History Has Its Eyes on You: Lighthouses and Libraries Weathering Storms of Change

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Program Outline
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About the title….
• Comes from Lin-Manuel Miranda’s Brilliant Musical, Hamilton.
• Lines, Song titles, and themes can be used in practically any context (3rd time I have used it in my presentations).
• George Washington sings to Hamilton as he hands him his first command before the Battle of Yorktown.
• And it does make sense to start here because Alexander Hamilton created the Coast Guard.

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Lighthouses Then and Now
• Boston Light – first lighthouse in the United States (first lit in 1716)
• Sandy Hook NJ is the oldest working light (1764)
• Fort Gratiot – Oldest in the Midwest (1829)

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Lighthouses Then and Now
• Long, long before Boston, Sandy Hook and Fort Gratiot, there was a lighthouse in Alexandria ( Pharos of Alexandria), Egypt that was one of the Seven Wonders of the Western World.
• It is estimated that it stood 103-118 meters tall – or 2x taller than Old Barney (NJ) – our 4th tallest light.
• Also in Alexandria was possibly the most famous library of all times.

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Lighthouses Then and Now
• Location of lighthouses along the ocean shores and great lakes were strategic.
• Lights were naturally placed in harbors (often range lights) and along the shore.
• Lights are typically 20 miles apart because light could be seen around 10 miles.
• Each light had their own signature pattern for the lamp as well as a unique pattern for daytime identification.

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Lighthouses Then and Now

• Lighthouse automation changed everything. Electrical lights were introduced in the 19th Century.
• Automation of lights started as early as the 1920s, but took place in greater fashion after World War II.

Lighthouses Then and Now

• Ship radar and navigation tools have become more sophisticated.
• Even smaller vessels are likely to have GPS tools to help them find safe harbor.

Lighthouses Then and Now

• Changing roles and function of lighthouses.
• Now, primarily historic sites and tourist attractions.
• Some through State Parks and National Park Service.
• Buildings are not well suited for repurposing.
• Transition from life saving to educational and cultural roles.

Lighthouses Then and Now

• While their functions and value have changed, the lights are still lit at night.
• There is a value in providing these aids to navigation.
• There may be small vessels that do not have advanced radar that larger ships have.
• To argue that we do not need lighthouses is to argue that all books are online. Not there yet.

Lighthouses as a “Public Good”

• What is a “Public Good”?
• Traditional economists saw lighthouses as a “public good”
• John Stuart Mill in Principles of Political Economy (1848) stated:
  • “It is a proper office of government to build and maintain lighthouses, establish buoys, etc. for the security of navigation: for since it is impossible that the ships at sea which are benefited by a lighthouse, should be made to pay a toll on the occasion of its use, no one would build lighthouses for motives of personal interest…” (from Coase, 1974)

Lighthouses as a “Public Good”

• Paul Samuelson in his Economics: An Introductory Analysis (6th Ed, 1964) stated:
  • “Take our earlier case of a lighthouse to warn against rocks. Its beam helps everyone in sight. A businessman could not built it for a profit, since he cannot claim a price for each use. This certainly is the kind of activity that governments would naturally undertake.” (from Coase, 1974)
• Other examples from economists including Henry Sidgwick, & A. C. Pigou are shared as well.
Lighthouses as a “Public Good”

In his challenge to the notion of the lighthouse as a “public good”, Coase looked at the British Lighthouse System in the 19th Century.

Coase connected that the lighthouses in the UK were managed by Trinity House, a private corporation charged by royal charter over 500 years ago (https://www.trinityhouse.co.uk/about-us/trinity-house-faq)

So if the British lighthouses are managed by a private corporation, are their management a “public good?”

However, the tradition in the United States is for publicly funded and managed aids to navigation.

1789-1910 - United States Lighthouse Establishment & United States Lighthouse Board - Department of the Treasury (9th law passed by Congress)

1910-1939 - Bureau of Lighthouses - Department of Commerce

1939 - Joined the United States Coast Guard - Department of the Treasury (etc.)

Core element in this discussion is “nonexcludability”

“Excludability is when you can prevent consumers from getting access to a good or service who have not paid for it.

There is no question that maintaining buoys, towers, lights, lighthouses, daymarks and shapes is an expensive and labor-intensive undertaking. But the unalterable fact is that these physical aids are essential to the safety of navigation on our waterways. Funding this infrastructure is always going to be a challenge. It is my opinion that the Coast Guard is the best organization to provide national-international continuity, and they should receive sufficient funding to provide for the continued maintenance of these critical navigation items.

Other papers:


[Image of a lighthouse]
Lighthouses as a “Public Good”
• Despite the general recognition that lighthouses are an important aspect of a community, they are not funded without restraint.
• The fact that we cannot have maritime travel without them, does not mean that they are impervious to change.
• Constant reflection is needed to chart the course forward.

Libraries as a “Public Good”
• How many times have we heard that libraries are the “heart of the institution”?
• We are not revenue driven – in fact, we are revenue-adverse.
• We look at community outreach at Universities – a large percentage of work for the public good comes from libraries and archives.
• Our goals are to provide services for patrons who are with us now as well as those who will come years from now.

