

The February 1960 storm was not the only event to cause damage to the lighthouse. In the East House dining room there is a display board with a hand written entry by the Head Lightkeeper as follows:



“Point Cabrillo Light Station

Christmas eve of 1928 early in the evening there was a light NW wind blowing and a very heavy sea running outside. About 9 pm, heavy winds came in from the south west. Seas started to roll over these banks 60 feet high, by midnight. The steamer Noyo - and the steamer Caspar from the Caspar Lumber Co., would go down in deep swells and we could just pick the running lights on the masts. The steamer Caspar was having engine trouble and started to drift toward the station. The fog signal station west end were broken from the heavy seas as shown in the picture and the water went through the station and out the front door. We had rocks on the grounds from the storm which weighed as much as 200 pounds, had a team of horses and a stone boat to haul them off the station. Fence posts 8 x 8 with barbed wire were broke off and washed back about 400 feet from the ocean.”

THE BIG STORM STORY

POINT CABRILLO



On February 8 and 9th, 1960, Point Cabrillo was struck by a series of monster waves reportedly engulfing the lighthouse, ripping siding from the building, upending the fog horn generators and depositing giant boulders and gravel on the bluff and for may yards inland. The source of these giant waves has been matter of some controversy over the years. Were these waves the result of some great storm system far out in the Pacific or did they originate from a far off seismic event as a tsunami?

I moved everyone up to the east house to be safe!

The Tsunami theory may have originated with the Owen's family, or from one of the Coast Guard Assistant Keepers stationed at Point Cabrillo around the time of the massive waves. Bill Owens was head keeper at Point Cabrillo at the time and lived at Point Cabrillo with his wife Isabel and several of their daughters. In published recollections of life at Point Cabrillo by Isabel Owens and daughters Joan, Diana and Jean, there is no reference to the event on February 8/9 1960 having been due to a Tsunami.

In a newspaper article from the 1970s about Point Cabrillo and Bill Owens the reporter states:

"Maybe the most memorable event was the storm of 1960 following an Alaskan earthquake" but the article then seems to

contradict this as Bill Owens is quoted saying "The waves were coming up over the bluffs and running right around the fog signal building." The big Alaska earthquake that impacted the northern California coast was in May 1964 not February 1960.

An article by well know lighthouse author Elinor DeWire from the 1990s describes the February 1960 event as a severe storm lasting all night and day with large waves driving onto the bluffs damaging the lighthouse.



Aerial view of the storm seas at Point Cabrillo Feb 9, 1960 from a CG patrol aircraft.

There was a massive earthquake in Chile in 1960 which generated Tsunami waves across much of the Pacific ocean and on the California coast. However this event was on May 22, 1960 and the Tsunami impulses reaching the California

coast were less than 6 feet.

The actual explanation for the massive wave conditions experienced at Point Cabrillo on 8/9, February 1960 was a series of very strong low pressure system in the northern Pacific entraining large swells aimed at the northern Coast of California and Oregon. Strong



CGC Taney in heavy seas from the same storm off San Francisco. The swells were estimated to be running at 70-feet.

cyclonic winds associated with the low pressure weather system typical in the Gulf of Alaska in the winter months can create ocean waves of massive proportions up to 40 and 50 feet. Over the time the waves move from the storm source as far away as the Aleutian Islands all the way to the west coast the wave harmonics can result in a wave crest catching up with a preceding wave crest ahead of it creating even larger "rogue Waves" as they are known. What Bill

Owens and the other keepers saw on the evening of February 8, 1960 rearing up off the headland engulfing the lighthouse were waves of this level storm generated not from a Tsunami.



Damage to the west wall of the Fog Signal building following the storm.