

November 27, 2012 – KINS Community Comment

Hello, this is Duane Rigge with a thank you message.

In Humboldt County, we have many different historical places, events and artifacts to celebrate, preserve and tell their story. One of these historic artifacts is the Cape Mendocino Lighthouse lens.

This magnificent first-order Fresnel lens operated in the original Cape Mendocino Lighthouse from 1868 until 1948 when it was decommissioned as an active navigation beacon by the US Coast Guard. The light safeguarded thousands of ships navigating the dangerous Pacific Coast and those destined for ports-of call at Port Kenyon and Humboldt Bay.

At the time of their development in France in the early 1800's, a first-order Fresnel lens was the state-of-the-art technology for projecting a small weak oil lamp light well over 20 miles out to sea as a reliable navigation beacon for sailing ships.

These Fresnel lighthouse lens were very challenging to manufacture, transport and reassemble in remote locations such as Cape Mendocino. The projected light from these lenses were highly valued by sailors navigating their vessels off of treacherous shores at night long before the invention of radio beacons and the modern global positioning systems.

In 1948, the Coast Guard loaned the lens to the City of Ferndale who dismantled it in 1949, built a replica lighthouse at the entrance of the Humboldt County Fairgrounds and reinstalled the lens there. In 2008, after an inspection by the Coast Guard, issues about the current housing structure were brought to the attention of the City and Humboldt County Fair Association. The "Save our Lens" group of local citizens raised over \$100,000 for the "Shining Light Fund" to dismantle and put the lens in temporary storage while the Ferndale Museum is remodeled for the public display of the lens.

By agreement with the Coast Guard this September, the lens was dismantled by a professional “lampist” engaged by the Coast Guard and placed in storage in Ferndale. The lampist wrote a detailed report with a summary that stated: “Overall, with the exception of putty, the Cape Mendocino Lighthouse lens is in good state. It needs conservation, but its age and manufacture, and the fact that its original clockwork remains, makes this lens special. It is no small thing that the lens exists so many years after it was taken from its lighthouse.”

It was through the dedication and perseverance of Ferndale business owners and civic leaders that brought the lens to the fairgrounds in 1949. Through that action, the lens has been preserved through earthquakes, floods, and challenging economic times. It is with similar dedication, the current civic leaders are again working hard to provide a new home for this incredible and important artifact of history and technology with a first-class interpretive site to showcase not only the lens but Ferndale’s rich maritime history.

A heartfelt thank you to the City of Ferndale as well as the Humboldt County Fair Association for the ongoing preservation and showcasing of the historic Cape Mendocino Lighthouse lens in an accurate replica of the Cape Mendocino Lighthouse at the entrance of the historic Humboldt County Fairgrounds in Ferndale for over 65 years.

A thank you goes to the Shining Light Fund which is a joint effort of the City Ferndale, the Ferndale Chamber of Commerce, Ferndale Rotary, the Humboldt County Fair Association and *The Ferndale Enterprise*.

And finally, a thank you goes to the Ferndale Museum Board for welcoming and agreeing to build a new home for this lens that it truly deserves and also honors its contribution to our maritime history and those individuals that served in the US Lighthouse Service and Coast Guard.

This has been Duane Rigge with a Community Comment.