HOLDING OUT FOR A HERO: THE ROMANTICIZATION OF WEST COAST LIGHTHOUSES AND THE KEEPERS LIVING ON THE LAST FRONTIER, 1850-1900

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ABSTRACT

Despite the idyllic and honorable view of lighthouses perpetuated by images in the second half of the nineteenth century, a view that continues to permeate the current American expectations of these dwellings in postcards, coffee table books, and novels, the reality of living at a lighthouse was much darker and more dangerous. This thesis looks at the images that came out of America of west coast lighthouses in particular from the second half of the nineteenth century, and compares those depictions to the reports from the keepers actually living at these posts in their logbooks. Newspaper articles from this time period reveal that people were aware of the perils and risks these men suffered inside the lighthouses, and yet still the images focused on the beauty and impressiveness of the exterior. From the tensions and discrepancies that arise here, the thesis draws parallels between the idealization of these west coast lighthouses and the romanticization of the west in general at this time, specifically in landscape paintings and dime novels, theorizing why Americans tended to project these unrealistic expectations on these lighthouse structures. The thesis presents the ocean as the ‘last frontier’ of unsettled wilderness, arguing that its position within the context of the American west caused the cultural mindset of the country to include these specific lighthouses in the idealization of the west.
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INTRODUCTION

In a letter to his wife on July 17, 1757, Benjamin Franklin wrote “Were I a Roman Catholic, perhaps I should on this occasion 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 light-house.”¹ This letter came after Franklin closely avoided a shipwreck off the coast of England, prompting the famous father not only to attribute his safety to a lighthouse but also claim that the sentinel was a sacred and blessed post. By drawing a parallel between a chapel and a lighthouse, Franklin emphasized the lighthouse as a place of hope and light, where danger and darkness could evidently be overturned and people’s souls could be saved. In his autobiography, Franklin wrote that “this deliverance impressed me strongly with the utility of lighthouses, and made me resolve to encourage the building more of them in America.”² Franklin's reverence of lighthouses and desire to establish more in America represented the early stages of America’s idealization of lighthouses as places of dependability and survival, an image particularly pervasive on the imagined final frontier in the later nineteenth century.

Despite his praise, Franklin himself was not unaware of the darker side of lighthouses where the keepers risked their lives at their stations. In 1718, when he was twelve years old, Benjamin Franklin published a poem in his brother’s paper in Boston “called ‘The Lighthouse Tragedy,’ and contained an account of the drowning of Captain Worthilake with his two daughters . . . sold wonderfully, the event being recent, having

¹ Benjamin Franklin, Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Benjamin Franklin (London: British and Foreign Public Library, 1818), 133.

made a great noise.”

The fact that the tragedy was publicized in the newspaper and sold copies because of the impact of the event made it impossible to claim that the Americans such as Franklin and the Bostonians had an ignorance of the risk of working at a lighthouse. However, despite this knowledge, Americans somehow still glorified lighthouses and disregarded the threat it posed to the men working there, as illustrated when Benjamin Franklin later wrote to his wife defining lighthouses as places of ensured and ordained safety after years prior learning and writing of their dark history.

In fact, at their core lighthouses themselves were initially established as results of death and peril to mark the space of danger for other ships and sailors. Before they ever became symbols of light, lighthouses were national tombstones. Lighthouses marked the spot where passengers and crew had lost their lives; though they did not promise salvation, they did promise risk and hazard in approaching them. In this way, the purpose of a lighthouse was never to draw people into an embrace of reassurance and safety but instead warn sailors away from the bar and their lonely structures. Especially on the west coast, where to the nineteenth century perspective the last edge of the frontier wildly defied conquest, lighthouses were meant to scare away ships from the life-threatening rocks and stretches of coast that had taken so many lives previously.

At St. George Reef off the coast of northern California, a ship named Brother Jonathan hit the rocks six miles from shore on July 30, 1865, and sunk along with almost all of its members on board. The event was so tragic and significant that even The Pacific Commercial Advertiser all the way in Honolulu, Hawaii, got hold of the official dispatch to the government updating them on the tragedy. It was printed a month after the accident as

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follows: “At 2p.m. yesterday, the steamer Brother Jonathan struck a sunken rock, and sunk in less than an hour, with all on board, except 16 persons.”4 Across the country, The New York Herald also published a notice of the ship’s sinking, the headline reading “Loss of Another Steamship. Wreck of the Brother Jonathan on the Pacific Coast. Nearly All Her Passengers Drowned.”5 Though the St. George Reef Lighthouse was not established until 1891 due to construction and money obstacles, it came to mark the site of the sinking, which was so costly and devastating its news managed to reach all the way from Hawaii to New York. The lighthouse itself was needed because its location posed a life-threatening risk to sailors there, subverting Franklin’s idealized precedent of viewing lighthouses as places of refuge and protection.

At Tillamook Rock in Oregon, a similar episode ensued just months before the lighthouse was officially lit in 1881. The headline for the event in the local paper read “The Fated Lupata. Not a Soul Saved…The doomed vessel lays within a hundred feet of the shore, on the point of Tillamook head.”6 As reported, the shipwreck happened just feet from where the lighthouse would soon shine; the beacon was therefore a marker for the danger zone and devastation that occurred there, reminding sailors to be weary and steer clear. The Daily Astorian newspaper later reported that “No one alive from the ship has been

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seen. Several bodies were picked up on the beach near by." This accident emphasized the tragedies that preempted the construction of lighthouse, and the dark reality and inhabitability of the geography lighthouses occupied. Tillamook Rock Lighthouse, like St. George Reef Lighthouse and the rest of those lining the shore, were historical signpost marking death and losses.

Cape Disappointment Lighthouse in Washington was an especially telling case of how lighthouse were not, as Benjamin Franklin asserted later in life, infallible spaces of safety and security. After its establishment in 1856, Cape Disappointment Lighthouse failed to save all the ships that struggled on its shore, and so in 1890 an appeal to Congress was made for another lighthouse to be erected at the mouth of the Columbia River where Cape Disappointment Lighthouse stood. One newspaper reported “the present light at Cape Disappointment is inadequate. It is proposed to establish a first order light at North Head and reduce that at Cape Disappointment to the fourth order.” The language here and use of the word ‘inadequate’ indicated the shortcomings and potential failure of lighthouses that were made available to Americans, and begged the question as to why the public expectation for lighthouses remained so high despite such functional deficiency.

The publication of sinking ships in newspapers, whether local or national, provided evidence that Americans were not completely ignorant of the dark narratives lighthouses told, and yet still somehow the American view of them, especially in the west, grew to be a positive and hopeful symbol for the country. This thesis will look specifically at Saint

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George Reef Lighthouse in California, Tillamook Rock Lighthouse in Oregon, and Cape Disappointment Lighthouse in Washington to illustrate the seclusion, danger, and domesticity that plagued these shining beacons and whose realities created tensions with the American expectation of them that will be illustrated in the following chapters. It was not just sinking ships that were overlooked, but the continued danger of living out at these perilous locations that had already taken so many lives. This thesis will argue that in the second half of the nineteenth century, the images of lighthouses inaccurately romanticized the day to day lives of the keepers at some of the most dangerous stretches of Pacific coast; while the keepers endured loneliness, peril, and monotony in interior isolation, the images permeating American culture at this time focused on the exterior of the lighthouse and ignored the existence of these men inside the light and their struggle to keep it running.

First and foremost, this research begs the question as to why these lighthouse keepers coveted this job at all, if the known experience was one of hardship and strife. It became necessary to answer this question before proceeding with the rest of the thesis, in order to understand how these men could withstand their conditions and why others continued applying for the posts. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the salary of a lighthouse keeper was actually quite significant compared with other occupations at this time. Looking at the decade of the 1880s, lighthouse keepers on average made two dollars and seventy-eight cents a day, which included annual provided provisions and housing in or beside the lighthouse structure itself. In comparison with that, a general factory worker in a big city was making one dollar and twenty-one cents a day without any perks of

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provided housing or meals.\textsuperscript{10} As a lighthouse keeper, a man without any formal apprenticeships or education could make over a dollar more than he would be making in a factory industry. However, what was especially noteworthy was that one of the top five skilled workers in the country, namely a blacksmith, carpenter, engineer, machinist, or painter, only made two dollars and twenty-six cents a day, and like the factory workers then had to pay for their own homes and food.\textsuperscript{11} This evidence suggests that the increased wage and inclusions of the lighthouse post was a primary incentive for men to apply for the job, an attractive concept when weighed against the situations of other men and their salaries. These lighthouses enabled men to do work without having to worry about room and board in theory. However, as this thesis will explore, in reality the most dangerous and difficult posts were not as comfortable or sufficient as one would hope.

While there is not a huge collection of scholarly work done on lighthouses, there are some significant studies looking at both individual lighthouses and groups of regional lighthouses, such as New England and the Great Lakes. Surprisingly, much of the scholarship is not just celebratory but exposes the harsh reality of lighthouse history that has gone overlooked just as I intend to do. However, none of the scholarship addresses the question of why it was that may Americans romanticized lighthouses, particularly those in the geography of the west coast. To mention a few prominent voices in published scholarship who really shape the conversation around lighthouses and acknowledge the reality of west coast lighthouses in particular, most recently Eric Jay Dolin published a


\textsuperscript{11} Long, “Wages by Occupational and Individual Characteristics,” 94.
comprehensive book *Brilliant Beacons: A History of the American Lighthouse* looking at the broad history of American lighthouses and reporting on specific posts and people under the themes of technology/engineering, gender, risk, money, and heroism.12 While Dolin uses the personal narratives of lighthouse keepers from a vast and diverse range of American lighthouses to expose the reality of life on the edges of the continent, acknowledging both the triumphs and the often ignored dangers and losses, my thesis aims to hone in on three particular west coast lighthouses to theorize how the history of lighthouses should be thought of not as individual narratives but part of the extended history of the American west.

Elinor De Wire’s book *Guardians of the Lights: Stories of U.S. Lighthouse Keepers* focuses on more specific examples than Dolin’s range and goes into more depth on each keeper’s personal experience from a selection of lighthouses across the country, including the west coast.13 De Wire discusses the day-to-day lives of the keepers as well as the families who lived with them, focusing on individual narratives to document the struggles and the humanity of the people glorified as heroic figures. Yet De Wire’s study is quite restricted to each individual lighthouse and its story, without directly addressing the more general expectations of lighthouses she is trying to subvert with her research. In addition to the more extensive sweeps of lighthouse history, Dennis M. Powers’ *Sentinel of the Seas: Life and Death at the Most Dangerous Lighthouse Ever Built* looks at St. George Reef Lighthouse exclusively to illustrate the immense dangers and costs of building and running


a lighthouse on the Pacific.\textsuperscript{14} His focus on the west coast geography opens an avenue for discussing the significance of west coast lighthouses and their location, and yet his direct focus on the singular lighthouse keeps the study still limited to the context of the lighthouse itself rather than the more expansive geography. My thesis will explore not just the specific lighthouses but also the settings of where they are situated and the significance of the west to the lighthouse narrative.

In terms of looking at the west coast history of America, David Igler’s book \textit{The Great Ocean} takes a look at the west coast of America not in the context of American history but in the context of Pacific Ocean.\textsuperscript{15} His work looks at stories of west coast encounters dealing with exploration, trade, and environmental impacts to tie the west coast into a broader and global chronicle. However, while Igler’s expansive study reveals the significance of the west coast to maritime history, my research explores how the west coast is still connected to American history, culture, and identity even with its outward-facing perspective. While nothing in the literature of lighthouses or the history of the west has suggested there is a connection here, there is something to be said about how lighthouses marked the final frontier in nineteenth-century eyes and fed into American idealization of American potential, expansion, and success; in particular, one example I will discuss in Chapter Two is a description of a Tillamook Rock Lighthouse construction worker from a periodical that described him as "a typical Oregonian pioneer, lean, bony, muscular ...one whom all the

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\textsuperscript{14} Dennis M. Powers, \textit{Sentinel of the Seas: Life and Death at the Most Dangerous Lighthouse Ever Built} (New York: Citadel Press, 2007).
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world could not scare, and whom no emergency would confuse.” The description of this man working at the lighthouse as a ‘pioneer’ suggested there was something there in the way nineteenth-century Americans thought about lighthouses and the west coast that went hand-in-hand. My thesis theorizes why it makes sense to put lighthouses in the narrative of the west by looking at the distinct parallels between the romanticization both of lighthouses and of the frontier in the second half of the nineteenth century that reveal a broader cultural trend in how Americans saw themselves.

