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# KEEPER'S LOG

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## Point San Luis Lighthouse



*The revolving fourth-order Fresnel lens flashing at night. Courtesy of George Homenko.*

## Welcome to the Keeper's Log!

### Bus and Hiker Tours Run Wednesdays and Saturdays

The Point San Luis Lighthouse is open for tours on Wednesdays and Saturdays. To take a shuttle bus up to the lighthouse, purchase tickets [here](#). To hike to the lighthouse, register [here](#). The hike is free; bring \$10 for the lighthouse tour.

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### A Note from the Executive Director

As the holiday season approaches, we hope you will consider the lighthouse in your gift-giving plans. Our non-profit is sustained by donations and grants, along with public tours and special events. While the restoration of this Central Coast gem is somewhat complete, we are by no means done. At the top of our list is restoring the in-ground cisterns that held water needed for the station's first fog signal—a steam whistle. While historically important, these cisterns are essential for fire protection. Another project would recreate the cistern that stood outside the Keeper's kitchen holding water for household use, which would give guests a better understanding of lighthouse life in the 1890s. Your gift would go a long way toward bringing these plans to reality.

Happy Fall! *Deb Foughty*

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Issue 34, October 2022

### The Lens Issue

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Were I a Roman Catholic, perhaps I should...vow to build a chapel to some saint; but as I am not, if I were to vow at all, it should be to build a lighthouse.

~ Benjamin Franklin,  
July 17, 1757 ~

[www.pointsanluislighthouse.com/donate](http://www.pointsanluislighthouse.com/donate)

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## The Fresnel Lens: Sautter, Lemonnier; Paris, 1878; No. 325

It wasn't always a given that Point San Luis would have both a fog signal *and* a light. Although the *San Luis Obispo Tribune*, on June 25, 1881, reported that having a light house at "the Point" was quite necessary, and that the Pacific Coast Steamship Company had gone so far as to erect their own private light and hire a man to maintain it, a fog signal was what the Light House Board was initially contemplating. In 1882, the debate was whether to place the signal on Whaler's Island or on "San Luis head." By 1884, however, the Board had ruled out Whaler's Island and was considering placing both a fog signal and a light on the mainland. One recommendation was a third-order lens, fixed white. But Albert H. Payson, the 12<sup>th</sup> district lighthouse engineer at the time, wrote to the Lighthouse Board Chairman on May 16, 1884:

**As the steamers passing are always bound into the Port Harford roadstead and as the Coast both North and South is free from outlying dangers, the Light does not need to be visible from any considerable distance, and I am now of the opinion that a fourth order would suffice. As Piedras Blancas to the North is fixed white varied by white flashes, and Point Conception to the South is flashing white every 30 seconds, it would seem desirable to introduce red at San Luis as a better distinction**

**There is now at Yerba Buena Island depot a 4<sup>th</sup> order revolving lens and clockwork in perfect order sent out here as a temporary substitute at Point Conception during the changes at that station. It is arranged for flashes at intervals of 30 seconds; and by making each alternate one red the requirements of the new station would seem to be fulfilled, and an important savings effected.**

By 1887, the matter was settled. The Lighthouse Board determined both a fog signal and a light should be placed on the mainland. Congress appropriated \$50,000 for the project. The Board agreed the light should flash red and white alternately at 30-second intervals. The Board was told once again, in a letter co-signed by Payson and district inspector Nicoll Ludlow, that a "fourth order lens and revolving apparatus flashing white every 30 seconds is now stored in the depot at Yerba Buena Island and could be inexpensively modified here to serve the purpose."

In November 1889, the Lighthouse Board asked David Heap, the engineer in charge of the supply depot on Staten Island, to fit up a fourth-order lens in its inventory with ruby glass panels to make it flash both red and white. Perhaps in the meantime the lens once in stock at Yerba Buena Island had been deployed somewhere else. The lens at Staten Island was made by Sautter, Lemonnier in Paris in 1878 and was numbered 325. Its various pieces—lens, clock, flash panels, pedestal, service table, lamps, and fitments—were packed in five cases, numbered 991 through 995. The cases were shipped in December 1889 from New York to San Francisco, then to Point San Luis. How long the lens had been in Staten Island's inventory before being deployed to Point San Luis remains a mystery.

