

The men who built Terrible Tilly

REFLECTIONS
ELAINE TRUCKE



While the Tillamook Rock Lighthouse lies a mile and a quarter off of the Tillamook Rock Head it has been a stalwart part of Cannon Beach since 1881. The Lighthouse affectionately referred to as, “Terrible Tilly” has become an icon of Cannon Beach. Often shrouded by marine fog, it is not only one of the Seven Wonders of Cannon Beach, but also one of the most intriguing. Not many are aware of the life that secluded lighthouse has led.

In the beginning, a lighthouse was not a welcome idea at the coast, but the need for it was clear. The first location surveyed was Tillamook Head, but the building of a lighthouse on the Head itself proved problematic.

The construction of a wagon road at least 20 miles long would have been required, in order to transport building materials, and then the road would have to be maintained, a costly expense. The most problematic prospect of all, however, was that the Head and the road itself would often be obscured by fog.

Even though Tillamook Rock was a mile offshore and had no nearby land access, the site was chosen because the lighthouse would be below the traditional fog line. In June of 1878, \$50,000 was appropriated for the construction of the lighthouse — and a tumultuous construction began.

The spot was classified as one of the three most “isolated locations of the lighthouse establishment,” Bert and Margie Webber wrote in their book “Terrible Tilly.” The rock itself was difficult to land on, and examining parties who were sent to inspect the rock before building had a horrible time setting foot on the rock in the first place.

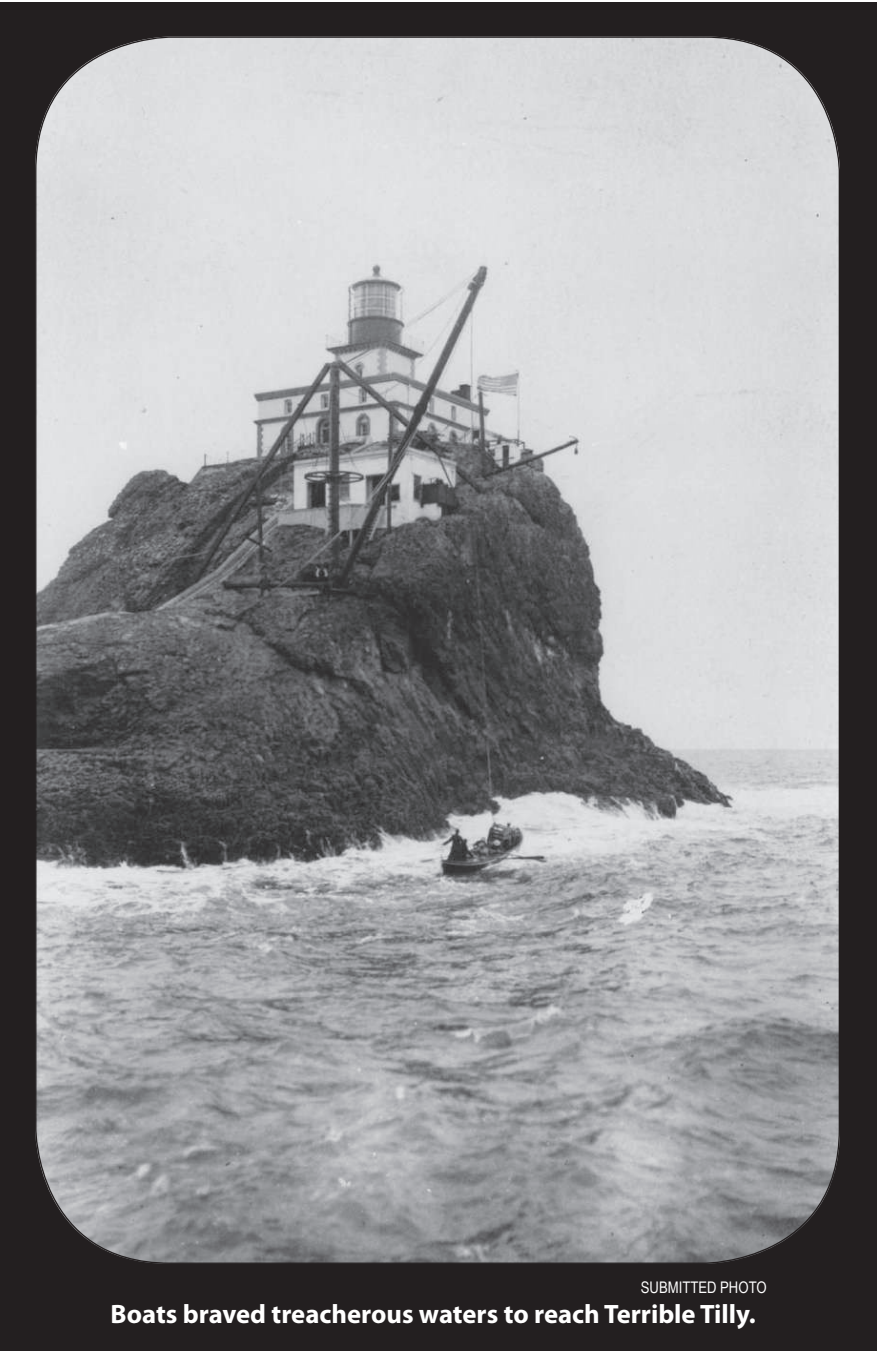
In 1879, H.S. Wheeler, who had been selected as superintendent of construction, sailed with the Corwin, and made the first landing on the rock, albeit a risky one.