Libraries as a “Public Good”
• “Social Justice” Mission for libraries.
• Universities need libraries as a means of acquiring information for the diverse activities on campus.
• Because something is a public good, does that ensure their longevity?

Libraries as a “Public Good”
• ACRL Publication 2010
• Does this reflect a “tipping point”?

Connections for Librarians
• So where are the connections between Lighthouses and Libraries, especially during dramatic change? Plenty!
• Perception is Reality
• Free Rider Problem
• Different Dynamics of Building Use
• Imagery is Important
• Embracing the Change
Connections for Librarians

• Perception is Reality
• Travel + Leisure Photo Contest – June 4th

2017 MOST BEAUTIFUL COLLEGE CONTEST

Connections for Librarians

• Free Rider Problem
• Plagues both lighthouses and libraries.
• Large central expenses fund either without true understanding or context of what it costs to operate
• Many expenditures in areas that are not relevant

Connections for Librarians

Different Dynamics of Building Use

• Lighthouses
  • Beautiful
  • Historic
  • Historically significant as architecture
  • No real other purpose except as a home

Connections for Librarians

Imagery is Important

• Lighthouses lead you to safety & safe harbor.
• Symbols of harbor communities (Ludington, Michigan)
• Lighthouses can help when you are lost – provided you see them.

Connections for Librarians

• Imagery is Important
• Libraries have books.
• Libraries are your connection for information.
• The fountain of wisdom flows through books.
• Libraries can help when you are lost – provided you connect with them.
Connections for Librarians

• **Embrace the change**
  • Automation started changing lighthouse staffing needs after World War I.
  • Automation accelerated after World War II.
  • Changing technology enabled lighthouses to operate lighthouses with occasional visits.
  • Lighthouses have transitioned to historical sites and museums.

Connections for Librarians

• **Embrace the change**
  • Whether we want it or not, things are changing for libraries and on our campuses and communities.
  • Education is also changing for higher education in general (Purdue recent purchase of Kaplan University).
  • Space demands on campuses that will see us with less real estate.

Connections for Librarians

• **Embrace the change**
  • NOT a library problem of the 21st century.
  • Changes in the last 50 years:
    • Copy cataloging
    • Local online catalogs & shared systems
    • Expanded access (TDC, more subject headings)
    • Shared catalogs (MeLCat, etc.)
    • Discovery layers
    • Working papers management → digital repositories
    • Coffee and food in the library

Connections for Librarians

• **Embrace the change**
  • The Library’s challenge is to stay relevant and service oriented, even without all the resources and tools once at our disposal.
  • Unlike lighthouses, we don’t want libraries to be relegated to museums.
  • Who lives, who dies, who tells your story

Future Challenges for Resource Sharing

• Challenge for libraries are great both now and in the near future.
• There is almost always a higher priority for space than the retention of print resources.
• Administrator question - If something has not been scanned yet – is it valuable?
• Our community does not care where it comes from…

Future Challenges for Resource Sharing

• Just as a lighthouse cannot protect the shore where they are not located, can libraries support research where they do not have collections?
• Mansueto Library at Univ. of Chicago is a dream that we all have. Our desire to hold on to the past while embracing the future. It is a dream that many if not most cannot afford.
Future Challenges for Resource Sharing

- Original vs. digital copy
- Do we have the rights to share?
- Squirrels at the Met (NYC)
- Bottle from Salem, NC - ca. 1790–1805.
- Snuffbox from Germany (Schreizheim manufactory), ca. 1761-1770. In Gallery 538 – closed the day I went.

Future Challenges for Resource Sharing

- Building collections for use over a 10 year window is what makes resource sharing work well.
- However, our governing bodies will not be keen on buying items that sit on a shelf just in case.
- We invest heavily in discovery platforms to get people to use these resources – the ultimate “low class problem.”

Envisioning the Library of the Future

- History has its eyes on us!
- Just as a lighthouse keeper could not turn his or her back on a storm, we cannot turn our backs on our community’s needs.
- Our services must reflect our community’s unique needs

Envisioning the Library of the Future

- A Physical Space
  - Study
  - Print Materials
  - Interaction Spaces
  - Walk-in Access
  - Some of this can be done by others.

- An Ethereal Space
  - This is where we connect with our community.
  - This is where we provide clarity to a complicated information universe.
  - This is where we contribute as a “Value-Add.”
  - This is where we do ‘library’ work.
  - This cannot be done by others
Envisioning the Library of the Future

• At Kresge, the “Ethereal Library’s” value proposition is:
  • Live within the restrictions of virtually no collection space.
  • Figure out new collaboration mechanisms to serve our community.
  • Focus on what we can do vs. what we have done.
  • Forget the dead, take care of the living.

Envisioning the Library of the Future

• “A completely re-thought Kresge Library Services, transitions from a collection of physical reference materials to a full suite of information resources and research services, guided by expert staff” — Ross Dividend, Fall 2016
  • The library did not close, but become virtually unrecognizable.
  • You do not always choose your path, but how you respond.

Envisioning the Library of the Future

• When changes take place all at once, it forces you to take the leap.
  • Our library of the future is different and we have made mistakes...
  • ...but come on in, the water’s fine!

Questions & Thank You

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