

From the Lightkeepers Journal

Memories from the Sheringham Point Lighthouse Preservation Society

By Rebecca Quinn

For 100 years, the Sheringham Point Lighthouse has withstood everything the environment has thrown at it; winter storms, dense fog, the salty air, and shuddering earthquakes. Earthquakes and tremors are a common occurrence for Vancouver Island. And while they are generally not strong enough to do much more than slam doors, occasionally one is felt more dramatically. One, in particular, sticks out in Mike Cross's mind. Cross, a junior lightkeeper under Fred Mountain in the early 1960s at Sheringham Point, recounts the story with a smile.

Before the lens was replaced in 1976, the third-order Fresnel lens sat in a bowl of mercury in order to allow it to rotate smoothly with little friction. A system of weights and pulleys rotated the lens, but had to be wound back up every 2 or 3 hours in the night when the weights reached the bottom of the tower.

"It was just a small earthquake," says Mike Cross in an interview, "I guess the lens wobbled some during the earthquake. We did spill some mercury onto the tower floor." Mike Cross and Fred Mountain were in for a bit of fun as they chased about half-a-cup of liquid mercury around the tower. It was "kind of hard to try and pick up and put back in,"--in case you didn't know, liquid mercury splits into little beads and is incredibly 'slippery'. Mike Cross adds, chuckling, "Now they get all excited if there's any mercury anywhere and we had a great big tub of it up there." Luckily, it didn't seem that the tower suffered any real damage from the earthquake.

Sheringham Point Lighthouse is celebrating its 100th birthday after having stood guard on the spectacular point for so long. As one resident points out, "Sheringham Point Lighthouse has the chance to be preserved that other pieces of the past, such as the wooden totem poles that once lined the coast, never had. If one believes we have an obligation to preserve the past for the future, there are few opportunities in this part of the country. I think Sheringham is a big one."

Please help preserve and protect the land, access and light station by joining the Sheringham Point Lighthouse Preservation Society www.sheringhamlighthouse.org