As stated, my research for this thesis has focused on three lighthouses established during the second half of the nineteenth century: Cape Disappointment Lighthouse in Washington, Tillamook Rock Lighthouse in Oregon, and Saint George Reef Lighthouse in California. These lighthouses are significant because each one is located at the most dangerous stretch of coast relative to their state, and therefore illustrate some of the hardest and most indicative experiences of what working at a lighthouse could demand of a keeper. I specifically looked at the discrepancies and tensions between the American view of each of these three lighthouses and the actual reality of living in them, using iterative research to identify key themes that appeared in both factual and more biased sources. I identified three key themes of isolation, danger, and domesticity to guide my reading, and used the inconsistencies and dissimilarities among these themes to theorize why there exists such a rift between the public view and reality of lighthouses at this time. By comparing these inconsistencies to those that exist in the depiction of a more general American western history I present the argument that west coast lighthouses are part of a broader American narrative of romanticization of the perceived frontier.

16 “On Tillamook Rock,” The Youth’s Companion 58.48 (November 26, 1885), 493.
My resources included a myriad of sources including a drawing by T. E. Sandgren circa 1857 of Cape Disappointment Lighthouse that depicted the lighthouse in an idyllic setting on the coast of Washington state, and an illustration of assistant keeper George Easterbrook at Cape Disappointment Lighthouse from an 1876 issue of *Harper’s Weekly* that depicted him fighting a storm from the top balcony of the structure; both the picturesque portrayal as well as the adventurous one presented discrepancies with the later logbook discoveries discussed below. I also looked at construction drawings at Tillamook Rock Lighthouse from 1881 that captured the aspirations for it as an engineering feat, and an excerpt from John Vancouver’s *A Voyage of Discovery to the North Pacific Ocean, and Round the World*, in which he named the Dragon Rocks and romanticized this dangerous place as one of myth and legend. On the other side of my study, I used logbooks from the National Archives to reveal the reality of day to day life at a lighthouse, the challenges faced, and the losses suffered.

At the National Archives, I looked particularly at the Saint George Reef logbook from 1881 – 1900, Cape Disappointment logbook from 1877 – 1900, and Tillamook Rock logbook from 1881 to 1900. For the Cape Disappointment logbooks, I looked at the recorded entries for Christmas Eve and Christmas day every year within the time span, to compare it with the “Harper’s Weekly” romanticized illustration of Christmas Eve at Cape Disappointment that showed the assistant keeper battling a huge storm and defying the natural elements to keep the glass clean and intact around the burning light. I then compared the activities of late December with the rest of the year to get a sense of how similar duties were, regardless of the season. A key theme that guided my reading was that of domesticity and interiority at a site that, in American culture and the public images,
represented exteriority in the last space of western wilderness. There was much repetition of daily chores, giving a sense of monotony and tedium to the lighthouse keepers’ schedules that undermined ideas of heroism and adventure emphasized in some of the artistic depictions at which I looked. This realization of the domestic lives at this west coast lighthouse painted a new picture of the rugged individual on the west coast – a man facing the perceived frontier and the last bit of uncivilized wilderness, yes, but one who lacked a wife or daughter to do the cooking and cleaning of the house dwelling.

For Tillamook Rock and Saint George Reef logbooks, I looked at a general selection of dates and years to get a sense of the typical life spent there. Two overarching themes I identified within the logbooks of Tillamook Rock and Saint George Reef were suffering and isolation, respectively. In the Saint George logbooks the loneliness of the post was evident in the absences of visitations and the lack of activity or stimulation; only on extremely brief occasions would visitors or provisions be noted as arriving, and the emphasis on the weather as the only notable occurrences emphasized how far the structure was from society or excitement. On the other side of this, there were also instances recorded in the Tillamook Rock logbooks of massive and life-threatening storms that the lighthouse keepers had to withstand while keeping the light burning for ships in trouble, and which in a majority of cases ended up wiping out much of the building and its interior.

The key idea I pulled from these sources was that there was a constant struggle for keepers at their lighthouses that created a discrepancy with the idyllic and triumphant images of lighthouses in the American records and depictions. I next looked at these public images of Cape Disappointment, Tillamook Rock, and Saint George Reef lighthouses to reemphasize this romanticized view of lighthouses. I found my sources from a selection of
places, using Eric Jay Dolin’s *Brilliant Beacons: A History of the American Lighthouse*, the National Archives, the Bancroft Library at the University of California, and the Georgetown Library database with suggestions and guidance by Maura Seale. In addition to the primary sources referenced earlier above, I also found an 1881 painting of Cape Disappointment by Gideon Jacques Denny and a photograph from the late 1800s of the construction worker, lighthouse keeper, and keeper’s family on Saint George Reef lighthouse outside the complete building. The research revealed a tension between the American expectation of the lighthouse as an exterior symbol of the west and the reality of lighthouses as an interior place where man became domestic, lonely, and vulnerable.

Additionally I looked to a number of newspaper publications through the Georgetown Library database that reported on the storms, deaths, and hardship suffered at each of the three lighthouses. The fact that these reports made local or national news made it impossible to claim that Americans were completely ignorant of the reality of lighthouses. With this information, I attempted to theorize why it appeared that, regardless of the known danger and struggles on the west coast, the produced American images of lighthouses in the second half of the nineteenth century still revealed aspirations for and idealizations of these structures. To help theorize an answer to this I looked at evidence of the broader American trend of romanticizing the west in the second half of the nineteenth century and the parallels to the romanticization of the lighthouses at which I looked on the west coast. One of my primary discoveries and focus were dime novels, which became extremely popular during the second half of the nineteenth century and romanticized the history of the west as a place of brave and brawny heroes conquering natives and subduing the wilderness of the antiquated frontier. In particular, I looked at *Adventures of Buffalo Bill*
from Boyhood to Manhood: Deeds of Daring, Scenes of Thrilling, Peril, and Romantic Incidents
In the Early Life of W. F. Cody, the Monarch of Bordermen, as well as Deadwood Dick’s Doom;
or, Calamity Jane’s Last Adventure, and Jesse James, the Outlaw: A Narrative of the James Boys. These three books allowed me to look at the three most prominent types of dime novel stories - the rugged individual, the female pioneer, and the bandit on the run – to get a sense of the expectations of life in the west.

I also study paintings by famous landscape artists in the later half of the 1800s that fed into this American cultural pattern of glorifying western history and narrative. It started with George Caleb Bingham’s 1851-1852 painting Daniel Boone Escorting Settlers through the Cumberland Gap, which paralleled Daniel Boone to a Moses figure parting the red rocks of the western wilderness to lead the pilgrims to the promised land, implying that western expansion was an ordained movement in America much like the fate of the biblical figures. Emanuel Leutze’s Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way (Westward Ho!) from 1860 gave a sense of the overwhelming American domination of the regarded wild frontier. Artists of the second generation Hudson River School in particular emphasized an idyllic landscape in the west, turning the wilderness into symbolic beauty of the country’s natural greatness in paintings like Albert Bierstadt’s Among the Sierra Nevada Mountains, California, in 1868, and Thomas Hill’s Great Canyon of the Sierra, Yosemite, in 1872. John Gast’s American Progress from 1872 showed Columbia bringing the light west along with all the technological advances that illustrated not just how the west represented growth but also advancement. The romanticization of lighthouses shared aspects with this broader cultural tendency in America to revere the west at a time when nostalgia for American expansion followed its fulfillment as the country finally physically reached from sea to
shining sea. Lighthouses in general marked this progression, with those specifically on the west coast facing the last bit of untamed wilderness (i.e. the ocean) as those from this time would have perceived the last frontier.

Chapter One will focus on St. George Reef Lighthouse. The objective of this chapter is to illustrate the isolation of the post and its distance and disconnection from the mainland, depriving the keepers of support or familial comfort as well as stimulation or any type of excitement. By comparing a government photograph of the establishment of the lighthouse that constructs an image of Saint George Reef as a place of community and companionship with the logbooks factually recording the events of the second half of the nineteenth century, this chapter reveals the tension between the expectations of the post and the darker and lonelier reality. Chapter One looks at the recorded entries of visitors to the post and the amount of times per month the supply ships came in as well within a year, also using newspaper articles to not only illustrate the solitary experience of lighthouse keepers but to initially create the question as to why, with the availability of the true knowledge of the perils and risks at lighthouses, there were still these images that idealized and romanticized them.

Chapter Two looks at Tillamook Rock Lighthouse. The objective of this chapter is to reveal the risk and danger the keepers faced by taking assignments at these lighthouse posts, especially on stretches of the west coast, in contrast to the expectations that lighthouses were places of safety and security. Chapter Two looks at construction drawings of the lighthouse that failed to convey an understanding of the geographic location of the sentinel and instead emphasized the technological feat of structure itself, and contrasts that aspiration with the logbook reports of storms that damaged and destroyed the dwelling
and threatened the keepers who lived there. In this way, Chapter Two works to illuminate the idea that the focus on the exterior of lighthouses in the second half of the nineteenth century failed to sufficiently relate the interior struggle of survival while water poured in through the roof and windows.

Chapter Three focuses on Cape Disappointment Lighthouse. The objective of this chapter is to subvert the idea that the ocean was a place of wildness and adventure and instead emphasize the domesticity and tedium of life inside the structures. Chapter Three uses logbooks to reveal how almost every day of every year was filled with mundane and repetitive chores, paired with the 1881 *Instruction’s to Light-Keepers* that detailed the preparations and executions for each housework duty; such evidence contradicts the depiction of the lighthouse as a space that bred strength and bravery, as seen through the singular and dramatic story of George Easterbook’s Christmas Eve battle with nature that was published and illustrated in *Harper’s Weekly*. Chapter Three takes that tension to consequently continue to ask the question as to why, with available knowledge about the difficulties of living at a lighthouse as seen through newspapers, lighthouses like Cape Disappointment were still so romanticized.

Chapter Four uses all the information related in the previous chapters to observe parallels between the romanticization of these west coast lighthouses and the romanticization of the west in the second half of the nineteenth century in dime novels and landscape paintings. Looking at the projections of community, adventure, and the outdoors on both the narratives of these lighthouses and the narrative of the imagined frontier, Chapter Four presents the theory that perhaps, despite available information proving otherwise, Americans idealized these west coast lighthouses because many saw them
embedded in the history of the west that they were idealizing as well. Such a theory then allows historians, scholars, and others to look at lighthouses not as singular histories and individual narratives but as part of this broader history of the perceived frontier; in this way, by looking at lighthouses in the context of American western and expansionist history, it then becomes possible to tie American lighthouses to ideas of Manifest Destiny, environmentalism, civilization and man versus nature, and other motifs of the nineteenth century mindset to better understand the mindset and culture at this time.
 CHAPTER ONE: TOO FAR FOR THE EYE TO SEA

Even with the widespread knowledge that lighthouses represented places of death and struggle, images by American artists of the external view of lighthouses was still not reflective of the reality of living there. As the old saying goes, these lighthouses literally embodied being out of sight and out of mind. After the completion at Saint George Reef Lighthouse in particular, six miles off the coast of California, it was a narrative of only five men living in isolation year-round in the confines of the structure, their interior existence completely disconnected and distanced from their family or friends back on the mainland.

From its discovery, the Saint George Reef where the lighthouse was eventually erected was always removed from the rest of the continent and almost unearthly in its isolation and existence in the middle of the sea. In April of 1792 George Vancouver became the first explorer to dub it Saint George Reef, where so many ships would hit in the following century. In his journal, Vancouver wrote “This land forms a very conspicuous point, which I named POINT ST. GEORGE, and the very dangerous cluster of rocks extending from thence, the DRAGON ROCKS...the surf broke with great violence all round the bay.” By associating this location with the mythology of Saint George slaying the dragon, Vancouver created an image of a place that was almost legendary in its danger that separated it from the safety and expectations of the mainland. This sense of separation that

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defined these rocks and their constant battle with ships over the next one hundred years before the light was established suggested how far from land the keepers actually lived.