Almost from the start there was concern about how far out to sea the red flashes could be seen. The red glass was too dense and not the proper shade. The suggested remedy, to insert panels of clearer red glass like the panels in use at Point Sur, could not be achieved. Better quality glass could not be found.

Finally, in 1912, the Bureau of Lighthouses approved changing the flash pattern of the light by removing the red glass screens. About September 10, 1912, its characteristic was changed to flashing white only, every 20 seconds.

In 1975, the lens was replaced by a modern beacon mounted on a platform on top of a 16-foot pole in front of the old coal house and surrounded by a chain-link fence topped with barbed wire. By December 1975, when Mike Kruenegel—the last Coast Guardsman stationed there—left the now fully-automated station, the Fresnel lens had sent out its welcoming rays for the very last time

Newspaper articles fail to record why and how our fourth-order Fresnel lens was removed from the lighthouse tower in 1976 and transported to the historical museum in the Carnegie Library building in San Luis Obispo's downtown Mission Plaza area.

But local attorney Stew Jenkins, who was on the Harbor Commission at the time, tells this story, and the story of how it came back:

-- It was a .22 caliber shot at the lighthouse tower that got the attention of the Port San Luis Harbor District. That, coupled with the plans of the Reagan administration to surplus and sell the 30-acre light station to a private bed and breakfast, triggered efforts by the five Harbor Commissioners to start negotiating with the federal government to have the light station transferred to the Harbor District to keep it in public hands as an eventual public park and historic site. I worked with my friend Leon Panetta and Dennis Johansen worked with his friend, then State Assemblyman William Marshall "Bill" Thomas.

-- The lens was rescued by Harbor District crew members who wrapped it in a mattress, and lowered it onto another mattress, before boxing it and putting it in storage for several years. Little did anyone know at the time that Coast Guard regulations forbade moving the lens without the supervision of a certified Lampist, licensed by the Coast Guard, and without a specially designed box to protect it.

-- After I left the Commission, the lamp got transferred to the county's historical society, and then moved to the City/County library. The care of those handling the lens to prevent damaging it, without knowing about the requirements for moving it, is a testament to how much our community cared for its historic value to our Central Coast.

## The Fresnel Lens: 1976 to 2010

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**-- Stew Jenkins**

By the time the library needed it out, so they could remodel, the Lighthouse Keepers had succeeded in restoring the horn house, and were able to move it into what had been the horn house tool room where it could be safely displayed. By this time technology had moved forward so much that these kinds of lenses were less and less in use. As I recall, we could only locate three living certified Lampists potentially available to help us.

-- James "Woody" Woodward came out to inspect, and gave us a good bid, which we accepted. He provided the plans for the box and supervised the installation of the metal mount for the lens and its operating mechanism onto the specially designed and reinforced base built to keep the mounting level and stable and free from shaking during the movement of guests and earthquakes. He also supervised taking the lens out of its container at the library, requiring specific clothing and removal of all jewelry, rings, keys and anything else that might scratch the lens during handling. We all had to wear white cotton gloves. Once it was moved, in March 2010, he made some needed repairs and mounted the lens, educating volunteers on the methods of cleaning it.

-- The volunteers loved the lens. In fact, they perhaps loved it too much, cleaning it so often that we had one of the bull's eyes pop out and fall on the floor when the special grout that holds the glass pieces into the brass fittings got too well cleaned.

-- By serendipity, we had just planned our grand opening fundraiser with an open-air trolley to bring the public out to enjoy the lighthouse. Every dollar of that successful fundraiser went into bringing Mr. Woodward back to go through the glass pieces one by one to replace the unique grout that holds them in place, which traditionally needed to be done every three to five years in working light stations. It had been well over 30 years since the lens had been so maintained.

