved on June 28, 1902, an appropriation of $19,000 was made "for constructing a light-house and fog-signal at the entrance of Oakland Harbor, California." Immediate measures will be taken for doing the work in question.

1903 (4th Sec)

38, 39. Oakland Harbor, entrance to San Antonio Creek, Oakland Harbor, California.—The act approved on June 28, 1902, appropriated $19,000 for the construction of a new light-house at this station to take the place of the old structure, which had become unsafe through the destruction by teredo of the supporting piles and by the general decay of the whole structure. This work was commenced in March and is now nearly completed. The new structure is supported on steel cylinders 4 feet in diameter, filled with concrete surrounding three pine piles, which have been driven to hard bottom. On these cylinders is placed a decking composed of steel beams, with concrete arching between them. The superstructure is a two-story frame building, the lower floor of which contains the storerooms and the upper story the living rooms of the keepers and the fog-signal machinery. Balconies extend around both stories.

1904

36. Oakland, entrance to San Antonio Creek, Oakland Harbor, California.—The contractor for building the new light-house completed his work in July, 1903. On July 11 the light was exhibited from the new structure. A No. 3 fog-bell striking apparatus was installed to operate the new 3,000-pound bell. The light-house is a wooden frame structure supported on eleven cylinders, each inclosing three piles and filled with concrete, and on the cylinders rests a framework of steel I beams filled in with concrete arches. The house has five rooms, one of which contains the bell-striking apparatus. Various repairs were made.

1905

36. Oakland entrance to the San Antonio Creek, Oakland Harbor, California.—The old, dismantled light-house was sold at auction. The purchaser removed it and all the piles supporting it. An armored cable was laid from the railway wharf to the light-station giving communication by telephone with the shore and thence by the public system with the offices of the inspector and engineer of the Twelfth light-house district. Repairs were made.

OAKLAND HARBOR

1906

37. Oakland Harbor south jetty, entrance to Oakland Harbor, California.—The 4-pile structure carrying this light was run into by a passing vessel and destroyed. The cost of the repairs was paid by the owners of the vessel.

1907

36. Oakland Harbor, South Jetty, 240 feet west from the westerly end of South Jetty entrance to Oakland Harbor, San Francisco Bay, California.—On June 15 this 4-pile lighted beacon, with a protecting 3-pile dolphin, was wrecked by a colliding steamer. It will be replaced soon.