One of the only photographs [Appendix A] taken at Saint George Reef Lighthouse in the eighteen hundreds was one of the construction team, the first official keeper, and the keeper’s family. In the image, forty-five men are lined up in a few rows, and in the front the first head lighthouse keeper John Olsen posed with his wife, two daughters, and dog. The chosen angle and space of the photograph failed to give any sense of the isolated and disconnected location of the lighthouse, and instead could be taken as anywhere with its white background and shallow foreground. This photo was taken specifically for government records, and was interesting in that the chosen way the government seemed to want to record the birth of the lighthouse was as the birth of a place of community, support, and teamwork.\textsuperscript{19} This photograph gave the impression that this lighthouse was a place where coworkers and family could coexist, totally contrary to the isolation and lack of visitation recorded in the logbooks discussed below. The focus on communal existence at the lighthouse, with all the men and the keeper with his wife and children posing proudly in front of the structure, made the lighthouse appear like a safe and friendly place and misrepresented the distance from the mainland and the rest of society. What the photograph did not show was how, after the celebration of completion, the construction workers and women and children all went back home, leaving only the keeper and his four appointed assistants on the lonely rock. In this way, the government recorded Saint George Reef Lighthouse as a space where companionship defined the work, when in reality this was a narrative of only five men separated from their friends and family. Consequently, this

photograph created quite a restrictive view of the lighthouse and its inception; the fact that the government brought out the keeper’s family for the completion celebration could indicate their expectation that this post would have ease of communication and commiseration with those back on land, when in reality the distance was just too far for those on the mainland to even understand its difficulties.

The reality of living at this post completely disproved the expectation the government appeared to have. First and foremost as mentioned, instead of a huge team of men like with the construction team, there were only five men living on the one rock at Saint George Reef – a head keeper and four assistants.\textsuperscript{20} While this was more men than at other mainland lighthouses, the fact that year-round there would only be the same four other people to whom to talk stressed how far the structure truly was from everyone else back on shore and the liberty of mobility everyone else had there. The logbooks for Saint George Reef Lighthouse revealed the seclusion of the ocean post through the lack of arrival and visitation reports to the structure. Within the entire year of 1892 there were only four occasions when a ship came to the station to deliver supplies, with only one of those occasions actually bringing a new human presence to the lighthouse: “John E. Lind arrived at the station as 3\textsuperscript{rd} asst.”\textsuperscript{21} The report was actually written with an asterisk below the report of the weather for that day, implying that the keepers at the lighthouse were unaware that Lind would arrive that day and further emphasizing their inability to communicate effectively with a mainland that was so far. That lack of communication

\textsuperscript{20} Saint George Reef 01/1881 to 01/1928; Logbooks of Lighthouses, 1872 – 1944; Records of the U.S. Coast Guard, 1785 – 2005; Record Group 26, Box 382; National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

\textsuperscript{21} Saint George Reef 01/1881 to 01/1928, September 29, 1892.
indicated how removed from the rest of the coast and country these men were. Also, the fact that the only incomer to the rock was a hired worker and not a family member or friend coming to check in and offer comfort or relief highlighted how difficult and rare it was to get out there.

The absence of guests and their company also represented the absence of comfort and solace for the men stuck out in the middle of the ocean on duty. Additionally, out of those four delivery days for that year, in August the supply ship came on the 16th, but “could not discharge in account of strong wind.”\(^{22}\) It was not until the 22nd that the “steamer Madrona arrived at the station & landed some supplies.”\(^{23}\) This delay in landing supplies revealed the struggle of approaching the location itself, and illustrated how unforgiving and harsh the geography in which these keepers were living was. The biggest problem was that if the boat could not deliver the supplies that the keepers needed, there was no other way to receive those necessities but to wait for the next time that the ship could come back. In this way, the logbook reports of the weeks that would go by before the boat could come back exposed how removed the lighthouse was from stores, buildings, and life in the rest of America.

During that same year, many of the monthly logbook entries reported only the weather, suggesting how little actually happened at these posts if there was nothing more exciting or substantial to report. In January, there was not a single entry noting anything other than the temperature, wind, or forecast, brief and direct such as “light southerly wind

\(^{22}\) Saint George Reef 01/1881 to 01/1928, August 16, 1892.

\(^{23}\) Saint George Reef 01/1881 to 01/1928, August 22, 1892.
with drizzly rain, and some fog.”24 or “light wind from Eastward and mostly cloudy.”25 The lack of activity indicated how confined these keepers were so far from the mainland with no freedom to go out and work or entertain themselves. In March the same pattern filled the page, with one day reporting “Wind N.W. & gale at first, later fresh breeze and partly cloudy,”26 while another mentioned “Light Easterly wind with light rain showers at first, later cloudy with a rain shower & mist, with drifting fog offshore during all times.”27 This deficiency of excitement or noteworthy occurrences illustrated how isolated the post was from the stimulation and hustle and bustle of cities back on the mainland, and suggested the struggle with boredom and exclusion the keepers faced. Indeed, a year earlier, the first entry ever recorded into this particular Saint George Reef logbook stated that there was “nothing of importance to record,” and each entry that followed on that page started with the word “Wind” and went on to report the weather.28 This first entry set up the context of the lighthouse and its geography, so far removed from the rest of society where nothing else existed there but the lighthouse itself.

As mentioned above, visits and arrivals were incredibly rare due to the isolation of the station, with weather the only evident change that occurred there. In the year of 1895, out of three-hundred and sixty five days the keeper reported only fourteen days where a ship called on the lighthouse, so that just under four-percent of the year was marked by

24 Saint George Reef 01/1881 to 01/1928, January 14, 1892.

25 Saint George Reef 01/1881 to 01/1928, January 23, 1892.

26 Saint George Reef 01/1881 to 01/1928, March 5, 1892.

27 Saint George Reef 01/1881 to 01/1928, March 15, 1892.

28 Saint George Reef 01/1881 to 01/1928, December 15, 1891.
new activity, stimulation, or a different face. The men at Saint George Reef either received a delivery from the *Madrona*, a steamer assigned to providing the lighthouse with the necessities it needed throughout the year, or took a boat themselves to the mainland for a brief allotted period of time, usually two or three days only. In both cases, the distance between the lighthouse and the shore caused difficulty in mobility and thus prevented more frequent trips back and forth. Even with the few delivery arrivals at Saint George Reef Lighthouse, a majority of them would be prevented from landing because of poor weather. In February of 1893, “Lighthouse tender Madrona received at the station with inspector aboard, could not land in account of rough sea.” The only next mention of the boat is when it came back to land three months later in May of that same year, and the men finally “commenced to take supplies from the Madrona, had to quit soon, in account of strong wind. Madrona left for Crescent City.” Such a problem with the delivery illustrated the real separation between the men living on the rock and the men back on the mainland, and also the struggle of living with inadequate necessities until the *Madrona* managed to make it six miles out. Noticeably, the ship left the day it arrived, not offering much opportunity for the men to talk with the captain and receive much news about the rest of America.

29 Saint George Reef 01/1881 to 01/1928, 1895.
30 Saint George Reef 01/1881 to 01/1928, 1895.
31 Saint George Reef 01/1881 to 01/1928, January 25 & 27, 1895.
32 Saint George Reef 01/1881 to 01/1928, February 17, 1893.
33 Saint George Reef 01/1881 to 01/1928, May 22, 1893.
In a less severe example, in February of 1895, “Madrona arrived with supplies and to inspect the station, could not make a landing in occasion of heavy swell” on the 16th.\textsuperscript{34} It took two days before the keepers could receive the supplies they needed, this wait time still indicative of the fact that the men had no other way to get what they needed other than this single lifeline back to the mainland. In a worse case in 1895, the Madrona came to the station on the 4th of May but had to leave and return on the 11th when the keeper reported “the tender arrived at 4:15am, landing all supplies to the station, departed 12:15pm, the inspector did not land.”\textsuperscript{35} The early morning arrival of the ship followed by its swift departure that same day revealed how these visits were not extended social visits but brief and necessary duties to sustain the keepers at their post. In this way, the reports served to emphasize how little interaction the men at the station had with anyone else, reiterating their isolation six miles from the coast. Even the fact that the inspector was not able to ascend from the boat to the lighthouse showed the difficulty for human mobility at the station, characteristic of the confined and isolated lives the keepers lived.

On occasion, reports of the arrival of the Madrona were written on the very end of the page, sometimes squished into the margin, almost as an afterthought to the day’s log. For example, in July of 1865, the report is written in parenthesis at the end of the line that “(tender Madrona arrived 6 PM).”\textsuperscript{36} This evidently later addition to the log suggested that the arrival of the Madrona was inconsistent and could be unexpected, dependent on weather and availability of supplies. In this way, keepers were so out of the loop they could

\textsuperscript{34} Saint George Reef 01/1881 to 01/1928, February 16, 1895.

\textsuperscript{35} Saint George Reef 01/1881 to 01/1928, May 4 & 11, 1895.

\textsuperscript{36} Saint George Reef 01/1881 to 01/1928, July 8, 1895.
not know the schedules back on the mainland that directed these other ships, emphasizing their seclusion on the ocean. However, as pointed out before, the Madrona never stayed at the station for longer than a day, with records logging that “L.H. Tender Madrona arrived with supplies” on one day and “Madrona left 10AM” the immediate next day.\textsuperscript{37} Such a brief encounter with others was not sufficient engagement with the rest of American society from which the keepers were separated, and gave them little opportunity to take a break from their hermitages.

Aside from the Madrona, however, the men from the light were allowed to take a small boat back to the mainland on occasional rotation. These excursions could last for up to a few weeks; in April of 1894 “boat left for Crescent City” on the 2\textsuperscript{nd} and “boat returned” as late as the 22\textsuperscript{nd}\textsuperscript{38} However, despite these opportunities to reconnect with community and experience new stimulation and activity, the respites were still few and far between. In the year of 1895, the boat only left the station eleven times out of the three hundred and sixty-five days divided between four men, and out of those eleven times the average time between leaving the post and returning was a little under two weeks.\textsuperscript{39} More than that, these short breaks offered a danger of their own; since the distance to shore was so far it increased the risk of drowning on the way to or from the coast.

In October of 1893, the first assistant “left for Crescent City” on the 17\textsuperscript{th}\textsuperscript{40} As mentioned above, this was not unusual, and the men were familiar with this rare yet

\textsuperscript{37} Saint George Reef 01/1881 to 01/1928, August 28 & 29, 1894.

\textsuperscript{38} Saint George Reef 01/1881 to 01/1928, April 2 & 22, 1894.

\textsuperscript{39} Saint George Reef 01/1881 to 01/1928, 1895.

\textsuperscript{40} Saint George Reef 01/1881 to 01/1928, October 17, 1893.
promising routine. However, by the 29th the first assistant had yet to return, and “the 3rd assistant was to Crescent City to inquire for first assistant that left the station.”

The limitation on the number of days a man was allowed to be away from the post showed how restrictive and isolating the job was that kept these men’s lives so lonely. The next day, the logbook reported that “the 17th left for that place, reports not arrived, consequently drowned, boat not heard of up to date.” This evidently referred to the keeper who left on the 17th for the coast, and the lack of definitive knowledge or a found body or boat reflected the distance of the lighthouse from the shore and the rest of the massive ocean. A month later, the logbook report confirmed how the men remaining at the station “receive[d] from the Principal Keeper the effects of 1st asst. keeper – who started in Oct. 17th for Crescent City and has not been heard of since, nor any news of the boat – Erickson probably drowned on that date.” Again, the fact that a month had gone by and the men still were not certain what had happened to their coworker or the boat stressed their disconnection from everything else and their subsequent inability to secure any pertinent information. Being six miles off the coast forced these keepers to struggle not just physically but mentally, with a lack of knowledge that kept them remotely in the dark about events even related to themselves.

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41 Saint George Reef 01/1881 to 01/1928, October 29, 1893.

42 Saint George Reef 01/1881 to 01/1928, October 30, 1893.

43 Saint George Reef 01/1881 to 01/1928, November 22, 1893.
The following month, “John E. Lind 2nd assistant left for San Francisco by order to testify regarding the departure of the late William Erickson from the station.” The fact that Lind had to testify about his colleague’s departure illustrated how when keepers left for the mainland on the boat it was required to be a granted leave of absence and not just a spur-of-the-moment escape from the post’s confinement. In this way, it showed how the keepers lacked the freedom to merely walk out of their door and go wherever they wanted; they were virtually trapped inside this structure in the middle of the ocean with limited reprieve or vacation from their solitude. The effect of this loneliness was emphasized in May of 1894 when “Boat left for Crescent City as George Goldsmith 1st asst. resigned.” It was interesting to note that this resignation happened less than a year after the drowning of the man whose position he ended up filling. Whether or not that was a reason Goldsmith quit his job, his leave still suggested the dissatisfaction and unhappiness harbored in such isolation so far from anything else. This discontentment contrasted with the recorded government photograph discussed in the beginning of the chapter, revealing that despite expectations west coast lighthouses were extremely disconnected from America and the general population in a way that prevented most Americans from interacting with and therefore understanding the true experience in this geography.

