
KEEPER'S LOG

Point San Luis Lighthouse



Pilates at Point San Luis in September 2021. Photo courtesy of PSLLK Archives.

Welcome to the Keeper's Log!

Bus and Hiker Tours Run Wednesdays and Saturdays

The Point San Luis Lighthouse is open for tours every Wednesday and Saturday. 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. Face coverings are required indoors.

A Note from the Executive Director

www.pointsanluislighthouse.com/donate

Fall is stunning at Point San Luis and the light station is brimming with activities. Besides bus and hiker tours every Wednesday and Saturday, a concert, a painting class, and a play for young and old alike will keep things lively at the Point. The Topsy Gypsies take the stage October 16 as the last act of our summer "LIVE at the Lighthouse" concert series. "Silver's Secret," a play by Charlotte Nixon featuring the talents of the Arroyo Grande High School Drama Department, will delight pirates of all ages on our Lower Terrace October 30 & 31. And Paint 'N Sip – a fun afternoon of wine, painting, and beautiful views – will take place at the lighthouse November 13. For tickets and more information about these special Fall events, go to My805Tix.com.

Issue 30, October 2021

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Of all the trusts that are given men,
One towers above the rest;
'Tis the charge to keep the Lighthouse lamp
Full burning at its best.

~ Captain A. G. Eisener, 1906 ~

Happy Fall! *Deb Feughly*

Fred Saunders, Bachelor Keeper

A small picture in an ornate frame sits on the fireplace mantel in the parlor of the Point San Luis Keeper's residence. Occasionally a visitor will ask about it. It's a photo of Frederick Carl Saunders, the station's fourth head Keeper. He is standing on the steps in front of the residence with his hands resting on the stair railing. He looks away from the camera, staring out at San Luis Bay. He seems not too keen about having his picture taken, although he is clearly posing for the photographer. He appears tall (he was not) and lean. His eyes are shaded by a cap with the insignia of a lighthouse enclosed by a wreath; his jaw is set.

It is striking how he distances himself from the camera even though the picture has been taken at close range. He seems remote and self-contained. One is not surprised to learn he lived alone. While many keepers at Point San Luis were family men, Saunders was not.

Saunders did, however, strike up a close friendship with Marie Donohue Watkins, her husband Everett "Bud" Watkins, and Marie's son John Pershing "Jackie" Donohue. Why and when the friendship formed is unknown.

After entering lighthouse service in 1917 and serving at the Farallon Island light, Southampton Shoal, and Punta Gorda, Saunders was appointed head Keeper at Point San Luis in 1929. In 1931, the local newspaper reported Saunders had returned from a week's vacation in San Francisco accompanied by "Master Jackie P. Donohue of San Francisco who will visit with him for two weeks." However, notes on the back of photos passed down to Donohue's granddaughter Bridgette Carty suggest that, rather than entertain the boy, Saunders put him to work. Photos in her collection also suggest that Marie and Bud Watkins came down from San Francisco to collect the boy when his working vacation was over.

In 1935, Harry Willet Rhodes, the superintendent of the 18th lighthouse district, had cause to write a cautionary letter to Saunders. The lighthouse service believed it was in their best interest to maintain cordial relations with the Marre family, who owned the land surrounding the light station.

Rhodes informed Saunders that Mr. and Mrs. Louis Marre had paid a call at his office, "in connection with several matters that have greatly disturbed them." They described a letter Saunders sent them accusing Marre or one of his employees with "appropriating a shovel belonging to the Lighthouse Service." Marre told Rhodes his herder found the shovel in a field and carried it to Marre's ranch house, and that a keeper was welcome to come to the house and get it. In addition, Saunders apparently posted a notice "on the fence at the spring" warning all persons against stealing lighthouse service property. Marre told Rhodes he believed the warning was because his herder had taken a few boards left over from the construction of the fence to use for other purposes.

Rhodes wrote:

The Lighthouse Service has operated harmoniously with the Marre family for many years, and there appears to have been 100% cooperation on both sides, and it is not desired at this time to take any action that may jeopardize the harmony that has always prevailed in the past. Furthermore, the Lighthouse Service will require in the future rights of way from the Marre family for a road and *(continued on page 4)*

Frank G. Tower 1971-1973

Boatswain's Mate Chief Petty Officer Frank G. Tower III was assigned as officer-in-charge of Point San Luis in March 1971 after returning from a tour in Vietnam. He recalls that he left in 1973 "as the station was being automated":

These jobs on the mainland were coveted duty as your family got to live on the unit also. This light was an ideal job due to the location and the weather. I made many friends there.

One of those friends was Bill Leaper, owner of the local Ford dealership (Santa Maria Ford used to be called Leaper Ford; Bill Leaper was the owner):

I taught him about abalone and how to get them, along with how to cook them.

Another friend was Frank Pesenti who owned the Pesenti winery in Templeton:

Frank would bring a salad, wine, and bread and we would cook up the abalone.

