

# Book captures perils, legends of iconic lighthouse

**New book offers insights of the challenges in building the Tillamook Rock Lighthouse**

By Rebecca Herren  
Seaside Signal



TESS RATTY

**Local author Brian Ratty holds his recently released book "Tillamook Rock Lighthouse: History and Tales of Terrible Tilly." Ratty will do a reading and signing at Beach Books on April 28, and he'll give a presentation at May's History & Hops speaker series at Seaside Brewing Co.**

Known for her fortitude to withstand nature's elements, the Tillamook Rock Lighthouse is not much more than a ghostly shell of her true glory. She is battered, beaten and abandoned, but still, she stands nearly 134 feet above sea level on a solitary rock off the shore of Tillamook Head.

There are six known books written about the lighthouse — most of them out of print. The newest book "Tillamook Rock Lighthouse: History & Tales of Terrible Tilly" by Brian Ratty, a local author who enjoys writing historical novels, was released in early April.

The book is mostly written in a narrative form and includes correspondence letters and logbook excerpts kept by former lighthouse keepers. There are passages from the book "Tillamook Light" by

James Gibbs, a young Coast Guardsman who spent tours of duty on the rock in 1945 and to whom Ratty dedicates this book, as well as accounts from local newspapers. He writes about the different ownerships and how they came to buy the lighthouse after its decommission on Sept. 1, 1957.

Ratty includes historical photos of area lighthouses, ships, shipwrecks, and engineering sketches. There are no known photos of what Tillamook Rock looked like before it was leveled, or "decapitated" as Ratty writes in his book, revealing "it looked like the hump of a camel's back."

However, during his research, Ratty found what is believed to be the only illustration of what it (the rock) looked like before decapitation, which was included in a report by H.S. Wheeler, the superintendent of construction.

He gives a historical account of why American light-

houses were built, which was to ease the way for trading ships. As for Tillamook Rock Lighthouse, it was the last of three lighthouses constructed to help seamen safely navigate the Columbia River Bar. Cape Disappointment and Point Adams framed the entrance to the river but were not sufficient enough to keep the ships from danger — a third was needed.

Tillamook Head was considered the optimal location; however, it was constantly enshrined in fog. A large rock west of the headland and a mile out into the ocean was the best option, but getting the lighthouse built and maintaining it proved to be anything but easy. Pounded by winter storms and no sensible access to shelter, the Rock earned the nickname "Terrible Tilly" early on.

While her future is unknown, her legacy earned her the moniker of Terrible Tilly and the mysteries of ghostly sightings and underground

spirit caves remain as folklore. "With the single stroke of a pen, Tillamook Rock went from the hands of Mother Nature into the grasp of the Lighthouse Board. It would never be the same again," Ratty wrote.

Ratty said he always felt a special connection to the Tillamook Rock Lighthouse. "While Karen Emmerling, owner of Beach Books, gave me the inspiration to write the book, it was my family history with the old lighthouse that drove me to the story."

His grandfather Harry Ratty almost died on the rock in 1934. He became ill due to exposure after a violent storm and was finally evacuated after several attempts at rescue.

When his family lived in Seaside during World War II, Ratty said, "we bathed in the light's beacon and heard her horns almost every night, so the Tillamook Rock Lighthouse was as normal to us as the sea and the surf."

Ratty noted that since the

last book written on the history of the lighthouse was 30 years ago and is now out of print, he wanted to give "Tilly" her voice again.

During his research, Ratty said he learned a much deeper respect for the men of the Lighthouse Service. Not only the keepers, but all the men who built, manned, supplied and maintained light stations up and down the coast. "These were a hardy bunch of dedicated men that kept the sea lanes open and the seafarers safe," he said. "Hat's off to all of them! I also developed a deep respect for 'Tilly' and feel she's not 'Terrible' after all.

"It's the centuries of storms she endured that to this day, make her stand proud, strong and tall," Ratty added.

Although Tillamook Rock Lighthouse is still privately owned, it has become part of Oregon Islands National Wildlife Refuge and, in 1981, it was listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



COLIN MURPHEY/SEASIDE SIGNAL

Jump rope contestants take to the air during their performance at Seaside High School.

## Meet the Skippers

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enjoys basketball and soccer. "But this is the only sport I do now."

"I like learning new double unders," Ella put in, describing a jump rope technique.