44 Saint George Reef 01/1881 to 01/1928, December 27, 1893.

45 Saint George Reef 01/1881 to 01/1928, May 20, 1894.
CHAPTER TWO: ROUGH AND TUMBLE

As a response to shipwrecks, lighthouses were manifestations of safety and salvation, an advancement expected to be a dependable technology in dangerous geographies. Tillamook Rock Lighthouse in particular served as an example of an engineering feat and American success story as men managed to establish this structure on a rock half a mile out into the ocean. However, the impressiveness of the sentinel unfortunately overshadowed the unseen lives and struggles of the men inside as the impenetrable lighthouse leaked, cracked, and broke under pressure of storms.

The construction drawings of Tillamook Rock Lighthouse [Appendix B] first presented the lighthouse as an achievement of engineering superiority without any potential for destruction. In one of the published government plans, exact measurements framed the lighthouse building as it was shown from two angles, the front and the side.\(^ {46}\) The sketch itself highlighted the architectural beauty of the structure as well as its sturdiness and solidity of materials. However, the problem with this construction drawing was that it lacked any sign that the engineers seriously considered or attempted to understand the geographical space of the structural location. In the sketch, the dwelling was set on just a flat line of ground, and there was no planning or mapping that indicated the danger of living on the ocean half a mile from the shore. The construction drawing and its lack of acknowledgement of the high-risk location suggested that the engineers, architects, and members of government were unable to comprehend what it would take to live on the west coast and did not understand the significant threats of the last

\(^{46}\) *Elevation and Section of First Order Lighthouse at Tillamook Rock, Oregon*, 1881, National Archives Building, Washington, DC (Records of the U.S. Coast Guard, 1785 – 2005, Record Group 26).
unconquered wilderness – the ocean. In another construction drawing actually documenting the execution of the design from 1881, the year the lighthouse was built [Appendix C], Tillamook Rock Lighthouse looked like a place full of activity featuring advanced technology and supported by what appeared to be easy access by boat.\textsuperscript{47} While this sketch did capture the precarious location of the light, it did so in a way that promoted the impressiveness of the engineering feat and ignored the possible consequences of forcing men to actually live there in the middle of the ocean. The water was also incredibly calm and flat in the depiction, failing to give a sense of the magnitude of storms and hurricanes that plagued the winter months and would threaten the structure itself and the men inside it.\textsuperscript{48} The focus on the physical exterior structure of the lighthouse in these construction plans indicated that there was an inability among American Congressmen, architects, and engineers to really consider what was necessary to survive the harsh wilderness of the unsettled territory in the sea.

A story of the construction of Tillamook Rock Lighthouse published in a periodical four years after the lighthouse was established illustrated the romanticization of the sentinel as a symbol of American progress despite the high risks and its resonance in the American mindset. In an interview, a construction worker allegedly reported ""the time when I felt most certain that my last hours had come was the night of the 7\textsuperscript{th} of January, 1880, on old Tillamook Rock"\textsuperscript{49} after a storm pummeled the rock and threatened to wash


\textsuperscript{48} Tillamook Rock 01/1881 to 01/1928; Logbooks of Lighthouses, 1872 – 1944; Records of the U.S. Coast Guard, 1785 – 2005; Record Group 26, Box 452; National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

\textsuperscript{49} "On Tillamook Rock," The Youth's Companion 58.48 (November 26, 1885), 493.
everything and everyone camping out on site away. The worker’s language of conviction and intensity four years after the event emphasized the magnitude of peril and danger at the location. However, the article then followed up his comment by emphasizing the brawn and strength of those who built the lighthouse on the rock, reassuring readers that these men had the capability to be dependable and steadfast and therefore create a structure that was the same. The description of the worker classified him as “a typical Oregonian pioneer, lean, bony, muscular…one whom all the world could not scare, and whom no emergency would confuse.” Here, the terrified man who thought his final day had come turned into a western hero who was unstoppable and unshakeable. The use of the word ‘pioneer’ suggested that perhaps there was some seed planted in the American mindset at this time that saw the history of lighthouses as tied into the history of the west, as will be theorized in Chapter Four. Additionally, the use of the word ‘typical’ in the article promoted the idea that any pioneer or man of the west was powerful and capable, inaccurately romanticizing the general experience and overshadowing difficulty of trying to survive in this last wilderness. Despite the danger that the story did relate, in the end it put the lighthouse on a pedestal as “one of the boldest engineering feats of this century.” This accolade made it seem like a place of ultimate safety and security withstanding the natural elements, though as made evident by the worker’s original testimonial it was in reality at the hand of a dangerous and hazardous location. Still the way the article set everything up publicized the lighthouse as a symbol of American dependability and soundness, and failed to focus on like what it actually was to live there.

In another publication titled “Northern Seaside Resorts,” Tillamook Lighthouse was greatly idealized by the magazine as a place of ordained safety and authority for Americans. The article recounted how the light was “erected only a few years ago on a rock which seems designed by nature for such a purpose.”

This description gave the impression that the Tillamook Rock Lighthouse was virtually meant to be where it was, giving a sense of security and stability to the post. The way the lighthouse’s existence was romanticized as a peaceful and preordained one failed in recognizing how such a precarious position put keepers in the path of storms with little support or safety for themselves, as will be discussed below. The concentration on the exteriority of the sentinel and its location made it impossible for the interior struggle of the men inside the walls to come forth; this publication in particular could imply that, because the lighthouse was protected by the will of God, so too were the keepers. In reality, as the logbooks show later in this chapter, the only protection the men had were the lighthouse walls that cracked and the roof that caved in.

Tillamook Rock Lighthouse was also mentioned in an article published in *McClure's Magazine* in 1900, a magazine known for its investigative journalism based in New York City more than three thousand miles from these west coast lighthouses. This magazine became famous for exposing Rockefeller’s unfair oil practices, and so was evidently no stranger to investigating the darker side of narratives. However, the magazine for some reason failed to reveal the darker side of lighthouse living, instead perpetuating the

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52 Frances Fuller Victor, “Northern Seaside Resorts,” *Overland Monthly and Out West Magazine* (1868-1935); Feb 1894, 23.134; American Periodicals, 142.

romanticization of the post and its men. The title alone of the article featuring Tillamook Rock was indicative of the idealization of the post, describing “Typical Instances of the Boldness, Skill, and Endurance of the Men Who Erect The Danger Signals on Rocks and Shoals.” The use of those specific adjectives set up a connotation between strength and dedication and working at a lighthouse. This connotation consequently painted the image of lighthouses as places where these committed and brawny men stood over the ocean, promoting the idea of the successful establishment of America over all wild parts of the country, including the water. Again, the use of the word ‘typical’ insinuated that the norm for lighthouse keepers was to be consistent and steadfast survivors. An image from the above-mentioned article showed Tillamook Rock surrounded by stormy waves, but yet untouched by them and rising above them in the center of the image; this inaccurate representation nevertheless gave the impression that Tillamook could withstand anything and was too massive and impressive to be touched by the wildness of the ocean. The focus on the external endurance of the lighthouse failed to reflect or comprehend the actual men behind the powerful front, and dehumanized them in a way that took away any sense of their vulnerability or suffering.

While the same article went on to recount a tragedy that occurred during the construction phase, the story’s angle did not acknowledge the constant danger it took to build the light and the risk of the location but instead just illustrated the beauty and feat of the light once completed. The tragedy was of an English lighthouse-builder Trewavas, who

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while trying to get to the post "was carried out to sea, and drowned in sight of his boat’s crew." In the article, the horror of this witnessed death was immediately undermined by a description of how the men in the boat then drove away "an immense herd of sea-lions, which defended their ancient citadel with persistent valor." The language here painted Tillamook Rock as a place of refuge and community even from the beginning, a place of security for one population before it then fell into human hands. Trewavas’ death became forgotten as the men in the article’s story moved onto the rock and established themselves and the structure despite their loss and setbacks.

*McClure’s Magazine* tactically illustrated the construction as a harrowing experience only to then contrast the strife with the greatness and safety of the actual lighthouse once built. In this way, the risk of working at the rock appeared worth it to enable the security and solidness of the building itself. The author of the article wrote that "few Arctic explorers have had to suffer the perils and privations to which these lighthouse-builders were subjected. And yet they lived, and built a great lighthouse on the summit of the rock." By comparing the builders to Arctic explorers the article immediately idealized the lighthouse as a marker of American expansion and progress, as opposed to a marker of peril and sunken ships. Much like a flag for Arctic Explorers, Tillamook Rock Lighthouse seemed to be a way for Americans to claim the territory and disregard further adversity from other countries. Yet again this focus on the exterior structure of the lighthouse failed

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to acknowledge the persistent struggles of the men in the post who also had to withstand harsh weather and brutal storms in this unforgiving geography.

Upon first arriving as keeper at the lighthouse, one man reported “the tube sheet leaks badly. House damp, when the wind is southerly the stoves on the south side will not draw, and when the wind is from the northeast the stoves on the north side of the building will not draw consequently it is rather uncomfortable.” This not so warm welcome indicated that from the first moment in a lighthouses it was an adjustment to living in harsh and uncomfortable conditions in which the beautiful structure had problems, leaks, and was not impermeable to the natural elements. The dampness of the dwelling illustrated how the environment was in fact overcoming the structure, not subdued or daunted by the American engineering feat but rather more powerful than the thick walls. During one storm, “Heavy sea running over the rock broke down the roof on West and South side of sirenroom carried away two chimney tops, landing bridge...broke lose the water tank, water tanks not damaged broke down some plaster in the rooms damage plaster by water from leakage of the roof. Damage platform on derrick and landing platform.” From this report, it was evident that the ingenuity and construction of the lighthouse was no match for the power of the storm that carried away the chimneys and broke through the walls of the house. The image of the ocean rising up and closing over the lighthouse evoked an idea of how the ocean wilderness consumed the lighthouse, subverting the aspiration of the lighthouse as steadfast and impermeable.

59 Tillamook Rock 01/1881 to 01/1928, May 1 & 3, 1881; Logbooks of Lighthouses, 1872 – 1944; Records of the U.S. Coast Guard, 1785 – 2005; Record Group 26, Box 452; National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

60 Tillamook Rock 01/1881 to 01/1928, December 16, 1886.
The imagery of nature consuming the lighthouse filled the Tillamook Rock Lighthouse logbook and illuminated how much the keepers struggled to survive on the ocean despite the American expectation that the sentinel could withstand and protect such a place. In April of 1892 the keeper reported “the sea breaking over the house.”61 This entry showed how much the lighthouse, which was hailed as this massive man-made building that was solid and secure as discussed above, was so dwarfed by the sea. One of the most illustrative and disheartening examples of this failure of the protection and welfare of Tillamook Rock Lighthouse happened on December 9th of 1894. On that day a huge hurricane devastated the lighthouse, so debilitating and strenuous that the lighthouse keeper only had time to scribble “Damaged by flood on 9th Dec 1894.”62 The writing on the report from this day was much less legible than usual, scrawled onto the page, and suggested the high nerves and preoccupation of the man writing it. This entry contrasted with another entry a day later recounting what had happened in greater detail, written with a much more stable and clear hand:

Hurricane from south to S.W. Heavy seas started at 11am came over tower and broke first plate glass at 11:30am. At 1pm 10 plate glass were broken in and three portly broken. During that time large rocks were thrown over dwelling and tower breaking in hall and kitchen roofs and making holes all over. The roof over the office

61 Tillamook Rock 01/1881 to 01/1928, April 24, 1892.
61 Tillamook Rock 01/1881 to 01/1928, December 16, 1886.
62 Tillamook Rock 01/1881 to 01/1928, December 9, 1894.
62 Tillamook Rock 01/1881 to 01/1928, December 16, 1886.
started in. Four windows frames broke in . . . part of wall gone. House was flooded some of rooms had four feet of water, we lost cooking stove and cooking utensils and dishes, and most all of the provisions, and lost most all personal property. All afternoon and night we could do nothing. Still hands worked in wet clothing all night. Impossible to go to tower for water and broken glass.\(^{63}\)

Again the image of the water consuming and overtaking the structure indicated the weakness and shortcoming of the work and engineering despite the expectation that it would be strong and dependable. The way the keeper described the storm crashing through the lighthouse changed the perspective of looking at the lighthouse from an exterior view to an interior one. Nature literally forced its way inside the building with water and rocks and threatened the men living there; despite the aspirations of Americans for the sentinel to be a structure representing safety and security after the shipwrecks that preceded it, the reality of the interior struggle against the wilderness subverted that idealization and proved the potential for danger and risk at the post. As reported, the lighthouse was literally being destroyed by the water and almost totally submerged by it, taking away any sense of the American’s ordained occupation on the edge of the country. The fact that the lighthouse keepers lost much of their personal property was reminiscent of the isolation and distance of Saint George Reef Lighthouse as discussed in the previous chapter, and emphasized not only the true cost and toll of living out at sea but also the

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\(^{63}\) Tillamook Rock 01/1881 to 01/1928, December 9, 1894.

