

Alaska Lighthouses

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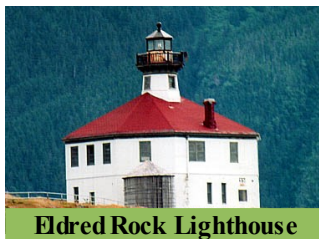
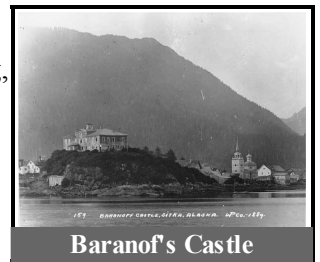
Our first lighthouses were actually given to us by nature. Sailors sometimes used landmarks such as glowing volcanoes to guide them. In the days of wooden ships with sails, the wind and waves could easily push them against the rocks and cause a wreck. So, the need for lighthouses as warning signals arose.



One of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World was a lighthouse, the famous Pharos of Alexandria, Egypt. It is the first one that is recorded in history and was built about 280 BC. Those records tell us that it was the tallest one ever built, 450 ft. (comparable to a 45-story skyscraper) and used an open fire at the top as a source of light. Pharos survived for 1500 years until it was destroyed by an earthquake in the 14th century. Today, we call people who study lighthouses pharologists. The name comes from this famous lighthouse.

Alaska, the Great Land, has 6,640 miles of coastline and including islands has 33,904 miles of shoreline. It has three million lakes and ten of its rivers are longer than 300 miles. The Yukon River wanders 1,979 miles from Canada to the Bering Sea. Is it any wonder that aids to navigation in Alaska waters have been important?

The Russians get the kudos for establishing the first official lighthouse north of Mexico. They first employed a light enclosed in a lantern atop the old administration building, frequently referred to as "Baranof's Castle," at the Port of New Archangel (Sitka, Alaska). That was 30 years before the U.S. Purchased the Alaska Territory from Russia 1867.



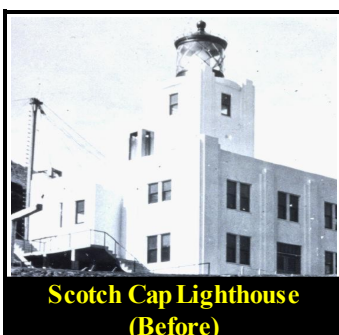
In the late 1800's the discovery of gold in Canada's neighboring Yukon Territory brought a rush of settlers and commerce to the southeastern coastal region. A series of wooden lighthouses was built quickly at that time; Eldred Rock Light is the only survivor from this early group.

The early lights were replaced in the 1920s and 1930s by an interesting group of concrete towers. Tree Point Lighthouse near the Canadian Border is one of these concrete towers. It was built in 1935. Notice how difficult it is to reach.

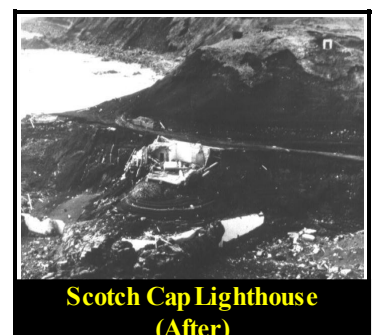


Alaska waterways have claimed scores of ships and lives. Several years ago, lightship sailors and fans were delighted to learn that the *Umatilla*, thought to have been lost, was still afloat at Ketchikan.

Alaska Waters have not only claimed ships, but, also lighthouses.



The Scotch Cap Lighthouse is one such victim. The structure was built in 1940. It was 40 feet above the sea and was five stories high. It was demolished by a 100 foot high tsunami in 1946 caused by 2 earthquakes that were only 27 minutes apart. All that was left of the lighthouse was the base. All five men stationed at the lighthouse died in the accident. The same earthquake was responsible for the waves that leveled many of Hawaii's coastal towns more than 2,500 miles away and caused 159 deaths. It only took 5 hrs. 45 min. to travel those 2,500 miles.



Recommended Reading:

Northern Lights: Tales of Alaska's Lighthouses and Their Keepers by Shannon Lowry