*Note: Woodward spent 40 years working on lighthouses out of the Coast Guard office in Cleveland, Ohio before moving to Arizona and continuing to consult as one of the country's few Fresnel lens experts.*

## The Fresnel Lens Gets Some TLC

The original Point San Luis beacon is no longer in the lantern atop the lighthouse tower. Instead, our "crown jewel" is proudly displayed inside the fog signal building. There, visitors can view it up close and learn about its history and purpose. But, being 144 years young, the lens has a certain fragility. Docents aren't allowed to touch it, and it's roped off from visitors so they can't get too close and accidentally bump it.

From the time the lens was returned to the lighthouse in 2010, up until 2020, the task of cleaning it was mostly left to Barton Dennen, a volunteer who had been carefully trained in the art of polishing the glass prisms and who cared for the lens like one would a precious gem. But in early 2020, Dennen passed away. While he left behind instructions for the care of the lens, no one felt up to the task.

As the lens is displayed inside a carefully controlled environment, and no longer has a kerosene flame, it's not as if it had become dirty. But clearly the glass no longer sparkled.

Enter twin sisters Karen Scanlon and Kim Fahlen from San Diego.

For over fifteen years, Karen and Kim have been volunteering with San Diego's Cabrillo National Monument, tending the third-order Fresnel lens in the Old Point Loma lighthouse lantern along with the fifth-order Fresnel lens from the Ballast Point light station. They learned how to clean the glass pieces that make up these lenses from the National Park Service, and now clean lenses all over the country and even internationally.

Armed with linen aprons to protect the glass from buttons and belt buckles; white cotton gloves; linen rags; spray bottles with a solution of rubbing alcohol, water, and a drop of detergent; and a small wooden tool somewhat like a tongue depressor, the sisters arrived at the light station on September 27, 2022, ready to work. And KSBY was there to record and report on their efforts.

Karen and Kim also trained volunteer Steve Avelar on how to clean the lens in the future, and left behind gloves, linens, and their special cleaning solution to aid in the process.

After an hour or so of careful work by Karen, Kim, and Steve, the 1878 lens now shines (with apologies to *Annie*), "like the top of the Chrysler building."

To view the KSBY clip about the lens cleaning, [click here](#).

### Upcoming Events at the Lighthouse:

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Concert: The Charities  
– a soul, funk-based band  
from Hermosa Beach

October 8, 2022

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Victorian Holiday Tours,  
with complimentary  
refreshments

December 2022

Tickets on sale at  
[My805Tix](#)