\(^{63}\) Tillamook Rock 01/1881 to 01/1928, December 16, 1886.
inability to understand that struggle when it was so far from the rest of the American experience on the mainland.

The most intense and significant aspect of this entry, however, was the sense of helplessness especially stressed by the assertion that ‘we could do nothing.’ Despite all of the danger and destruction, the lighthouse keepers had no control or power over the wildness of the environment. Even though the construction drawings and published articles romanticized brawny heroes who could keep consistent and strong against the highest dangers, the reality reported in the logbooks showed the true capacity of American men was no match for this geography. A couple days following the hurricane and devastation the logbooks reported that the keeper “found some of our cooking utensils amongst debris in kitchen.” This entry revealed that the storm itself was not just a major impediment to live, but the recovery after the damages was slow and difficult. The storm did not just hit and then life went back to normal; the men on the rock had to live with the effects of the wreckage, with little support or assistance. There was danger not just in surviving the hurricane but surviving the period after the destruction – exposed to the elements in a ruined structure without personal property or provisions.

The trauma and ruin from the hurricane did not go unnoticed or unreported on the mainland. The Daily Morning Astorian newspaper reported how after the hurricane:

“[The kitchen] was dripping with water which came through a great hole overhead in the roof, made by a huge boulder weighing hundreds of pound that had been

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64 Tillamook Rock 01/1881 to 01/1928, December 12, 1894.

64 Tillamook Rock 01/1881 to 01/1928, December 16, 1886.
thrown up by the force of the waves. The kitchen range was a total 
wreck...everything in the way of edibles, except the stock of canned goods, was 
ruined. Over the hall way the roof was badly shattered, evidently by the same 
boulder that caused the wreck of the kitchen roof adjoining...”

Here, the readers were not spared the intensity and peril of the hurricane, and so 
begs the question as to why in the following years reports like the *McClure's Magazine* 
description that so glorified living there could still be published and taken seriously. What 
was interesting was how this article on the storm did not mention the lighthouse keeper or 
assistant in the wreck, and instead took a very physical and mostly exterior perspective of 
the lighthouse after the storm despite the narrative of suffering inside of it. The report 
especially addressed the kitchen and the loss of food, but failed to describe or give an 
account of how that affected and took a toll on the men who lived there. In this way, the 
lack of human life in this article and ones like it perhaps failed to allow other people to 
grasp the true struggle and severity of surviving at a lighthouse by removing a personal 
and relatable link to the structure. In the same newspaper article *The Daily Morning 
Astorian* referred to Tillamook Rock Lighthouse as “the lonely sentinel off Tillamook 
Head.” Such a description gave a sense of emptiness and forsakenness, but also 
deemphasized the hardship and risk of the lighthouse keepers by removing their narrative 
and figures from the report. The lives of those men became overshadowed by the existence 

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65 *Oregon Daily Morning Astorian*, December 14, 1894. Chronicling America: Historic American 
Newspapers. Accessed December 1, 2016, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn96061150/1894-12-
14/ed-1/seq-1/>

66 *Oregon Daily Morning Astorian*, December 14, 1894. Chronicling America: Historic American 
Newspapers. Accessed December 1, 2016, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn96061150/1894-12-
14/ed-1/seq-1/>
of the lighthouse itself, and consequently the danger had less of a personal and significant impact. However, the tension remained between the fact that people had to know about the strife at the lighthouse and the fact that such strife was still continually ignored and overlooked.

The way that the strength of the lighthouse structure was almost always no match for the power of the surrounding geography, ocean, and weather, framed the reality of the lighthouse keepers’ existence inside such an unreliable defense. More than that, however, it proved that there were aspects of America and its progress that were fallible. The tension between the solidness and impressiveness of the construction drawings and the physical destruction of Tillamook Rock in hurricanes and storms revealed the American aspirations for their advancement in the west, perhaps fueling their unwillingness to recognize the shortcomings.
CHAPTER THREE: A VERY SCARY CHRISTMAS

In the second half of the nineteenth century the ocean in a sense presented the last edge of expansion, the lighthouse and its keeper facing the wildness of the Pacific that was the only geography not yet subdued by the westward-moving Americans. In particular, Cape Disappointment Lighthouse and the exterior view of it in both paintings and periodicals created the allusion of the glamorous adventures of keepers in untamed territory, especially with the widespread publication of an extraordinary Christmas Eve escapade in one of the most circulated and popular magazines at the time. Yet the more common story in the logbooks told of the tedium and monotony of daily chores, so while the outdoor space created an expectation of adventure and strength, a reality of domesticity existed inside the structure and marked the true experience of the men there.

Cape Disappointment Lighthouse, built in 1856 and marking the edge of the soon-to-be established state of Washington, physically delineated what Americans at this time thought of as the successful spread and installation of nineteenth-century civilization across the country. After about four decades of its existence, the publication titled “Northern Seaside Resorts,” stated “perhaps the prettiest scene of the day is when the fishing boats start down the river...momentarily catching a ruddy tint as the sunset light flares up behind Cape Disappointment.”67 Here, the context around where Cape Disappointment Lighthouse stood contributed to the sense of successful human occupation of this part of the west coast. The image of the bright light of the sunset behind Cape Disappointment gave the location a sense of holiness, a trend seen in many paintings at this

67 Victor, “Northern Seaside Resorts,” 139.
time validating westward expansion that will be discussed in Chapter Four. This described image also stressed an exterior view of this geography, giving the illusion that the keepers lived in a place of fresh air and physical outdoor activity.

A drawing by T.E. Sandgren circa 1857 [Appendix D], about a year after the Cape Disappointment Lighthouse was established, showed it as an idyllic place where the wilderness of unruly forests and wild waves had been subdued and the lighthouse reigned over the edge of the country.\(^6^8\) By depicting the lighthouse from the exterior, this image conveyed certain themes of the outdoors and freedom from confinement, suggesting adventures that contrasted with the buildings and interior spaces of more established eastern cities. In the painting, the hill itself was cleared, with two small shrubs on it suggesting that perhaps there were once trees on this hill that were removed by the nineteenth-century American pioneer or merely that in the presence of the lighthouse the great and looming wilderness became dwarfed and unthreatening. Indeed there was a path leading up to the lighthouse with a man walking towards it, establishing that this was man’s domain. Furthermore, at the front of the forest was the image of an eagle about to take off and fly, a symbol of American hope and power that consequently insinuated such a location was symbolic of America and its history.

While Sandgren created his painting just a year after Cape Disappointment Lighthouse was freshly erected, a painting by Gideon Jacques Denny [Appendix E] about twenty-five years after the establishment of the lighthouse still used Cape Disappointment to define the American border and emphasize the exterior setting of the west. In Denny’s painting, the lighthouse itself was not the focus on the painting; there was a steamship in

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\(^6^8\) Sandgren, T.E. Cape Disappointment Lighthouse, hear the mouth of the Columbia River, circa 1857. National Archives, Washington, DC.
rough seas and a red buoy in the foreground, with the lighthouse itself a mere white spot in the background on the cliffs.\textsuperscript{69} However, the lighthouse was significant in giving a sense of place to the painting that could otherwise appear to be any other coast. It was the lighthouse that defined the geography and identified this space that was an otherwise generic landscape. Additionally, much like Sandgren’s perspective, the view of the lighthouse was external just like the context of the western frontier, without the confines of cities and houses. Inside the lighthouse, however, a different world existed, one full of housework and domestic chores where the exterior was a majority of the time obscured by bad weather and storms.

In a \textit{Harper’s Weekly} article published in 1876, an artistic depiction of Cape Disappointment Lighthouse [Appendix F] embodied the American public’s aspirations of life on the frontier and expectation that it bred real heroes. The image portrayed first assistant George Easterbrook on the outer rim of the lighthouse, where the logbooks rarely reported the keeper being, in a raging storm on Christmas Eve courageously scraping ice off the window so the light could shine through.\textsuperscript{70} Easterbrook’s posture bracing against the wind and sleet while holding fast to the light quite vigorously put forth the image of the lighthouse keeper as a man of brawn and rugged physical strength, a warrior fighting the natural elements. The light in the painting spilled out onto the first assistant from the lantern room, illuminating him and suggesting that the keeper was the embodiment of what the lighthouse represented – insinuating themes of light, triumph, and hope.


However, the way that the light filled up the space behind the keeper made it a little unclear that the light was coming distinctly from the lantern room, and could also be symbolic of the blessing of a higher power to sustain the light and nineteenth century American settlement even in the still dark and wild geography. Further to this point, the date of the painting and event as set on Christmas Eve added to the sense of holiness and painted the keeper as an almost Christ-like figure, a savior being born as he committed his life (literally!) to saving others.

The lighthouse itself was covered in ice, emphasizing both how harsh and unforgiving the nature on the west coast was and also how capable it was to overwhelm the post, an occurrence also seen with Tillamook Rock Light. Yet, Easterbrook valiantly worked to remove the invading ice from the building so that the light could work without impediment, giving a sense of his heroic duty and commitment to the establishment of America. The exterior perspective painted the job of a lighthouse keeper as demanding and as physically rigorous as that of a pioneer who first came and set up what American promoted as ‘civilization’ on the current edge of the frontier. The romanticization of the rugged individual who challenged the darkness of the untamed land and came out on top was a testament to the white male narrative that, in the second half of the nineteenth century, defined America’s history.

However, the reality was that for a rugged individual lacking a wife and children to help cater to his cleaning and cooking, he became confined in a role of domestic duties that no one else was there to fill. While the illustration showcased the drama of a catastrophic storm and depicted the perils these moments assumedly posed for keepers, the reality of life was that keepers passed most of their days doing mundane tasks and avoiding the
harsh weather. Even in the instruction manual for all keepers, it outlined that “the keeper must visit the light at least twice during the night between 8 p.m. and sunrise;”\textsuperscript{71} it was not as if these men were spending their entire night tending the light and holding off storms, but rather only briefly visited it unless something went wrong. The logbooks for Cape Disappointment Lighthouse revealed that generally keepers spent most of their time in other parts of the structure doing cleaning or repair.\textsuperscript{72} While Easterbrook’s struggle gave the sense that a lighthouse keeper’s life was characterized by demanding physical stamina and strength, the fact that a majority of the keeper’s chores were confined to the interior rooms of the building undermined the magazine’s idealization of the keeper as a Herculean figure and the west coast as a distinctly outdoor space. In fact, for many days out of the year especially in the winter season, there was nothing remotely of interest or activity to report at all except the weather, as discussed at Saint George Reef Lighthouse as well.

The general duties that the lighthouse keepers so often referenced were a small scattering of domestic chores done mainly inside the structure, juxtaposed with the exterior view emphasized in the available published and recorded images. To look again at the reports from Christmas Eve, the day of George Easterbook’s famous escapade, what was typically done on a regular non-stormy day instead was not face the weather or rise to the light but housework cleaning and management. A frequent job that keepers reported was “cleaning and polishing plate glass at the Light House,” but unlike the Easterbrook


\textsuperscript{72} Cape Disappointment 01/1877 to 01/1908; Logbooks of Lighthouses, 1872 – 1944; Records of the U.S. Coast Guard, 1785 – 2005; Record Group 26, Box 61; National Archives Building, Washington, DC.
depiction this was an interior task done from the inside of the lantern room. The vocabulary of cleaning and polishing suggested domesticity and interiority that created tension with the exterior expectation of life and existence at this lighthouse. Additionally, keepers at Cape Disappointment Lighthouse “polished lens... scrubbed tower steps and lit new wicks in lanterns.” Scrubbing tower steps and lighting candles pointed to a very interior space of work for these men. These duties not only restricted the movement of the keepers to the inside of the lighthouse but also denied romanticization created by the public image of George Easterbrook that work on the nineteenth century frontier was harrowing and challenging and required only the most capable of men. When the keepers did in fact have a chance to work outside it was not typically as exciting as fighting off hurricanes; instead, most outdoor days reported “keepers doing garden work,” a task that still lacked the excitement or adventure of saving lives and fighting storms.

