Hillsboro Light at Pompano Beach — that mute but constant monitor to the great ships at sea as they ply the charted course day or night along the Atlantic sea coast — how many of us who have glimpsed this silent sentinel on the seashore from the road in passing really know or think about its highly important and often merciful service to mariners, and in these later days, the navigator of the hydroplane, who may also be passing along the coast? Comparatively few perhaps have tarried to inquire minutely and to learn that this all-steel tower rising 136 feet in the air supports at the top an intense flash light of 370,000-candle power which may be seen by the ship’s navigator at a distance of 31 miles in ordinary weather, or on an extraordinarily clear night, the reflection of this giant light in the sky may be seen by the mariner 35 miles at sea. This light is displayed in alternating flashes of 10 seconds each.

Hillsboro Light is what is known in the government light service as a skeletal tower. That is, instead of being built of brick tile like the huge chimney of a great industrial plant, as in the case of some of the older types of lighthouses, the upright steel cylindrical center of the structure, 13 feet or more in diameter, is supported and stayed to stand the storms with many steel rods, braces and brackets from its cement base to the top and according to the most scientific conception of steel construction. The top, or light and watch tower, is reached by a winding steel stairway on the inside of the tower, secure from the wind and the weather. All of the work of the captain or lighthouse keeper and his two assistants, except the annual painting of the exterior to stay the ravages of rust incident to the salt laden air of the sea, is done on the inside of the tower.

Captain Thomas Knight, the official keeper of Hillsboro Light, was at Palm Beach at the time of my visit, so I am indebted to Mrs. Knight and the first assistant keeper, B.F. Stone, for data for this story. However, both these were most courteous and cheerfully gave any information at their command. From them I learned that Hillsboro Light, which required two years to erect, was completed in 1906. Mrs. Knight said, as she recalled, it was built by the Champion Bridge Company. Captain

*See "Behind the Scenes," inside front cover.
Knight, a native Floridian and now 46 years old, came to take charge of the Hillsboro station in July, 1911, from Cape Canaveral, where he was born and where he was assistant lighthouse keeper of the Cape Canaveral light eight or nine years, when he was transferred here. He was also lightkeeper at Jupiter Inlet for five and a half years.

Hillsboro Light is known as No. 126 in the sixth district of the government lighthouse service, though it was formerly included in the seventh district. Charleston, S.C., is the headquarters, where the superintendent of the district is located, to whom Captain Knight has to make his monthly and annual reports. The superintendent also inspects Hillsboro and all the other lighthouses in his district four times a year. Hillsboro Light, First Assistant Stone told me, was one of the best kept stations on the coast, and further vouchsafed the statement by saying that Captain Knight and his assistants during the past year won the lighthouse pennant and the efficiency star, which distinctions of exceptional work are awarded each year.

Captain Knight has two assistants, B.F. Stone, first, and J.B. Isler, second, all three of whom are furnished comfortable homes for themselves and families. Besides these homes other minor perquisites and monthly salaries of $125 for the keeper, $115 for the first assistant and $100 for the second assistant are received. Their various duties, in addition to keeping the light in the tower burning every night from sunset to sunrise, involve rescue work in cases of storms and shipwreck, and to at all times keep the lighthouse in first-class shape.

This includes painting of the exterior once a year and the interior something like every third year. The watch periods in the tower vary in length of from 12 to 24 hours, though the day part of the longer shifts in calm weather give time for rest and sleep. The short and long shifts are divided among the men, whose off time with a maximum of 48 hours is also similarly divided or shifted, giving all reasonable time for recreation. Though the salary is not large, similarly the duties are seldom arduous for a great length of time.

Captain Knight's father before him, Captain J.A. Knight, was lighthouse keeper at Cape Canaveral in the early seventies, while a grandfather, Captain Burnham, was the keeper of the same light before the former and during the Civil War. Hence Captain Knight's splendid record at Hillsboro as well as other stations, is but natural. He has grown up in the service. He also has an uncle, Captain Wilson, an assistant at Canaveral, who served in the Mexican, Seminole and Civil wars. His grandfather Burnham was at Fort Capron, two miles south of Fort Pierce, when Fort Capron was burned by the Seminoles, and he barely escaped to sea in a small boat, being picked up later by a schooner near St. Augustine.

Captain Knight has a family of four children now quite grown. When he and Mrs. Knight first came to the Hillsboro station there were no roads of consequence along the beach and few residents much nearer than the little town of Pompano on the Florida East Coast Railroad, over a mile back from the seashore. Naturally, it was somewhat lone­some at first, but roads have since been built, the bathing beach a mile south improved, until now, with various homes in the vicinity and small pleasure craft in the inlet nearby affording considerable social intercourse. A couple of years ago also the Lake Placid winter school for boys, formerly at Coconut Grove, was located near the lighthouse. All of these and the development of residence subdivisions nearby, are attracting visitors, bathing and fishing parties, until Hillsboro Light is now quite firmly on the list of enjoyable places to visit along the Atlantic beach in South Florida.

