

FIVE STAR WEEKLY

Section of

Eugene Register-Guard
LANE COUNTY HOME NEWSPAPER

Sunday, Feb. 21, 1937

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America's GUIDING LIGHTS CAPE HATTERAS LIGHT

A TALL sentinel shooting skyward on a narrow sand island south of The Chesapeake and a short distance off the North Carolina coast, flashes a guiding light to passing ships along this section of the Atlantic seaboard, which constitutes one of the greatest dangers to shipping on the United States coastlines. It is the Cape Hatteras lighthouse, the tallest lighthouse on American soil, rising one hundred ninety-three feet above sea level.

The first lighthouse was erected on Cape Hatteras in 1798. It was but ninety feet high, and due to the low coast line was inadequate protection for mariners. The present brick tower with granite base was completed in 1870, in a position a few hundred feet to the north of the first tower. It is painted with broad spiral stripes and its beam is equipped with a twenty-four panel revolving lens which flashes a warning every six seconds.

After the first lighthouse was erected on Cape Hatteras at the turn of the nineteenth century, it soon became evident that a light was not sufficient. A lightship was built and placed on Diamond Shoals off Cape Hatteras in 1824. After a few months this vessel broke from her moorings, and after being driven a great distance to sea, succeeded in gaining the port of Norfolk. The vessel was replaced several times, but finally, in 1827, was driven ashore near Ocracoke Inlet and wrecked. It was seventy years before another lightship was placed on Diamond Shoals. Floating bell beacons, "whistling" buoys, and other precautions for navigation were tried, but all met with failure. The old Cape Hatteras light alone stood dependable.

EVEN as late as the World War, disaster hovered over Diamond Shoals, the Diamond Shoals lightship, just off Cape Hatteras, being the only navigation aid in the United States destroyed by the enemy. On the afternoon of August 8th, 1918, a submarine raider began firing on a merchant ship about a mile and a half away. The lightship sent out a radio warning to other vessels in the vicinity and this was undoubtedly the means of saving many ships. It resulted, however, in the enemy submarine firing six shots at the lightship, and later returning to sink it by gunfire. The Diamond Shoals lightship crew escaped in lifeboats, aided by the Cape Hatteras lighthouse crew.

A lightship is now stationed at Diamond Shoals, but is occasionally carried away by the fierce storms that strike this section of the Atlantic seaboard. The light that never fails is the Cape Hatteras light, itself. Swept by the unrelenting fury of the seas, the pepper-mint-stick-like pinnacle stands, a guiding light to all mariners on the most projecting point of land on the Atlantic coastline.

Beside the tall tower, the house of the lighthouse keeper stands, lonely, desolate, but typical of the strong, brave men of the sea, alone and unafraid, battling the fury of the elements.

For twenty miles out to sea the Cape Hatteras light can be seen. The reflection of its powerful beams on the sky can be seen for more than fifty miles. From the lighthouse balcony on a clear night it is a beautiful sight to watch the twenty-four sparkling shafts of clear light sweeping up the horizon. For many a ship that comes staggering up the coast, battered by fierce gales, rain, snow, and mountainous waves, the bright guiding light of Cape Hatteras is indeed a welcomed sight. It not only is a warning to keep mariners clear of the dangerous shoals, but means to them that port is just beyond and a long hard voyage ended.