While Harper’s Weekly promoted the idea that the duty of a lighthouse keeper was parallel to a savior or hero, the accounts of every other Christmas and Christmas Eve at Cape Disappointment Lighthouse failed to support this image of an ordained and superhuman man. Around the holidays and winter months, keepers were rarely engaged with the environment or the bad weather but instead inside avoiding the storms and the cold. The standard entry around the time of Easterbook’s adventure started with a weather report and ended with a short description of keepers attending their general duties, which as will be discussed were primarily painting, cleaning, polishing, and checking on the light.

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73 Cape Disappointment 01/1877 to 01/1908, December 24, 1895.
74 Cape Disappointment 01/1877 to 01/1908, December 24, 1898.
75 Cape Disappointment 01/1877 to 01/1908, December 24, 1894.
As stated above, the instructions for keepers demanded that "the keeper must visit the light at least twice during the night between 8 pm and sunrise," and additionally "on stormy nights the light must be constantly looked after." This meant that every night keepers had to repeatedly get up to check that the light was still shining; this was not the exciting and adventuresome task George Easterbook faced that fateful Christmas Eve, but instead a grinding and repetitive chore that would take a toll on anyone.

The repetitiveness of the job was stressed by the way the keeper generalized the duties in the logbooks, evidently feeling no need to specify the exact same duties over and over again. For example, on one Christmas in 1888 the keeper reported "weather very bad frost and a strong east wind. Keepers attending to general lighthouse duties." The language used in this report about attending to general duties painted an image of the men in an internal space doing every day chores, suggesting a daily routine that confined and limited them not only by obligation but by interior location as well. In fact, the whole month of December of that year saw terrible weather that kept the lighthouse keepers inside for the entire month. More reports like "weather very bad frost and a strong east wind. Keepers attending to general light house duties" showed that living at a lighthouse was not an outdoor adventure but rather an interior existence waiting out the bad weather and at the mercy of the surrounding environment. The keepers had very little control over their geographic location or its forecast, subverting the narrative produced by landscape

76 United States Light-House Establishment, Instructions to Light-Keepers, 29.
77 Cape Disappointment 01/1877 to 01/1908, December 25, 1888.
78 Cape Disappointment 01/1877 to 01/1908, December 25, 1888.
paintings and dime novels presented in the following chapter of man dominating and controlling the wilderness that challenged him in the west.

On Christmas Eve of the following year, “Weather continues fine with an East wind with a light frost bar smooth. Keepers attending general duties.” The continued dedication to cleaning the dwelling and cooking meals and the mundane routines implied by the description contrasted with the excitement and grandness of America’s romanticized frontier promoted in the paintings and dime novels in Chapter Four. One year after that, in December of 1890, for Christmas Eve the only report was about the “south gale with very heavy rain squalls during the night bar rough breaking across the channel.”

There was nothing else reported, an indication that nothing else could be done while the poor and harsh weather kept the men immobile and inactive. The keepers’ restraint and the fact that they were stuck in such restrictive interior roles emphasized the true tedium of life on the west coast in these lighthouse spaces.

However, it was not just Christmas Eve and Christmas that saw these confined and interior days. Winter storms throughout the season did not draw keepers out to battle the elements but kept them virtually trapped inside to escape the terrible weather; in November of 1887 the keeper reported “Scrubbing down stairways and floors at Light House weather bad thick with heavy rain squall blowing a perfect gale during the night with thunder and lightning bar very rough breaking clear across the channel.”

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79 Cape Disappointment 01/1877 to 01/1908, December 24, 1889.

80 Cape Disappointment 01/1877 to 01/1908, December 24, 1890.

81 Cape Disappointment 01/1877 to 01/1908, November 1887.
burning to save the innocent lives of those at sea. Instead, the keepers continued with their indoor drudgery and made no mention of even the thought of venturing out. More than that, year-round the logbook was filled with domestic duties that kept the keepers inside the dwelling, regardless of the weather. In June of 1883, the complete opposite time of the year, the keeper reported “cleaning plate glass in lantern” on the 4th and the same chore again, “cleaning plate glass in Light House,” on the 16th. The repetition of cleaning the plate glass suggested the constant need for upkeep within the dwelling, restricting the men to their housework so they had little time to even think about the outside. In July, in addition to “cleaning plate glass in Light House and polishing stove,” duties also included “washing down stairways at Light House and scrubbing floors” as well as “painting kitchen at Dwelling House.” While it might have been understandable that in reality the winter months were spent indoors avoiding the weather, the logbooks revealed that it was the summer months too that were filled with domestic work. In this way, the men’s lives subverted the narrative of adventure and potential in the west that the landscape paintings and dime novels in the next chapter promoted. In August of 1891, the logbook reported what appeared to be ideal weather, and yet the keepers still spent the day inside doing housework: “Painting floors and inside of lantern steps. Weather warm and dry.”

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82 Cape Disappointment 01/1877 to 01/1908, June 4 & 16, 1883.
83 Cape Disappointment 01/1877 to 01/1908, July 16, 1883.
84 Cape Disappointment 01/1877 to 01/1908, July 12, 1883.
85 Cape Disappointment 01/1877 to 01/1908, July 27, 1883.
86 Cape Disappointment 01/1877 to 01/1908, August 19, 1891.
Painting itself was not a simple easy task that could be finished in a couple hours either. First and foremost, lighthouse keepers actually had to make their own paint, as indicated by the provided paint recipes in the instruction manual distributed to all men at these posts. According to the instructions, in order to whitewash the interior of the lighthouse, preparations had to be begun days in advance, and was uneventful work that included “three pounds of ground rice put in boiling water . . . half a pound of powdered Spanish whiting, and a pound of clear glue, dissolved in warm water . . . let the mixture stand for several days.” The work required a lot of waiting, further stressing the tedium of this particular job. The instructions for how to actually paint the inside of the dwelling and keep it clean of soot, grease, and salt spanned four full pages, demanding meticulous and dull attention to detail like “when the paint in the paint bucket becomes thicker than cream, it must be thinned by adding small quantities of spirits of turpentine” and “the large paint brushes are used for putting on priming and in painting over large surfaces . . . The small brushes are used for parts to which the large brushes, from their size, cannot be applied.” These descriptions from the manual illustrated how the men would be painting and constantly having to re-thin the hardening paint they were using, and also switch between brushes as they arrived at different areas of the dwelling that demanded either filling in corners and around windows or massive patches of wall. It was understandable how a task like that could then take up the entire day in the logbooks, forcing the keepers to spend all their time on just one tedious task without other stimulation or entertainment.

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In many of the entries, the keeper mentioned polishing or cleaning the stove as one of the chores. On a surprisingly pleasant day in February, the logbook reported “cloudy with moderate breeze from the South East. Keepers cleaning and polishing stove at the Light House.” The fact that a priority was keeping the stove clean and functioning suggested the amount of use it got and the amount of cooking the keepers had to do for themselves, and the need for heat in the west coast environment. In this way, it served as a reminder of how the image of the rugged individual lacked the wife or daughter to cook for him and help with these domestic necessities. In fact, when a keeper recorded a chore outside the lighthouse structure itself, a majority of the time it was about working in the garden and harvesting food to eat. As early as March, the men “planted different kind of garden vegetables,” set on this domestic duty because there was no alternative to getting fresh vegetables on the edge of the west coast. In fact, these lighthouse keepers only received an annual allotment of provisions such as one barrel of flour per man or twenty-five pounds of rice per man, but no types of vegetables or fruits were included in the written record stipulating the allowances.

However, despite these occasions of being outdoors and working in the garden, the fact was that these days paled in comparison to other days spent cleaning inside the house. In April of 1887, the keepers spent one day “spading up ground near Keepers Dwelling and planted some late potatoes” and one day “fixing up flower beds around Dwelling House,

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89 Cape Disappointment 01/1877 to 01/1908, February 10, 1896.

90 Cape Disappointment 01/1877 to 01/1908, March 24, 1887.


92 Cape Disappointment 01/1877 to 01/1908, April 11, 1887.
painting kitchen.”

On this second day, part of the work was still taking place inside. As discussed, the rest of the month the logbook was full of internal domestic duties like “whitewashing kitchen and hallways + stairways at Keepers Dwelling.” Comparatively, the days spent outdoors on the west coast were few and far between the days restricted to the interior upkeep, and thus undermined the idealized exterior view in both depictions discussed of Cape Disappointment and of the imagined frontier in general presented in the next chapter.

Incapable of battling the elements and conquering the wildness of the ocean, lighthouse keepers depended on an interior existence for their survival and success. This reality created a discrepancy with the *Harper's Weekly* romanticization of Cape Disappointment Lighthouse, which saw the lighthouse as a place of exterior wildness breeding brawn and feeding the adventurous spirit. While such a perspective appeared to create an exciting expectation for what Americans at this time could see as the final frontier, the truth was that keepers were living an inside life submissive to their surrounding environment. There was no ordained assistance that validated or encouraged the keepers’ duties; from the logbook evidence presented above it was a commitment and struggle to sustain oneself at work. The nineteenth century American imagery around the conquest and triumph over nature overshadowed the domesticity demanded of the rugged individual, creating a fictitious history that idealized American lighthouse keepers by putting them on a pedestal as a heroic legend.

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93 Cape Disappointment 01/1877 to 01/1908, April 23, 1887.

94 Cape Disappointment 01/1877 to 01/1908, April 4 & 16, 1887.
The question remains as to why, even with evidence of newspaper articles that revealed the difficult and gruesome reality of lighthouses to the American public across the country, there was this continual perpetuation of a romanticized view of such structures on the west coast in the second half of the nineteenth century. By looking at the parallels and shared aspects between the depictions of lighthouses and the depiction of the greater American West, it is possible to theorize that the idealization of the imagined frontier influenced Americans’ understanding and perceptions of west coast lighthouses in that context. By using this theory it then becomes plausible that Americans would ignore a darker reality in favor of a more attractive and pervasive narrative that contributed to their construction of a glorified history.

Perhaps the popular imagery around community in paintings of this imagined frontier made it even harder for many Americans to understand the complete and severe isolation of Saint George Reef Lighthouse and other lighthouses in the west. George Caleb Bingham began romanticizing the west as a holy and ordained place that had been destined for the white American claim and community in his 1851-1852 painting Daniel Boone Escorting Settlers through the Cumberland Gap [Appendix G]. In this painting, Daniel Boone appeared parallel to a Moses figure parting the red rocks of the western wilderness to lead the pilgrims to the Promised Land, giving this western migration scene a sense of

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familiarity to many Americans by paralleling it to a recognizable scene from the Bible. Daniel Boone and his followers were walking forward through the dark wilderness, and the only source of light appeared to radiate onto them from some source in front of them and out of the frame. Again, this light gave the implication that these people as an entity and group were blessed and ordained to go forth and claim the territory, the illumination that highlighting and welcoming their presence in the wild west. The number of people in the painting gave the sense that the westward movement, though led by the brave and legendary rugged individuals, was a movement to establish civilization as nineteenth century Americans understood it across the country. Seen in this way, the overall point of this space then became not merely adventure, but expansion and settlement in the new territory. As physical markers of the country’s borders from sea to shining sea, lighthouses on the west coast illustrated a success story that went hand in hand with paintings of westward movement, and therefore could tie into this nineteenth century constructed narrative.

An alternate reading of the painting could reveal not Moses leading his people through the red sea but Joseph leading Mary on a horse to find an inn in which to stay, a traditional Mexican reenactment on Christmas Eve that could have influenced the artist’s vision of the parents of Jesus trying to find a welcome place in the west. From this interpretation, the painting’s story emphasized not just how the west acted as a place of


98 Shana Klein, interview by author, in person (Georgetown University, February 14, 2017).
promise and protection, but how it was a place where solidarity and dependence on others helped support those venturing forth. Unlike some of the other panoramas of the great and bountiful west, Bingham’s image still included a sense of danger and foreboding in the surrounding wilderness, which further communicated the need for congregational support to sustain settlement. Like these pioneers, lighthouse keepers in the west were also living on the edge of this imagined frontier, and thus Americans’ expectations for these keepers could be that they had a community of family and friends supporting their duty just like those in the paintings. The imagery of the west being populated by these pioneers revealed American aspirations that the geography in which these lighthouses were situated housed large and supportive settlements.

