

Laura J. F. Hecox

By Frank Perry

From 1869 to 1941 the federal government maintained a white, two-story lighthouse at Santa Cruz. Located near the site of the present beacon, it was built to aid the many schooners and steamers that came to Santa Cruz then to pick up lime, lumber, and hides. Through the years three different people served there as keepers. The longest to stay at the post was Laura Hecox. She faithfully tended the light each night for 33 years.

Miss Hecox was born in Santa Cruz in 1854. She was the daughter of Adna and Margaret Hecox, who had come to California by wagon train in 1846. Adna Hecox was appointed first keeper of the Santa Cruz light in December of 1869. Laura aided her father with his duties until he died in 1883, after which she was appointed keeper.

The old-fashioned oil lamp and lens then used in the light-house required several hours of maintenance daily. She had to regularly polish the lens, which on clear nights directed the light 14 miles out to sea. Miss Hecox was a particularly tidy lightkeeper, and was always praised at the quarterly inspections for her spotless lighthouse.

When not cleaning, painting, or repairing the lighthouse, she devoted time to her collection of marine life, minerals, Indian baskets, and other curios. She turned one room of the lighthouse into a small museum for the enjoyment of visitors. In 1904 she donated her collections to the City of Santa Cruz. From these collections grew the present Santa Cruz City Museum in Seabright.



Photograph of Miss Hecox

Sources

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- *Photograph courtesy of the Santa Cruz City Museum.*
- *For more information about Laura Hecox and the lighthouse, read Mr. Perry's book, which is available at the Library: "The Lighthouse Point: Reflections on Monterey Bay History". Soquel, CA., GBH Publishing, 1982.*

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