

Book illuminates history of lighthouse

By MARK BERGSTROM
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The battle over development of Lighthouse Point dates back more than a century to the time the federal government began looking at sites for navigational beacons, according to local author Frank Perry.

After four years of research and writing, Perry recently has published a book, "Lighthouse Point, Reflections on Monterey Bay History." The book is available at area bookstores.

Congress approved money to construct the first beacons on Sept. 28, 1850, just 19 days after California was admitted to the union.

The first lighthouse was built on Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay. The second lighthouse lit was at Point Pinos on the southern edge of Monterey Bay.

To provide a beacon on the northern edge of Monterey Bay, President Millard Fillmore signed an amendment to a lighthouse bill which provided \$30,000 to construct a beacon at Santa Cruz.

Construction first was held up by disagreement over whether a lighthouse should be built here or farther north at Ano Nuevo. Once that was resolved, construction was delayed 15 years by a battle over land ownership of what is now called Lighthouse Point.

The Santa Cruz lighthouse finally cast its beacon upon the Pacific on Jan. 1, 1870.

From that date until the lighthouse was replaced by an automated beacon atop a wooden tower in 1941, there were only

three keepers of the light, according to Perry, who represents biographical sketches of those keepers.

The first was Adna A. Hecox, who was in charge of keeping the light lit from 1870 to 1883. Upon his death, his daughter, Laura, took over and kept the beacon shining until 1916.

It was only her quick action which kept the light burning when the massive 1906 earthquake hit. The temblor shook the wooden lighthouse and shattered the glass chimney on the lamp.

The oil lamp she had cared for all those years was retired the next year. Because the town was served by electric power, the lighthouse became one of the first in the state to use an electric incandescent lamp, Perry writes.

The last keeper of the light was Arthur Anderson, who had been chief draftsman for the Lighthouse Service in San Francisco and later lighthouse inspector.

Poor health forced him to seek a slower-paced job, which he found upon Laura Hecox' retirement. He was keeper of the light until it was automated.

The lighthouse building was torn down in 1948. During World War II, the lighthouse area was off limits to the public. Fox holes, connected by a maze of tunnels, were dug into the point and machine guns were aimed toward the Pacific.

During Anderson's years, the government sold a strip of land to the city for use as a road. West Cliff Drive previously was an unpaved right-of-way through the reservation.

The automated beacon remained atop a wooden tower for more than two decades.

The current brick lighthouse was built in 1967 as a gift to the city from professional photographers Chuck and Esther Abbott, in memory of their son who had died in a surfing accident.

The Mark Abbott Lighthouse reflects the design of early-day Santa Cruz homes and is unique among West Coast lighthouses.

It also is the youngest lighthouse in the country.

In the 1950s, the landward portion of the old lighthouse reservation was deemed surplus by the federal government and sold to the city of Santa Cruz in 1960 for use as a public park.

The city first considered building a

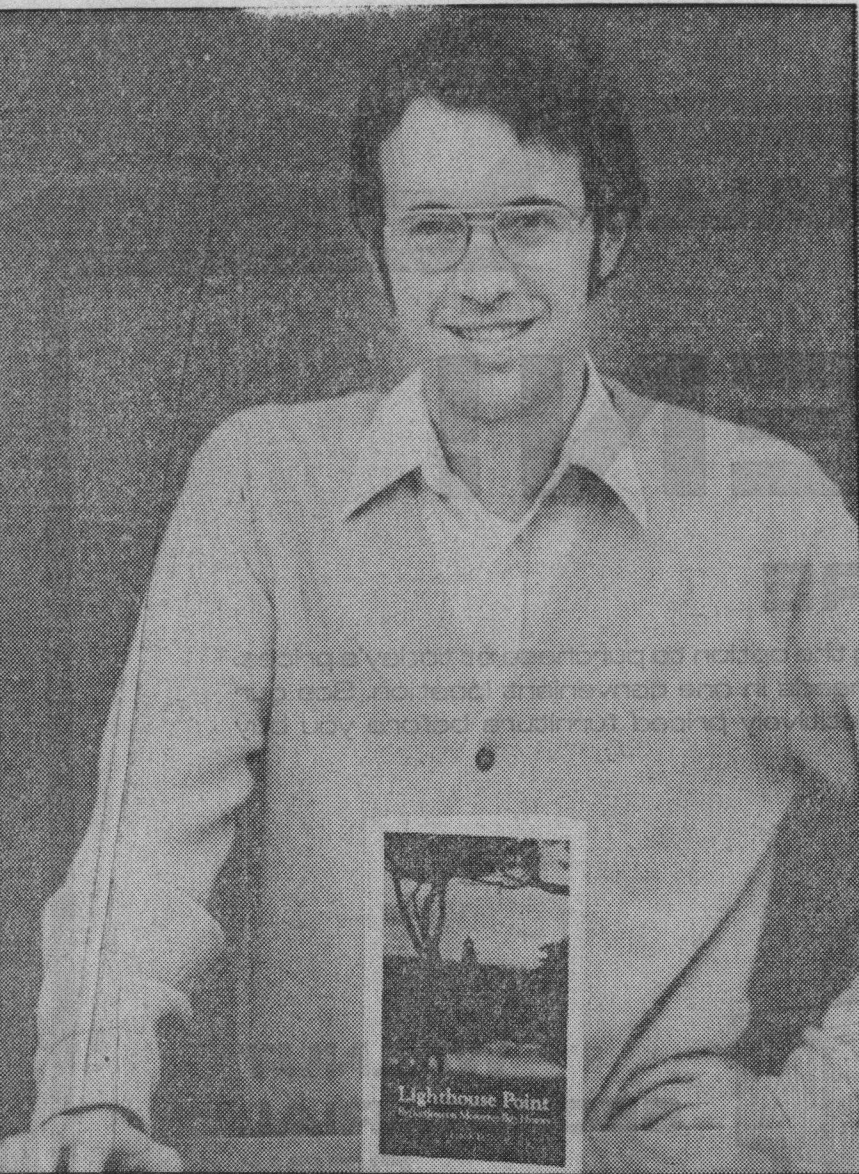
hotel or apartment complex on the site and then discussed a convention center.

A storm of controversy over the proposed convention center led to a citizens' ballot initiative to preserve Lighthouse Field for open space.

In 1980, the state purchased the land for what is to become Lighthouse Field State Beach.

Perry's book is full of historical photos of the original lighthouse, the wharf and of the only shipwreck in the lighthouse's history. Perry also weaves the story of the lighthouse against a backdrop of the history of the city.

A native Santa Cruzan, Perry studied at Cabrillo College and graduated with a bachelor's degree in earth sciences from UCSC.



Author Frank Perry