### Wellness at the Lighthouse

January thru June 2023

Details TBA

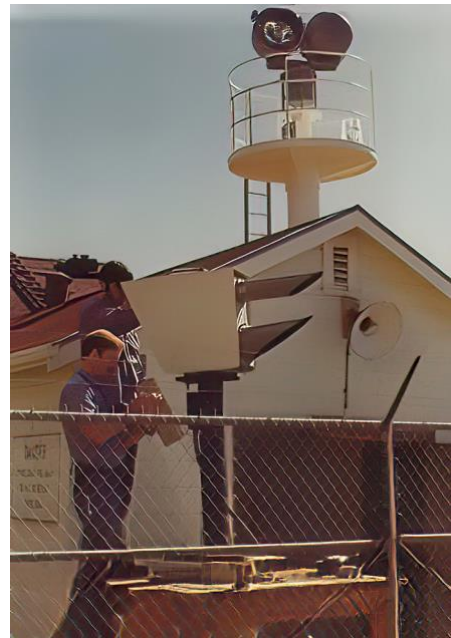
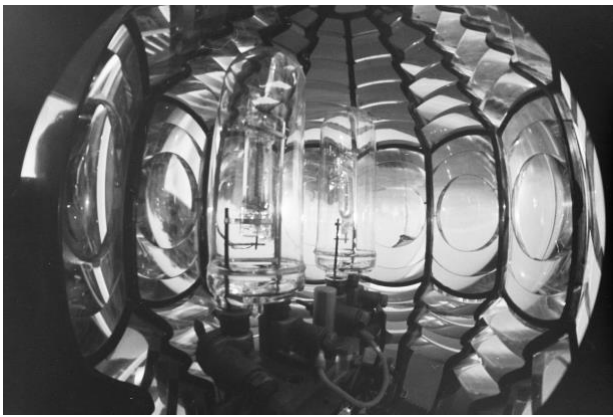
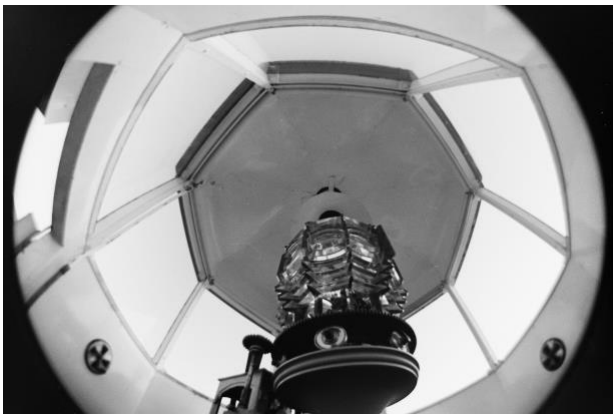
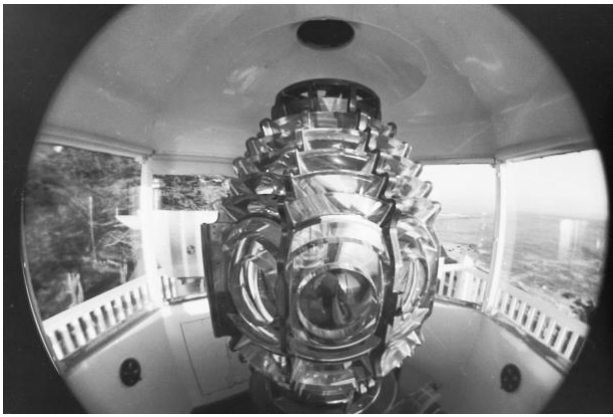
Coast Guard Reunion

April 2023

for Coast Guard members  
(and family) stationed at  
Point San Luis 1939-1975.

Details TBA

## The Fresnel Lens [and Its Successors] in Pictures



*Black and white photos courtesy of George Homenko. Cleaning the lens courtesy of Kathy Mastako. 1975 replacement beacon courtesy of Dave Ingebright. Beacon in late 1990s courtesy of Sharon Collester. Current light courtesy of Bob Mihelic.*

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## Point San Luis Lighthouse

### KEEPER'S LOG

P.O. Box 308  
Avila Beach, CA, 93424

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As a way to honor the memory of a loved one in a very special way, Point San Luis offers dedication benches. Only a limited number are available. For information and pricing, contact [SanLuisLighthouse@gmail.com](mailto:SanLuisLighthouse@gmail.com) or call (805) 540-5771.



## Give the Gift of Membership

*If you're looking for a unique gift idea, consider giving a Point San Luis Lighthouse Keepers membership as a birthday, anniversary, or holiday gift for someone special in your life.*

### Memberships Now Available Online!

Visit [pointsanluislighthouse.org](http://pointsanluislighthouse.org)

*Annual Memberships help preserve a special piece of California; each membership level comes with premiums – check them out online.*

- \_\_\_\_\_ Lighthouse Keeper - \$50
- \_\_\_\_\_ Lighthouse Mariner - \$100
- \_\_\_\_\_ Lighthouse Navigator - \$250
- \_\_\_\_\_ Light Station Inspector - \$500
- \_\_\_\_\_ Light Station Commander - \$1000

Or, send a check to PO Box 308, Avila Beach, CA 93424, payable to the Point San Luis Lighthouse Keepers.

Donations and memberships allow Point San Luis to stay in operation. Consider donating or becoming a member today.

Special thanks to all who support the lighthouse!

If you shop on Amazon, use [AmazonSmile](#). Choose Point San Luis Lighthouse Keepers as the non-profit you're supporting. The AmazonSmile Foundation will give us 0.5% of the price of what you buy!