

This is KPTZ FM 91.9 in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Nhatt Nichols, bringing you the news and commentary from the Jefferson County *Beacon* for Wednesday, November 27, 2024.

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On October 29, after a determining journey, the fourth-order Fresnel lens atop the Point Wilson Lighthouse was lit for the first time in 17 years. This historic relighting not only marked a significant phase in the ongoing restoration of the Point Wilson property but also added Port Townsend's lighthouse to a list of only four in Washington state with an operable Fresnel lens.

Originally shipped from Paris and installed in 1879, the lens is both a work of art and a worldly scientific advancement that lives on Port Townsend's shore. Specifically designed to help travelers orient through the elements, the beehive-shaped lens was fitted with three red flash panels to help signify Port Wilson. Completing one rotation per minute, it produces a white light with a red flash every 20 seconds: a signal that has represented its place on Puget Sound for 145 years. Over decades this signal used only human power, kerosene lamps, steam, and electricity to illuminate the waters of the Strait of Juan de Fuca and Admiralty Inlet, until the lighthouse was automated in 1976. After further modernization in 2007, the Fresnel lens was decommissioned. Though it never moved from its place of prominence in Point Wilson's lantern room, a VRB-25 beacon was brought in to do the job instead. After all, there has always been a job to do – a signal to shine and a way to light.

All this was done after the Point Wilson Lighthouse property saw the longest vacancy period in its decades-long history. All three of its structures – the lighthouse, the Keeper's Duplex, and the Chief's House – fell victim to the weather and the persistent battering of seagulls. It wasn't until 2019 that the Coast Guard found a partner in the United States Lighthouse Society: a locally-based organization with a heart for restoration and real resources for preservation.

Since then, necessary water and septic infrastructure have been installed or improved upon. Building rehabilitation and the replacement of the roof on the Keeper's Duplex have also been major projects, allowing for the Point Wilson property to re-open for more vacation rentals, programs, and partnerships in the last few years.

Lighthouse keeper Mel Carter said, "I see all of these possibilities here, how it's interconnected. Everyone is locally linked to this lighthouse. This is Port Townsend's lighthouse, Port Townsend's porch light." The relighting ceremony for Port Townsend's most historic porch light is set to be scheduled for next May.

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Today, nearly all turkeys on U.S. tables are a breed developed in the 1960s known as Broad-Breasted Whites. These birds can grow up to 50 pounds if allowed to reach full maturity with 70% of that weight in their chest. They can grow so fast that their legs break under the weight.

Heritage turkeys are what most likely comes to mind when imagining a turkey that's feathered rather than coated in gravy. In spite of all that, heritage breeds compose less than one percent of the overall turkey population, with only 25,000 produced annually compared to 200 million industrial broad-breasted birds.

Against those odds, 25-year-old local farmer Ren Winchester began raising heritage turkeys four years ago on a plot of land he rents off Beaver Valley Road. Winchester first decided to size up from chickens when he saw a turkey sell for over a hundred dollars at an auction. He didn't want to get too attached to his first turkey, so he

and his partner decided not to name it. Instead, they eventually started calling the bird “Yurkey the Turkey” for fun. Four years later, Yurkey is still hanging out with Winchester, in addition to 30 or so other birds.

Winchester keeps his flock of heritage turkeys growing in number, if not in pounds, because he’s hoping to preserve history. In 1997, the Livestock Conservancy declared heritage turkeys the most endangered domestic animal in the United States because farms were no longer raising heritage turkeys as they’re not as cost-effective for meat production.

When the Livestock Conservancy announced those findings, fewer than 1,500 heritage turkeys were left in the U.S. Winchester says, “They’re just these weird birds with lumpy heads, and no one really thinks about them at all... There are so many beautiful varieties that people don’t even know exist. We came so close to losing them, and it just shows you that there’s something to appreciate about anything out there, no matter how weird or insignificant you might think it is.”

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