Other paintings such as Emanuel Leutze’s *Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way (Westward Ho!)* [Appendix H] from 1860 also gave a sense of the overwhelming American domination of the wilderness of the west. In his mural, Leutze depicted a pioneer wagon train making its way over the mountains and into San Francisco Bay to settle.99 Here, it was not just the rugged individual who was making his way through the western wilderness but entire families, giving the sense that the west was a new place for community where people could create homes and settlements. The fact that this painting was commissioned for and hung in the U.S. Capitol building in the eighteen-sixties and was seen daily by the government offered a reason why perhaps members of Congress were

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unable to comprehend the isolation of the lighthouse keeper, as these members were consistently influenced by a communal image of the west.\footnote{Emanuel Leutze, \textit{Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way}, 1862, The United States Capitol Building, accessed April 14, 2017, \url{https://www.aoc.gov/art/other-paintings-and-murals/westward-course-empire-takes-its-way}.}

Not only that, but the Dime Novels like the 1882 \textit{Adventures of Buffalo Bill from Boyhood to Manhood: Deeds of Daring, Scenes of Thrilling, Peril, and Romantic Incidents In the Early Life of W. F. Cody, the Monarch of Bordermen}, placed characters like Buffalo Bill in the company of other triumphant frontiersmen like Daniel Boone, Davy Crockett, and Kit Carson,\footnote{\textit{Adventures of Buffalo Bill from Boyhood to Manhood: Deeds of Daring, Scenes of Thrilling, Peril, and Romantic Incidents In the Early Life of W. F. Cody, the Monarch of Bordermen}, from Stanford University Libraries/Academic Information Resources (New York: Street and Smith, 1901), Chapter 1: Prologue, \url{http://web.stanford.edu/dept/SUL/library/prod/depts/dp/pennies/texts/ingraham1_toc.html}.} illustrating for their American readers that the west was a space of community and solidarity, a notion that the lighthouse keepers’ situation subverted. The narrator of the dime novel asserted “I have seen [Buffalo Bill] amid the greatest dangers, shared with him his blanket and his camp-fire’s warmth, I feel entitled to write of him as a hero of heroes, and in the following pages sketch his remarkable career from boyhood to manhood.”\footnote{\textit{Adventures of Buffalo Bill from Boyhood to Manhood: Deeds of Daring, Scenes of Thrilling, Peril, and Romantic Incidents In the Early Life of W. F. Cody, the Monarch of Bordermen}, Chapter 1: Prologue.} Despite Buffalo Bill’s heroic and almost mythic status, there was still something accessible about him, as implied by the fact that the narrator was able to get an eyewitness account of the man and his feats. The language of the description also gave the sense that the west was a shared experience where men traveled and worked side by side, which enabled the narrator to get such a first-hand view of Buffalo Bill’s narrative. The accessibility in the story consequently built up the image of Buffalo Bill as having one foot
in the wilderness and yet one foot facing back towards American society, giving the allusion that those in the west were still connected to the cities and settlements. Such a misunderstanding of the true distance and separation of the western landscape could have hindered many Americans’ ability to realize how the lighthouse keepers on the remote stretches of the Pacific Ocean were so cut off from cities or the rest of the country.

Another tactic Dime Novels used was to set up the narrative in a way that invited the readers themselves to become a part of the tale, experiencing the adventures of the imagined frontier first hand via these accounts. In Deadwood Dick’s Doom; or, Calamity Jane’s Last Adventure, the story started by asking “Did you ever hear of a more uninviting name for a place dear reader?”103 The way that the text directly addressed the reader immediately created the illusion that the reader was part of that western narrative; such a misrepresentation of reality could give the American readers the impression that they could understand this place of which they were not a part. However, it made sense that because of these dime novels that were so popular and widely read Americans assumed they could know what to expect of living in the west even as far as the coast, even though they had never been there. From this understanding, it can be argued that many Americans were projecting their experiences reading western tales onto the image of these isolated and disconnected west coast lighthouses about which they heard, and despite the newspaper evidence that showed glimpses of the darker reality, the romanticized version was too enticing and pervasive to give up.

103 Deadwood Dick’s Doom; or, Calamity Jane’s Last Adventure, from Stanford University Libraries/Academic Information Resources (New York: Street and Smith, 1901), Chapter 1: Too Late For The Stage, http://web.stanford.edu/dept/SUL/library/prod/depts/dp/pennies/texts/wheeler_toc.html.
The focus on the exteriority and idyllic nature of west coast lighthouses like Cape Disappointment Lighthouse paralleled with landscape paintings of the west in the second half of the nineteenth century, which also attempted to highlight the exterior geography as a way of promoting the country’s natural greatness and bolstering the nineteenth century expected claim to the land. At this time such landscape paintings of the American west became extremely popular as artists moved away from the factual sketches and reports of exploration to romanticized and poetic views of the land that made it capable of comparing to European wonders; particularly among the second generation of Hudson River School artists, idyllic panoramas of the vast western scenery spoke to the idealization of the west and its history.104 One of the most prominent painters participating in this cultural obsession was Albert Bierstadt, an artist associated with the Hudson River School and known for his idealized landscapes of the peace and promise of the west. In 1868 he produced Among the Sierra Nevada Mountains, California, [Appendix I] depicting a grassy bank at the edge of a lake flanked by waterfalls and magnificent mountains that mingled with the heavens and dwarfed even the tallest trees.105 There was an abundance of deer at the edge of the water, suggesting that this new land was full of food and resources. More than that, the abundance and centrality of water on the canvas illustrated how important water was in this imagined frontier, making it easier to extend and translate this geography and its history all the way to the ocean and its lighthouses. There were no humans to be seen in the painting, although the tree in the right foreground had been cut down, perhaps


symbolic of the potential for this peaceful land to be tamed and subdued by civilization as those in the nineteenth century saw it. The light spilling through the clouds over the area tied back to the idea of America as heavenly ordained to those who discovered it; thus this painting could suggest America had the potential to be naturally great, promoting the ideal of Manifest Destiny and how American ancestors were meant to expand and cover the country.¹⁰⁶ Such an image illustrated the American ideology that framed the context of Bierstadt’s work, himself European-born, and thus the mindset of the majority of Americans who viewed, admired, and encouraged images like this. The perpetuation of positive and brighter imagery of the western landscape overshadowed the true struggle of living in the wilderness to which the keepers’ narrative spoke, consequently replacing reality with a much more attractive and promising image.

Thomas Hill, another second generation Hudson River School artist, also used this idealized vision of American history to form and animate his own western landscapes, particularly in California. In 1872 he painted *Great Canyon of the Sierra, Yosemite*, [Appendix J] which showed a massive canyon filled with trees and surrounded by big mountains that stretched all the way back to the horizon.¹⁰⁷ Like Bierstadt’s painting, Hill included a waterfall and river, its pure whiteness and location in the center of the painting suggesting again the importance of water in the image of the west. This significance of water to the west coast imagery created a connection to the imagery of the ocean, thus


making it easy to situate the ocean and its lighthouses within the context of the western history.

While the paintings of America that artists produced in the second half of the nineteenth century reminisced about the greatness and glory of Manifest Destiny, Dime Novels helped focus particularly on the specific heroes and legends of the west. These pioneer figures helped shape American identity and give the new nation historical figures that could stand as inspiration and motivation for westward expansion and American pride; with such rugged and capable men defining life in the wild west, it was easy to see how Americans could have the same expectations of lighthouse keepers on the final frontier as they saw it. One of the most popular dime novel series at the turn of the century revolved around the James brothers, outlaws and bandits who plagued the west by stealing and killing. In Jesse James, the Outlaw, the narrator was on a mission to capture Jesse James and stop him from terrorizing the community there, pretending to be an ally to get close to the rogue. First and foremost, this story was set in the exterior wilderness of the west, where “the country grew wilder and wilder through which we passed.” Mirroring the external environment of the paintings, these dime novels were set explicitly on the ‘wild frontier’ so as to contrast with the notion of nineteenth century civilization established on the east coast. What was especially interesting about the tale of Jesse James was that the farther the narrator followed the outlaws, the more savage and dangerous the landscape

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110 Jesse James, the Outlaw: A Narrative of the James Boys, Chapter 1: In The Robber’s Nest.
became; while indicating that there was in fact peril and risk in this geography, these dime novels did not romanticize the west as an idyllic Garden of Eden but as a place full of adventure and daring. The narrator acknowledged that in his attempt to capture the outlaw Jesse James, “I was literally carrying my life in my hands.”\(^{111}\) The emphasis on such a life or death situation stressed the danger of living in the wildness of the west, and by recognizing the hazard of life in this setting, the narrative was then able to further stress how brawny these men were who lived there and overcame such adversity. Therefore, it could be understood how the expectations for these west coast lighthouse keepers in images like *Harper’s Weekly* of George Easterbrook compared them to these capable and mighty mythologized pioneers.

The narrator himself was a man named William Lawson; his name was significant as it alluded to the word and notion of ‘law’ and bringing justice to the wild west, a sign of civilizing the wild and untamed land as Americans at this time would have seen it. Such an appellation gave Lawson a sense of authority and also of heroic righteousness that characterized him as a legendary frontiersman but also as a civil and gallant man representing American societal superiority. Lawson emphasized strength and courage, but he himself embodied more than just physical brawn; the way that Lawson executed the capture of Jesse James was by outsmarting him, pretending to be an ally to get close to the outlaw and still protect his own life and identity.\(^{112}\) In this way, the wild west became a more civil place of men not just fighting but thinking as well. Lawson’s capability and accolades in the west spoke to Americans’ imagination of frontiersmen as legendary and ideological figures that fostered

\(^{111}\) *Jesse James, the Outlaw: A Narrative of the James Boys*, Chapter 1: In The Robber’s Nest.

\(^{112}\) *Jesse James, the Outlaw: A Narrative of the James Boys*, Chapter 1: In The Robber’s Nest.
and inspired these stories, creating expectations that could then have been projected onto lighthouse keepers as the pioneers on this ‘last frontier.’

As discussed above, *Adventures of Buffalo Bill from Boyhood to Manhood: Deeds of Daring, Scenes of Thrilling, Peril, and Romantic Incidents In the Early Life of W. F. Cody, the Monarch of Bordermen* from 1882 assisted in the imagining of a communal west, but it did even more to emphasize the west as a setting for potential American heroes.\(^{113}\) The language in just the title alone did so much to romanticize life in the wild, painting the geography as a place of adventure that fostered bravery and strength by using stimulating and evocative words like ‘daring,’ ‘thrilling,’ and ‘peril.’ The articulation of the aspirations of the west could reveal the way American readers began to think of the west coast in context of their imagined frontier, expectations that even unconsciously could extend to keepers and inaccurately characterize them as capable and resilient as they survived in this wild geography. The appellation of ‘Monarch of Bordermen’ sounded like a European title and alluded to the lineage and tradition of Europe, creating a history for America that paralleled that of the Old World and constructed Cody as a legendary figure who defined the American west.\(^{114}\) Perhaps this way of thinking of men such as Buffalo Bill as historic icons could create the expectation for Americans that other men in this geography, like the lighthouse keepers, would live up to their legendary predecessors.

The Prologue of this dime novel promised “it is beyond the pale of civilization I find the hero of these pages which tell of thrilling adventures, fierce combats, deadly feuds and

\(^{113}\) *Adventures of Buffalo Bill from Boyhood to Manhood: Deeds of Daring, Scenes of Thrilling, Peril, and Romantic Incidents In the Early Life of W. F. Cody, the Monarch of Bordermen*, from Stanford University Libraries/Academic Information Resources (New York: Street and Smith, 1901).

\(^{114}\) Le Beau, “Imagining the Frontier,” 109.
Here the Prologue contextualized the story in the wildness and exteriority of the west, much like the American perspective of lighthouses was framed by external views. The promise of struggle and conquest in the story gave the sense that the west was a space for the brave-hearted and the triumphant to occupy, and highlighting the peril only served to prove how heroic the men were who faced the risk and hazard. The most significant aspect of this introduction was the assertion that everything in this story was true, and not only true but irrevocably so. Here, the narrative of the dime novel became less of a fabled story and more of a genuine history that could encourage readers to ignore sporadic newspaper reports of the lighthouse keepers’ devastation in favor of this optimistic and promising narrative.

