



Photo by Diane Varni

Santa Cruz Lighthouse — symbol of the past still performing its duty

## A beacon of the past

By CATHERINE SHAW

The Santa Cruz Lighthouse, which in its 115-year history has been moved, torn down, converted, automated, and finally rebuilt, begins a new chapter in its life story which is significantly linked to its past.

The Lighthouse, which continues to perform its lifelong duty to aid navigation, was recently opened to the public under the auspices of the Santa Cruz Museum Association. It is now available for public viewing from noon to 5 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays.

This affiliation with the Santa Cruz Museum provides an historic link with the original lighthouse, which was built in 1869. It was Laura Hecox, daughter of the first lightkeeper, and lightkeeper herself for 33 years, who provided the museum with its first artifacts. A naturalist who maintained a collection in her "lighthouse" home as a hobby, Hecox donated her treasured objects to the City of Santa Cruz in 1904. Her collection comprised the entire contents of the first public museum in Santa Cruz, located in the basement of the old Carnegie Library. After leaving its library location, the museum was housed for a short time at Santa Cruz High School, and in the 1930's it moved to its present location at 1305 East Cliff Drive.

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Housing its own history

# Lighthouse

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Hecox was the daughter of Adna Hecox, who moved into the newly constructed wooden six-room building in 1869. Built by the federal government at the request of merchants and shipping concerns, the lighthouse guided ships in and out of what was then a busy seaport.

Because of cliff erosion, the wooden lighthouse had to be moved just 10 years after it was built. It was "dragged" 300 feet across West Cliff Drive, where it remained until 1948 when it was torn apart and sold for its material. The Coast Guard, which assumed official responsibility for lighthouses in 1939, put up a wooden tower in 1941 to replace the original building.

"This Mark Abbott Memorial Lighthouse is dedicated to all youth whose ideals are the beacons to the future." These words are inscribed on a plaque near the front door of the present brick lighthouse, which was built in 1967 by Chuck and Esther Abbott in memory of their son, Mark, who drowned in 1965 in a surfing accident at Pleasure Point.

The Abbott family shared a common interest in light-houses, and over the years Esther Abbott created vividly colored paintings of lighthouses of various styles that are on display inside the building.

The present lighthouse is situated on the ocean side of West Cliff Drive, approximately 100 feet closer to the road than the original building. Because of erosion, it is estimated that only a small strip, if any, of the land in front of the first building remains today. According to Frank Perry, President of the Museum Associa-

tion, it is very likely that the present building might eventually have to be moved just as its predecessor was 105 years ago.

The Santa Cruz Lighthouse, one of some 4 lighthouses operating in the United States, is not a "fake lighthouse," as some people refer to it. It still serves as an official aid to navigation, today under the jurisdiction of the Coast Guard, just as in the past it was under the authority of the United States Lighthouse Service, which dates back to George Washington's time.

Originally lard oil was used for the light. In 1880 it was converted to kerosene, and in 1917 to electricity. In 1941 the Santa Cruz Lighthouse became one of the first in the country to be automated.

Besides Esther Abbott's unique display of lighthouse paintings, the building contains a visitor information desk and a small museum featuring exhibits on the history of Lighthouse Point. An exhibit entitled "Migration" is also on display, the first of several exhibits to be shown at the Lighthouse. It consists of 50 color photographs by nature photographer Frans Lanting, along with text panels, models and animal specimens. Featured are four migratory animals common to the Santa Cruz County coastal region: Monarch Butterflies, California Gray Whales, Sanderlings, and Santa Cruz long-toed Salamanders.

And last, but not least, the lighthouse contains in its tower a 500 watt rotating light bulb that gives forth a flash every five seconds, just to let those traveling on the water know that Santa Cruz land is close at hand.