In his off-duty hours, Towers roamed the surrounding land:

I can remember exploring the ranch [adjoining] the lighthouse. It is a beautiful property. I spent many a day exploring the ocean and up the valleys. Some days I would find a spot and just sit and watch the ocean or wildlife. It was a hiker's dream.

(Our hiker docents would no doubt agree.)

Towers wrote:

At Point San Luis, we are committed to documenting our history. If you know anyone who served at the lighthouse, or know their relatives, let us know and we will contact them to record their memories.

Many times we would have guests for dinner or eat by ourselves on the old porch [of the Keeper's dwelling] and watch the sun go down, and then watch the light, and sometimes fall asleep. My third child was born just before we left.

Jobs like this give you a chance to find yourself after the Vietnam tour. It was a turning point in my career. Since my retirement I have convinced a few young men to find out what the Coast Guard is like and make a career of this work. Not being a man of many words but a doer of deeds, this is a short story of part of my career—a very important part.

In the light station's guest register, written in red, is the following: *BMC Frank G. Tower III and Family (Janice, Butch, Louise, Steve) the last officer-in-charge as semi-automation was installed leaves this unit with many regrets and a sadness to close down a wonderful billet that will not be enjoyed by CG people in the future. BMC Frank G. Tower III. P. S. Departed for a brand new unit, the U.S.C.G.C. Midgett.*

It is thanks to countless hours of labor by a corps of dedicated volunteers that Towers' prediction did not come true. The restoration of the lighthouse means it *can* be enjoyed by Coast Guard people again, along with the rest of us. Although we don't get to live there, at least we can visit and imagine what life was like at the lighthouse during those bygone years.

Fred Saunders, Bachelor Keeper (continued from Page 2)

possibly for other facilities over their lands, and it is not desired to antagonize them by unjust or hasty accusations. Mr. Marre was directed to have his man take the boards which he had removed from the vicinity of the spring and replace them where they were found and this will be done as soon as practicable. You are requested to report by letter after the shovel has been returned to the Light-Station if all matters between Mr. Marre and the Lighthouse personnel have been satisfactorily adjusted.

Evidently Saunders backed off; history records no further issues between the Keeper and the Marre family.

In 1936, shortly after entertaining Bud and Marie Watkins as weekend guests, Saunders was transferred to Carquinez Strait and Bob Moorefield was promoted to Keeper. In 1942, Saunders moved to Crescent City, a one-man station, and was serving there when he retired in 1946.

After retiring, up until his death in 1967, Saunders seems to have drifted somewhat. At various times, he asked that his pension check be sent in care of his sister Edith, in care of Marie Watkins, and even in care of Jackie Donohoe, now married and father to a daughter and son. What Saunders did during those 20 or so years is unknown.



Circa 1936 photo of Bud Watkins (left) and Fred Saunders (middle) in front of the Keeper's dwelling. The man on the right is unidentified. Courtesy of Bridgette Carty.



Circa 1931 photo of John P. "Jackie" Donohoe with his mother Marie Donohue Watkins at Point San Luis. Courtesy of Bridgette Carty.

Upcoming
Point San Luis
Special Events:

Tipsy Gypsies.
October 16

~

Silver's Secret.
October 30 & 31

~

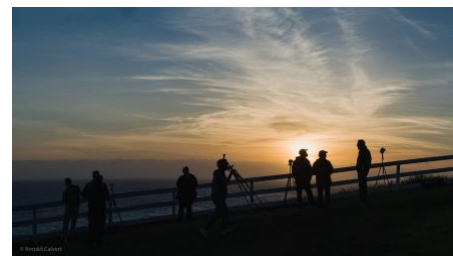
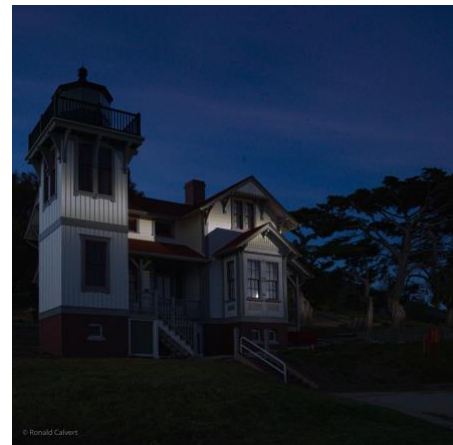
Paint 'N Sip.
November 13

~

Holiday Tours.
December 1-31

Go to [My805Tix.com](https://www.My805Tix.com) to
purchase tickets.

130th Anniversary Photo Shoot: April 11, 2021



Top two photos courtesy of Chuck Ubele; bottom photo courtesy of Ed E. Powell.

Top photo courtesy of Penni Powell; bottom two photos courtesy of Chuck Ubele.

These photographs were taken during a group photo shoot at the Point San Luis lighthouse April 11, 2021, as part of our series of 130th anniversary events.

Top photo courtesy of Penni Powell; bottom three photos courtesy of Ron Calvert.

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



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 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

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!

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