During this time, paintings also worked to promote the image of the west as a space of technological advancement where American engineering defined expansion and characterized American occupation of the land. In his 1872 painting titled *American Progress* [Appendix K], John Gast presented Progress as a woman in white bringing American advancements westward as a way of civilizing the wilderness and bringing light to the darkness. To paint Progress as a woman dressed in white with a star on her forehead and fabric-like wings alluded to the image of an angel and once again stressed how American potential and movement westward was heavenly ordained. The way the light followed the movement and trajectory of the railroad and the telegraph line

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115 *Adventures of Buffalo Bill from Boyhood to Manhood: Deeds of Daring, Scenes of Thrilling, Peril, and Romantic Incidents In the Early Life of W. F. Cody, the Monarch of Bordermen*, Chapter 1: Prologue.

highlighted these technologies as manifestations of American progress and what Americans imagined as their civilization.\textsuperscript{117} Such a romanticized expectation revealed the American aspiration for the frontier to be a place where the best and most superior developments existed and defined the Americans from the rest of the inhabitants of the land. In this way, Americans could have been incentivized to idealize lighthouse structures in this context and therefore failed to focus on the keepers themselves who were struggling to survive there.

In 1868 Currier & Ives published a painting by Frances Flora Bond Palmer titled \textit{Across The Continent: "Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way"} [Appendix L]. In the painting, Palmer depicted a train heading west towards a darker horizon, similar to the way the train and telegraph line were bringing the light of perceived civilization to the darkness of the wild west in Gast’s creation.\textsuperscript{118} What was especially significant in Palmer’s painting was the way that the railroad separated the natives in the wilderness and the white pioneers in their settlement and constructed a divide between the two groups. In this way, the railroad symbolized the difference between the two groups, representing the believed ingenuity and superiority of white Americans that to their own eyes pushed them past their native rivals. The fact that the painting was printed and distributed by Currier & Ives made it both affordable and available to people all across the nation, promoting this idea that technology defined white experience and occupation in the west in contrast to the


\textsuperscript{118} Frances Flora Bond Palmer, \textit{Across The Continent: "Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way"} (New York: Currier & Ives, 1868). [Link to painting]
indigenous culture. This apparent widespread mentality that saw engineering innovation and enterprise as defining American occupation of the west suggested why Americans tended to focus on the exterior and physicality of the lighthouse structure itself rather than the struggles of the men on the ocean; the engineering feat of lighthouses like Tillamook Rock fed into the American conviction that the west was a space where the triumph of white Americans could be seen in the advancements and progress there.

As dime novels and landscape paintings worked hand in hand in the second half of the nineteenth century to construct a romanticized version of the west as a place of solidarity, adventure, and progress, it emphasized the collective American expectation for that particular geography. The parallels and shared aspects between the idealization of lighthouses and the romanticization of the perceived frontier at this time suggest a connection between the history of the lighthouses and the history of the American west that can perhaps explain this discrepancy between many Americans’ continued view of lighthouses as idyllic and adventurous when the reality was so much darker and depressing.

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119 Le Beau, "Imagining the Frontier," 121-123.
CONCLUSION

Still today American lighthouses are continually misrepresented as idyllic and romantic images, a trend that continues to undermine and ignore their dark history as well as the struggle and endurance of the keepers. As recent as 2013 a book titled *Lighthouses of North America: Beacons From Coast to Coast* came out, highlighting a majority of American lighthouses including Cape Disappointment Lighthouse. It is interesting to note that both Saint George Reef Lighthouse and Tillamook Rock Lighthouse were not included in the book, two posts whose precarious and daunting positions in the middle of the sea perhaps did not fit into the idyllic imagery expected; regardless, the selection of specific lighthouses for the book and exclusion of others shows how the author was selective in what lighthouses would be featured, further revealing how coffee table books and illustrative books like this continue to construct a specific and biased view of lighthouse history. The author statement claims the book serves to highlight the structures from “the ‘golden age’ of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries” in North America, perpetuating the misrepresentation of lighthouses and the difficulties their keepers faced.\textsuperscript{120} The implication that the nineteenth century was part of a sublime age of American progress stays consistent with the inaccurate romanticization from that time in America that overshadowed the reality of the struggle moving west and facing the wilderness, including the keepers’ experience trying to survive on the west coast. It is fascinating how this mindset has been able to persist for over a century, and speaks to the power and authority of the nineteenth century view and idealization of the west.

The publications of many coffee table and pictorial books about lighthouses help illustrate how America’s pride and perspective is still stemmed in its western history of legend and idealization. This perpetuation of collective amnesia over the dark truth of American history, in which the history of west coast lighthouses is embedded, can be seen most evidently in the severe controversy over an exhibit at the Smithsonian American Art Museum in 1991 titled “The West as America: Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier, 1820-1920.” In the exhibit, the museum presented famous paintings and images of the American West alongside descriptions of the violence, racism, and environmental consequence that actually marked those spaces.\(^{121}\) However, while some welcomed this new revised history with appreciation and respect, a strong response condemned the exhibit as ludicrous and lies, seeing the explanatory plaques and curatorial interpretations as a sickening attempt to rewrite history in the modern context of political correctness. This commitment to the romanticization of the west illustrates how persuasive and pervasive the mindset has been, and makes it possible to argue it had influence over the way people saw lighthouses in that context then and now.

First and foremost, renowned art critics known for their scholarly analysis in credited and respected publications jumped on the exhibit as an injustice and fallacy that poorly represented and de-valued the art it displayed. Michael Kimmelman, a prominent art and architecture critic for the esteemed *New York Times*, wrote that the exhibit “represents art-historical revisionism of the kind that has given rise to the phrase political correctness. The show preaches to visitors in wall texts laden with forced analyses and

inflammatory observations.”¹²² Kimmelman’s accusatory and aggressive language suggested the personal affront he felt with the exhibit’s attempt to change American identity and his rejection of the idea that American could embody such a horrific and dark past. He put the blame not on the museum’s need for accuracy in education but instead on the current push for political correctness that he believed forced the curator to project an artificial history more inclusive of narratives subverting the white man’s success story. Here, Kemmelman revealed how these idealizations of the American West that spread through the nineteenth century and into today were powerful enough to influence educated people despite evidence they received against it.

In The Washington Post’s review of the show, columnist and critic Hank Burchard also attacked the Smithsonian and curator William Truettner on the artificially constructed history they presented based off of the images displayed. In his own words, Burchard saw it as “a jeremiad against American idealistic art and westward expansion, seen through a politically corrective lens.”¹²³ For him, the exhibit amounted to nothing more than a biased list of woes created by the new mindset of political correctness, instead of an accurate and factual account of the history. To further his point, Burchard accused Truettner’s artistic interpretations of presenting “meanings that would surprise if not enrage many of the artists who painted them.”¹²⁴ By implying that the revisionist history inaccurately


¹²⁴ Burchard, “How The West Was Rewritten.”
represented the mindset and identity of the artists themselves, Burchard condemned the show as a strictly twentieth-century construction of American history due to the attempt to adapt to new and constricting notions of political correctness.

More than just the official critics, much of the museum masses too were enraged and severely affected by the exhibits new construction of American identity. Comments in the museum’s guestbook from the exhibit revealed the nineteenth century mindset that romanticized the west still had influence over Americans a century later, emphasizing the power of that cultural tendency over two centuries. One guest commented that “I didn’t need to be told that Catlin’s pictures were propaganda – phooey! I’m happy with the myth. – J.V.”125 Here, though the visitor made it clear that they understood their ignorance of the reality of the west, their pride in the constructed American identity overrode a need for truth or confession of their ancestors’ transgressions; just like with lighthouses, despite evidence that revealed a darker side to the narrative, people were unwilling to deconstruct their idealizations. However, for other guests it was not a matter of wanting to ignore the truth, but rather that the exhibit was a flat-out set of lies attempting to rewrite history in a way that accommodated the narratives of minority groups like Native Americans. One comment in the guestbook read “wonderful art but a sickening example of the dishonesty of contemporary art historical interpretations. – L.J.A.”126 Here, the author suggested that the curator was attempting not to expose the reality of the frontier but instead was working to fit western history into the modern frame of political correctness that was

125 Andrew Gulliford, “Visitors Respond: Selections from ‘The West as America’ Comment Books,” Montana: The Magazine of Western History 42.3 (Summer, 1992), 78.

inaccurate and destructive to their dominant white male narrative. Another visitor agreed, writing that “the curator, by his commentary, is trying to strip Western Americans of their achievements and their sense of self-worth.” The language of this comment represented the personal attack that many people felt this exhibit was taking on them, indicating how this myth of the west had become such a part of American identity and self-regard. The clear conviction was that the west was the axis of American history around which everything else turned and on which everything else rested, which included and still includes the narratives of lighthouses.

This conviction in the sincerity of the western legend still characterized many guests who were certain of the ordained westward expansion subverted by the curator’s comments. One visitor from Lincoln, NE, wrote “I am appalled at the lack of sophistication and the parochialism of the comments of many. My God! Manifest Destiny is alive and well! – G.B.” This comment proved that the nineteenth century phenomenon that inspired a nation continued to inspire that same nation even at the end of the twentieth century. The romanticization of the ‘frontier’ was substantial enough that it became rooted in the American imagination and identity, allowing it to permeate for a hundred years. Despite the attempts of the curator and the Smithsonian to convince people otherwise, as one visitor wrote, “my heroes have always been cowboys. – C.S.” There was a consisted and committed belief in the nineteenth century frontier and the wild west that, even with the attempts at creating a more inclusive and realistic narrative, was so instilled in people’s


heritage and ancestry that it could not be shaken or subverted. Even though progress has been made in the public’s willingness to accept the reality of America’s past, the fact that so many were still so dedicated to the American legend showed the true power of romanticizing the frontier. The West represented the great potential of Americans instead of a stage for their violence, racism, and environmental destruction, with lighthouses paralleling and contributing to that darker history of struggle, danger, and isolation. It then makes sense how lighthouses should be looked at in the context of western history, suffering the same idealizations that overshadowed negative aspects of the past that challenged and subverted American pride and honor.

In this way, the influence and perpetuation of the nineteenth-century sense of American identity into modern day represented not just its ability to endure but the power and popularity that mindset must have had in the second half of the nineteenth century that enabled it to continue to permeate American culture. With that it mind, it was understandable how many Americans saw these west coast lighthouses in the context of their imagined frontier, since as physical markers on the edge of the country they were manifestations of the widespread and prevailing idealizations of the American west that defined American expansion and history. As both The New York Times and The Washington Post critics of the Smithsonian exhibit insinuated, Americans respond to public images as representative of a people and a time, and so the parallels between the exterior views of the west and lighthouses suggested a connection between the cultures and history of both.

By looking at lighthouses in the context of American western and expansionist history, Americans are then able to tie lighthouses to ideas of Manifest Destiny, environmentalism, civilization and man versus nature, and other motifs of the eighteen
hundreds that allow scholars, historians, and others to study lighthouses not as singular histories and individual narratives but as a contributing part of the American past. In this way, Americans can develop a deeper understanding of the influences and precedents that shaped this country and continue to have an effect on American expectations and problems today.
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APPENDIX

Appendix A: Saint George Reef photograph (1892)

Appendix B: Tillamook Rock Lighthouse Construction Drawing (1881)
Appendix C: Tillamook Rock Lighthouse Sketch of Construction (1881)

Appendix D: T.E. Sandgren Painting of Cape Disappointment Lighthouse (c. 1857)
Appendix E: Gideon Jacques Denny Painting of Cape Disappointment Lighthouse and Coast (1881)

Appendix F: *Harper's Weekly* Illustration of George Easterbrook (1876)
Appendix G: George Caleb Bingham’s *Daniel Boone Escorting Settlers through the Cumberland Gap* (1851-1852)

Appendix H: Emanuel Leutze’s *Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way* (1860)
Appendix I: Albert Bierstadt’s *Among the Sierra Nevada Mountains, California* (1868)

Appendix J: Thomas Hill’s *Great Canyon of the Sierra, Yosemite* (1871)
Appendix K: John Gast’s *American Progress* (1872)

Appendix L: Frances Flora Bond Palmer’s *Across the Continent: “Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way”* (1868)