“The sea was running to rough to land instruments for an official survey,” said the Webber’s, “but he was successful in jumping to the rock where he made basic measurements with a pocket tape.”

An official survey would, of course, have to be conducted before building could begin, and a master mason, John R. Trewavas from Portland was commissioned to do the work. Unfortunately for Trewavas, the inhospitable rock took his life before he could begin the job.

“Mr. Trewavas missed his footing by slipping on the wet rock and was instantly swept into the churning water. The sailor, Cherry, jumped into the sea in a rescue attempt ... but Trewavas was pulled down by the current and not seen again,” said the Webbers.

The public was in an uproar over Trewavas’s death, and swift work was



Boats braved treacherous waters to reach Terrible Tilly.

necessary to keep the momentum going on construction of the lighthouse.

One month after Trewavas’s untimely demise, four men were able to successfully land on the rock with hammers, drills, iron ring-bolts, a stove, and food. The weather was less than pleasurable, and more men would need to be landed in order to begin proper construction.

The problem of landing on the rock had to be solved. The Corwin attempted to find a better way to transport materials and men to the rock, and anchored the ship to a buoy about 300 feet away. A “traveler” (a buggy and pulley system) was rigged and ropes were stretched to a fixed point on the rock.

Men were able to safely gain access to the rock by loading themselves on the traveler and being pulled across by other workers.

“At no time in history has a workable method been found for landing men or supplies directly on the rock from a boat or ship of any size,” the Webbers said.

The lighthouse was finally ready to be manned in March of 1881, and was staffed until 1957, when a lighted buoy replaced the dioptric lens and operating mechanism atop the tower. After years of storms and costly rescues, the lighthouse was decommissioned.

When Oswald Allik, the final lighthouse keeper, shut down the lighthouse on Sept. 10, 1957, just about 53 years ago, he wrote these words in the visitor’s register:

“Farewell Tillamook Rock Lighthouse, an era has ended with this final entry and without sentiment. I return thee to the elements ... Through howling gale, thick fog, and driving rain your beacon has been a star of hop and your fog horn a voice of encouragement. For 77 years you have beamed your light across desolate acres of ocean. Keepers have come and gone: men have lived and died, but you were faithful to the end. May your sunset years be good years.”

The tale of Tilly didn’t end when it was decommissioned. In fact, life after being decommissioned was even more entertaining. Tales of haunted hallows, mobster owners, charlatans, and even life spent as a columbarium. More on that next month.

LETTERS

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demonstrated his depth of knowledge every day.

Being new to Cannon Beach, I asked Don to help me understand the water system from the origin of our water, to the delivery system, to the reservoirs and treatment of our water supply. Over the years, Don took me into the forest where we climbed a huge fallen tree that had steps carved into it and boards nailed on it to provide access to the natural springs. These springs bubbled out of the hill from an underground source in the Coast Range. It was a stunningly beautiful and peaceful place. He also took me to read the water meters once or twice. It took three days to do it at that time. Each meter had to be found (not always an easy task), opened up and the reading recorded by hand. It was a fascinating way to get to know the city. Naturally, breaks in the system would occur from time to time and you would see Don standing in a ditch, using a shovel in the driving rain, often in the dark, wee hours of the morning. He was a dedicated, hardworking city employee that loved his town.

