



Chains and ropes were used to elevate the lightship and transport it on dry ground to the Columbia River.



Nikki Davidson

Columbia Pacific Maritime Museum Collections Manager Donella Lucero inspects the pages of the recently discovered 1901 book.



Crews used horses to move the lightship across dry land.

Continued from Page 8

Created in 1901, the book is rare surviving evidence of an underdog success story that became one of the biggest local advancements in shipwreck salvage operations.

The album contains dozens of printed photographs illustrating the tale of the Columbia River Lightship LV-50. The vessel was built in 1891 to guide ships through the fog of the treacherous Columbia River Bar, however, the craft itself ran into trouble during an 1899 November storm.

Winds of more than 74 miles per hour ripped through the sails after anchor chains broke, tossing the lightship aground between North Head Lighthouse and Cape Disappointment. Crews were able to rescue the men aboard, but the ship itself was a mess, turned and stuck deep in the sand.

Several salvage companies stepped forward to get the boat back to the water, but the harsh conditions made their efforts unsuccessful. Then, a wild proposal from Portland came into the picture from Andrew Allen and J.H. Roberts, a house-moving company. They promised to have the ship refloated in 35 days by picking it up and moving it more than a third of a mile on land to be launched in the Columbia River.

In 1889, this kind of operation seemed an impossible task. Despite skepticism, the plan to move the ship with logs, chains and horses worked. It took longer than 35 days, but the vessel made it to Baker Bay, where it was repaired and successfully put back in the water.

History comes home

The mission took place just 2 miles away from the Columbia Pacific Maritime Museum. But, until now, much of the process was a mystery. Lucero explained that's why this donation is so significant. Not only does it include 46 photos, but the original owner also stored a clipped article from Scientific American magazine that detailed the process.



The names of the people involved in the lightship project have been lost in time.

The collections manager believes whoever owned this book was an important part of the mission. Lucero explained the company likely printed out several of these books, as she had encountered a partial version of another copy in the Oregon Historical Society in Portland. Envious of the book ever since, she's overjoyed that this complete copy has a new home in Ilwaco.

"We're always thrilled when we get a piece of history that just fills the blanks in," she said. "We always knew (the ship) had been moved, and saw a couple of photos, but never to the extent of this book."

How the Ilwaco book ended up in Boston remains a mystery. Its rescue is all thanks to Kate Kelley, a woman who could be considered an Indiana Jones of antique stores.

Dubbed the "Photo Angel" in her Facebook group of more than 5,000 people, Kelley refers to her hobby of reconnecting fami-

lies and old photos as "an addiction."

The long-time family tree research junkie came across a pile of anonymous photos in an antique store one day and couldn't look away.

"I thought, 'these are somebody's relatives,' and 'oh they have price tags on them,'" said Kelley. She purchased the photos and launched an internet mission to find the family members of the people in the pictures. It wasn't long before she located them and gifted the photos.

Immediately, she wanted to dig again. She and her husband now visit various stores in search of pictures with names on them. She's connected more than 100 families to lost photographs, some are even overseas. Early this fall, she came across the Columbia River Lightship book at a store in Lakeville, Massachusetts.

"I started flipping through and I saw all these guys and the 5x7 pictures glued onto

If You Go

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115 Lake St. SE, Ilwaco
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each page and I thought, 'oh my goodness! I think I just hit on something really important,'" she said. "I told my husband, 'we're not leaving without this book.'"

Although Kelley's ultimate mission is to give an artifact like this to a family member, she couldn't find any connections. An internet search led her to the Columbia Pacific Maritime Museum, where she offered to donate the book.

A mystery

There are few clues to tell historians who the book belonged to. A name is written on the first page, that appears to read "H.W. Heakes." Lucero believes a small scribble on one of the photos could have been the owner's way of identifying himself, but there's no way to know for sure.

"I'm sure it ended up in the family and someone looked at it and said 'Where the heck is Ilwaco, Washington?'" she laughed, estimating that it was given away by someone who didn't understand its significance.

She says the discovery is an important message for residents who live on the North Coast, urging people to contact the museum if they find old mysterious objects. She believes the discovered book will become part of future shipwreck exhibits at the museum.

"Some people think no one wants it because it's just a picture of my family in front of the house," she said. "And it could be something that we have a hundred pictures of, or it may be something that we don't have any pictures of and we would want it. You never know until you see it."