The immense glass flash light lens in the top of the tower of Hillsboro Light is of interest because of its great size, peculiar construction and its revolving mechanism. The lens consists of more than 300 curved glass prism sections set in a globular frame work of bronze eight feet in diameter, besides other smaller prisms at the center of the "bull's eye." The light is generated by a large lamp in the interior of this globular lens for lighting by means of a vapor burner with an asbestos mantel somewhat similar to many of the gasoline lighting apparatus of the present time used for house lighting, where electricity is not available.

This lens is skillfully and substantially built on a circular platform which sets in a large steel or circular vat containing approximately five gallons of mercury, which the whole flashlight lens and revolving mechanism floats. The mercury is used in lieu of bearings or similar device, I was told, because of the less friction involved and because of the more desirable sensitiveness to adjustments and rotation of the lens. The rotation of the lamp and the lens is accomplished by means of clock work gears and weights very similar to those employed in a grandfather old clock.

The weights in this seeming primitive motive power are of heavy metal slugs fastened to the end of a small metallic cable suspended from the steel shaft in the center of the tower. This clock motor has to wound every three hours for vapor lamps. Because of the effect of the temperature on the mercury in which the big lens floats, a man on watch in the tower is required to take off or put on weights on this cable to maintain the proper efficiency of the light. Some of the adjustments involve small weights of little more than a quarter of a pound and from two up to five pounds or more.

That the lightkeeper's night work is not all monotonous routine may be gleaned from the fact that so minute in adjustment is the needle in the burner of his va
lamp that if perchance, as sometimes happens, a grain of sand or small fibre of asbestos from the mantle gets into the needle the

Hillsboro Lighthouse. [Historical Commission]

Upper left: the plaque indicates that the gear shift was manufactured in 1880 in Paris, France. [Hibbard Casselberry] Upper right: the watch room, with windows that face out in all directions, is located below the gear system. [Hibbard Casselberry] Below: the electrical conduit, originally kerosene, powers the pair of "clam shell" revolving lenses that had been invented by French physicist Augustine Fresnel.
light is immediately extinguished and he must repair it at once.

This accident of occurrence must also be noted on his nightly log and show in his monthly report to headquarters. In stormy weather he must also keep a sharp lookout from his tower for passing vessels to warn them if they appear to be getting too close to the reefs or sandbars near the beach.

In case of shipwreck near enough to his lighthouse so that it is possible, he or his assistants must also put out to sea in one or more of their three 12 to 20 horsepower gas boats and render such assistance as may be possible. During the more severe storms it may be necessary for the man on watch to warn passing ships being crowded too close to shore, by the firing of a gun or the displaying of special light signals. Nineteen disabled hydroplanes alone have been towed in at Hillsboro light during other rescue service.

The location of a lighthouse is an indication to the mariner of rock reefs, shoals or sandbars off the shore in the vicinity, and he readily understands that he is to keep a certain distance from the shore, particularly in stormy weather. There are rocky shoals some 200 or 300 feet out from the beach at Hillsboro. These lighthouses are so stationed that the navigator as he passes one light begins to look for the next one on his way. This with the aid of his charted course keeps him out of danger most of the time except during blinding storms or heavy gales.

First Assistant Stone, with whom I talked, said he came to Hillsboro Light last June from the lighthouse tender, Water Lily, on which he was chief engineer for five years. He had during this service visited all the stations on the Atlantic coast in the jurisdiction of the Water Lily, and was for a time connected with the lighthouse at Mosquito Inlet, just south of Daytona. He stated among other things that the flash light in the Hillsboro tower was on exhibition, shortly after it was made, at the St. Louis World’s Fair and was later shipped direct to Hillsboro for installation. He pronounced it as one of the best lights along the coast.

The Founding of Broward County’s Twenty-Nine Cities: A Chronological List

Dania: November 30, 1904.
Pompano Beach: June 6, 1908.
Fort Lauderdale: March 27, 1911.
Broward County: October 15, 1915.
Deerfield Beach: June 11, 1925.
Davie: November 16, 1925.
Hollywood: November 25, 1925.
Oakland Park: November 25, 1925.
Hallandale: May 11, 1927.
Lauderdale-by-the-Sea: November 30, 1927.
Hillsboro Beach: June 12, 1939.
Plantation: April 30, 1953.
Lazy Lake: June 3, 1953.

Lighthouse Point: June 13, 1956.
Pembroke Park: December 10, 1957.
Cooper City: June 20, 1959.
Lauderhill: June 20, 1959.
Sunrise: June 22, 1961.
North Lauderdale: July 10, 1963.
Coconut Creek: February 20, 1967.