Once, when the city employees went to a League of Oregon Cities conference, I rode back with Don on Highway 26. On Saddle Mountain, we came across a mother duck trying to lead 8 ducklings across the highway. She’d start and stop with those little guys trailing behind her and she had already lost two of them to the unheeding traffic. Don stopped the car and walked into the roadway to help her herd her offspring safely to the other side. He was a kind man.

Another time he received a letter from a woman complaining that the water made her sick when she came to her home in Cannon Beach, because there was too much chlorine in it, while she did not have this problem in her Portland home. Don researched her location in Portland, sent for the water testing results from her delivery system and found that the chlorine content was seven times higher than the amount in Cannon Beach and that the water required ammonia to maintain the level of chlorine to the delivery point. He wrote her with the results. He was not one to allow incorrect information about his town’s water system to go unchallenged.

Don was a fine man in so many ways. His dedication put the lie to the idea of uncaring bureaucrats and lazy public employees. He was a credit to his community and I respected him more than I can say. Rest in peace, Don.

Karolyn Adamson
Cannon Beach

Great workforce already available

“Business Leaders Call for Housing Solutions” headlines the Seaside Signal. The CEDR leader speaking to the Seaside City Council “calls for new affordable and workforce housing.” There is no doubt that communities have a responsibility for homeless housing, especially for veterans. But before we rush out to create additional programs and levy additional taxes, the business community has its own homework to perform.

Certainly local employment has been shifting to lower wage jobs in the hospitality industry in Seaside and Cannon Beach and retail jobs in Warrenton. Wages in the area have not kept up with housing costs and statewide wage growth. One way to solve local workforce housing problems is to pay workers better. How does one do that and remain competitive? You make your business efficient.

The local lodging industry is a prime candidate for this approach. Lodging managers complain about workforce turnover, a tremendous cost to this industry. The area abounds with older adults who need supplemental income and who already have housing. They are great workers for a number of positions in the hospitality industry, yet management in this industry remains unaware of how to use this resource to solve their seasonal problems. CEDR instead of running around crying, “the sky is falling, you need to do something” should do something themselves and help educate Clatsop businesses to better solve their own problems. CEDR should get a copy of “The Aging Workforce: Four Steps to Maximize Older Workers in Your Organization.” It’s free on the Internet.

John Dunzer
Seaside

LITERARY HAPPENINGS

Northwest Authors series at library

The Cannon Beach Library offers the Northwest Authors series the second Saturday of each month from October to May except December and is free to the general public.

Speaker Carolyn Wood author of “Tough Girl: An Olympian’s Journey” is featured on Nov. 12. Wood won a gold medal at the Rome summer Olympics when she was a high school freshman.

Fantasy author Terry Brooks speaking on “The Shannara Chronicles,” the books and the MTV series on Jan. 14.

Feb. 11 will bring Barbara Drake, author of “Morning Light,” describing life in western Oregon’s Yamhill Valley and lessons learned from her long sting of country living.

All library events are free and open to the public. Cannon Beach Library is located at 131 N. Hemlock St.; 503-436-1391, or at www.cannonbeachlibrary.org.

Mystery Weekend

Mystery Weekend II kicks off Friday, Nov. 18, at the Hoffman Center for the Arts with a mystery-themed art show from 2 to 4 p.m., followed by a presentation of the film “If There’s A Hell Below” at 7:30 p.m.

Also on Friday, Nov. 18, the Riverbend Players Readers Theater stage “Dead Give Away” at the North Coast Recreation Department auditorium in Nehalem at 7 p.m. Admission is \$15.

On Saturday, Nov. 19,

mystery activities include story time for children featuring “Where’s My Teddy,” by Jez Alborough, at 11 a.m. at the North Tillamook Library, 571 Laneda Ave., in Manzanita. The first 10 families attending the event will receive a free book. “Taking Your Mystery Recycling” is the theme of an all-day free event at CARTM from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Hoffman Center events include a “writing scary” workshop by author Cat Winters from 1 to 3:30 p.m. Winters will read from her book “The Uninvited” Saturday at 7 p.m. at the Hoffman Center, followed by the writer’s series open mic with the theme “It Was A Dark and Stormy Night.”

Mystery Weekend wraps

up on Sunday, Nov. 20, with the mystery book sale from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the North Tillamook Library.

The Riverbend Players

Readers Theater presentation of “Dead Give Away” will be performed at the North Coast Recreation District auditorium at 2 p.m.



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