Ella is even looking at learning a triple under, her mom, Amber Clyde added, an advanced move of one jump within three turns of the rope.

The Skippers will travel to perform at Six Flags Discovery Kingdom Theme Park in June and plan to compete in

the World Jump Rope competition in 2019. They have hosted jump rope camps and workshops and performed at fundraising events, including the Providence Seaside Hospital Foundation "Outpace Diabetes."

Next up for the Skippers: the Tournament of Champions in Kirkland, Washington, on May 11.

"They're doing pretty good!" Dundas said between events. "I think they're doing all right!"



R.J. MARX

Ella Clyde and Alona Whisenhunt of the Tsunami Skippers.



COLIN MURPHEY/SEASIDE SIGNAL

Jump ropers from across the region gathered in Seaside to participate in the competition.

## Essays that whet the appetite

**Author Tabitha Blankenbiller discusses her new book 'Eats of Eden'**

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REBECCA HERREN/SEASIDE SIGNAL

Tabitha Blankenbiller at Beach Books on April 20.

Author Tabitha Blankenbiller talked about how her debut memoir "Eats of Eden: a foodoir" came to be at the April 20 Lunch in the Loft author series hosted by Beach Books.

"Eats for Eden" follows Blankenbiller's attempt to write a novel. It is a collection of personal essays, each ending with a recipe. Some recipes have a correlation to the essay, where others do not. And, each recipe used is from her collection of hand-me-downs and favorite things she likes to make.

Blankenbiller said being in Seaside again felt like she had come full circle by ending her book tour in the town where she spent her residency as part of the MFA writing program at Pacific University. "Those 10 days when you're here immersed in that writing world with your friends and your mentors, feel like a hundred days in that magical way — when those days feel like more when it's not ordinary."

After finishing her degree program in 2012, she planned to use her edited thesis as her first novel. "We think our thesis will be our first book. Our first manuscript is going to be our first new novel, but that's not how it works," she said referencing the advice given by her mentors. "It's not going to catapult us to New York."

Part of the writing process is dealing with rejection, Blankenbiller said. She hired an agent who began the process of selling Blankenbiller's first project to publishers, recalling some of the feedback being less than encouraging, "this doesn't feel ready," or "she's not famous so we don't want to take a chance."

This continued for about a year before Blankenbiller severed ties with her agent and moved on from her original project she started in graduate school. "No one, it turned out, wanted to read about a middle-class white girl's pursuit of perfection in all things," she read from the book. "I didn't even want to read it by the end of its prolonged, stumbling death."

Moving on, she wanted to write a novel about personal experience she was obsessed about, but couldn't quite work through with non-fiction, she said. "It's funny how we try to go these directions, but always end up coming back to what we actually enjoy doing and what other people are drawn to us doing." For Blankenbiller, that meant

essay writing. To get started, she wrote novel distractions — essays about food and writing. But time was a factor. "I work full time and I need to write and I need to eat," she said, "and those things I both enjoy." By now, her essays were getting published and began drawing much interest.

One day she received an email from a representative at Alternating Current Press showing interest in her essays and asked Blankenbiller if she would be willing to turn them into a book. It took her about a year to write the first draft, then another year for edits.

Though "Eats of Eden" is a compilation of essays, Blankenbiller wrote each one to go with another, saying there is more of a narrative. "I call it a 'memoir in essay' because I did want the pieces to stand on their own, but at the same time it's not just a collection I've published online or a collection around a theme. I wanted to have a narrative with it."

The recipes, too, are written in narrative form as Karen Emmerling, owner of Beach Books pointed out. "I read her book and it makes me laugh and feel tender. It's very entertaining."

Blankenbiller admitted she didn't know how to cook when she left home for college and learned mostly from watching the Food Network and chefs Nigella Lawson and Ina Garten. "They showed me how to cook and they did it in a narrative style, telling stories while cooking for family and friends," she said. "Food TV had a lot of influence on me."

Blankenbiller's debut novel accomplishes the tenets of contemporary writing, showing significance to detail through honesty, emotion, wit, and humor. As her biography points out, "her writing springs to life where personal and pop cultures intersect."

Her talent for formulating stories is like that of many great writers of the past. She uses descriptive prose to provide the reader a mind's eye to better understand each experience she pens as if it were in real time. Her artful imagery plus her sensory journey makes "Eats of Eden" a feast to crave.