



VISITORS TO PATOS ISLAND LIGHTHOUSE

By: **EDRIE VINSON**

Patos Island Fog Signal Station of 1893, which became a Lighthouse in 1908, kept a register of the visitors to the establishment. The register is now housed at the Orcas Island Historical Society, and photos of its pages from 1903 to 1978 are available on the website of The Keepers Of The Patos Light.

While it is unknown how many visitors came to Patos between its construction and the earliest surviving register, we do know that the fog signal was a destination for the family of keepers, for the inspectors and administrators of the Lighthouse Bureau, and a lay-over for travelers across the region. From 1903 the register suggests that the total frequency of visits to the island were steadily increasing but not dramatically until 1914 when the tour boat business began. For example, the City of Blaine brought 29 people to the island July 12 and another 34 on August 2, 1914. The San Juan II brought 47 on August 9 that same year. These visitors came mostly from the San Juans, Seattle, Bellingham, Birch Bay and Blaine. The Harndens start coming in 1912, but Captain William Harrison Harnden of Sucia who built and operated the Tulip King rarely signed in. He stayed with the boat, except in winters when he was relief light keeper. His daughters and wife who rowed the passengers to the beach in a rowboat, do, however, sign the visitors register. Harnden stopped at the resorts and picked up guests to visit Patos. He

also brought groups of people from several islands around the San Juans. Harnden probably operated tours longer than anyone else, into the 1940s.

Tours stopped altogether during WWI and again during WWII, but the greatest period of visitation was during the Great Depression when traveling to the United States was quite affordable. The bulk of visitors were Canadians. In one day, July 21, 1933, there were 80 people visiting. That year and the next people came from Holland, Spain, Germany, Argentina, Scotland, England, Norway, and India. By August 1938 there were only 220 the entire year.



After WWII ended the Activian and the Flying Clipper II came with boat-loads of people, but not as many as in 1933-1934. And the post war revival ended soon; by 1951 when Helene Glidden's *The Light on the Island* was published only 149 people visited.

In 1970 there were 164 including Camp Fire Girls, Boy Scouts, and guests from Japan and Switzerland at Camp Orkila. By 1978, the last year the lighthouse was manned, only two people signed the book, and those signed out.

Weather permitting, the Orcas Island Historical Society's Cruise Into History, May 21, 2017, will visit Patos and other Aids to Navigation. For a seat on that excursion call (360) 376-6566.

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