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Lissa Brewer
lbrewer@dailyastorian.com

WEEKEND BREAK



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Point Adams Lighthouse was officially shut down in January 1899.

FIRST LIGHT

Point Adams Lighthouse once guided ships entering the Columbia

By JULIA TRIEZENBERG
For The Astorian

Many lighthouses have been scattered across the North Coast, although some are no longer standing. Point Adams Lighthouse, the first to be built on the Oregon side of the Columbia River, worked to guide ships entering from the south for 24 years.

Completed in 1875, the lighthouse was designed by Paul J. Pelz, who also designed a few sister lighthouses as well as notable buildings in Washington, D.C., including the Library of Congress.

The lighthouse's tower rose up from a wooden Eastlake style house, representative of Victorian era architecture. Over the years that it actively guided ships, the lighthouse's homey atmosphere provided keepers with a sense of community.

Although the lighthouse shares its name with a geographical place, it wasn't actually built on Point Adams. The building was about a mile south of the geographic Point Adams, near Battery Russell in Fort Stevens. The lighthouse started with a fourth order Fresnel lens that had a flashing red and white light, allegedly visible for 11 miles.

The lighthouse also came equipped with a fog signal for low visibility

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conditions. It was the first Oregon lighthouse station with a steam fog signal. The hope was that this locomotive style signal could be heard over the noise of nearby breaker waves.

Unfortunately, this didn't work out as well as the U.S. Lighthouse Service had hoped, and the whistle was discontinued in 1881. One of the lighthouse keepers' most frustrating maintenance issues was the sand constantly blowing into the building. Keepers tried planting various types

of grass and fences to slow the sand's spread, but to no avail. The building saw a lot of wear and tear over the years and was always in need of repairs.

The lighthouse began to feel unnecessary after the extension of the South Jetty in the 1890s, as well as the first Columbia River lightship marking the entrance to the river. With the construction of the jetties, the geography around Point Adams changed a lot. While the area used to be a rounded point directly near the river's entrance, Clatsop Spit now separates Point Adams from the sea by more than a mile.

Conversations to deaccession Point Adams from the Lighthouse Service began in the late 1890s. In 1898, Congress appropriated funds to discontinue the light and replace it with a fog signal near Fort Stevens.

The lighthouse was officially shut down in January 1899. Desdemona Sands Lighthouse, which used to sit in the middle of the Columbia, was constructed to replace Point Adams just a couple of years later. Then, after being declared a community fire hazard, the Lighthouse Service burned the Point Adams Lighthouse building down in 1912.

Julia Triezenberg is an educator at the Columbia River Maritime Museum.



Point Adams Lighthouse was located on the south side of the Columbia near Fort Stevens.