

## EARLY UNITED STATES COAST PILOTS

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(Extract from the article: "The United States Coast Pilots"

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The "American Coast Pilot", known as Blunt's Coast Pilot, describing the waters of the Atlantic Coast, was the first Coast Pilot volume published in America. It appeared first in 1796, and was published by Edmund M. Blunt of Newburyport, Massachusetts, then a printer by profession who also dealt in nautical instruments and publications. The first edition was appreciated so much and was in such great demand that a second edition was published in 1798. This early work was compiled from notes of pilots and shipmasters, but subsequent editions also included data collected by special survey expeditions financed by Blunt himself: Mariners of this period disclosed information of this kind with great reluctance, for they considered their professional knowledge of the secrets of the sea too valuable a business asset to be published.

Two sons of Blunt, both of them hydrographers of note, continued as a private enterprise the work of revising the American Coast Pilot. The twenty-first and last edition was published in 1867. Coast Pilot information, however, can be collected only imperfectly and at great cost by private enterprise. Consequently the maritime public was insistent that this task be performed by the Federal government, and the Coast Survey, which had been engaged in charting the coasts of the United States since 1816, undertook the preparation of an Atlantic Coast Pilot, which was published about the time of the last edition of the Blunt publication. This was 14 years after the first official edition of Davidson's Directory of the Pacific Coast. At the present time all private publications containing piloting information relative to the coasts of the United States and possessions, are compilations from Government publications and are generally based on the work of the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey.

Before the acquisition of California by the United States, comparatively little was known of the hydrography and geography of the Pacific Coast, except by the few navigators trading along its sea-board and the daring otter hunters familiar with every cove, rock, and headland.

The first accurate detailed information of the West Coast was contained in the Coast Pilot Notes of William Pope McArthur, an officer of the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey who, in a short but brilliant career, showed unusual qualities of leadership and accomplished much under adverse conditions. McArthur was ordered to the West Coast by the Superintendent of the Coast Survey in the fall of 1848. This period witnessed one of the most spectacular expansions in shipping ever known, due essentially to the development of gold mining near San Francisco, and marks the time of the first definite action of the Coast Survey toward making surveys of the Pacific Coast (1). In 1849, McArthur made an estimate of the increase in the combined population of San Francisco, Sacramento, and Stockton. From scarcely 100 people in these three settlements the number rose to about 175,000 in the short space of 18 months. McArthur died of illness in December, 1850, near Panama Harbor while returning to the East Coast. About the same time Professor George Davidson, then a young man, was sent from Washington to the Pacific Coast and began collecting Coast

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(1) *There was not justification for surveys of the Pacific coast at an earlier date. Although the northern limits of the Oregon Territory were settled in 1846, it was not formally claimed by the United States until 1848. The conclusion of the Mexican War in 1848 resulted in the cession of California. The United States had no Pacific coast before 1848.* (Editor.

Pilot information while engaged in the control surveys of the coast, surveys which were made under serious difficulties. For a period of more than 50 years the biography of George Davidson might almost be considered the history of the activities of the Coast Survey along the Pacific Coast from the Mexican Border to the Arctic. In 1854, Davidson began to write, outside of his working hours and in addition to his other duties, his Coast Pilot Notes, or Directions, which were published in one of the contemporary daily journals of San Francisco. (2)

The first official publication of a Pilot for the West Coast consisted of Davidson's Notes included in the Coast Survey Report for the year 1858. The first Pacific Coast Pilot information issued separately by the Coast Survey in books especially designed for the purpose was made in 1862. These volumes were the first of this character published by the Coast Survey and antedated its Atlantic Coast Pilot. (3) The new Pilot, a revision of the Coast Pilot Notes in the 1858 Report, was named "The Directory of the Pacific Coast of the United States". In 1867, Davidson submitted "The Directory of Alaska", and, in 1869, his "Coast Pilot of California, Oregon and Washington on Territory" was published.

"The Davidson's Coast Pilot of California, Oregon and Washington", edition of 1889, is the most elaborate of them all and has been referred to as "a monumental work standing unequalled as work of reference for the mariner, for the historian and for the geographer".

More about McArthur and George Davidson may be found in Captain Thos. J. Maher's most interesting article, "The Coast Survey on the Pacific Coast", in the Field Engineers Bulletin of December, 1934.

Twelve Coast Pilot volumes and one Inside Route Pilot (New York to Key West) are now published by the United States Coast and Geodetic Survey. They describe the coastal waters of the United States and possessions, and the Intracoastal Waterway along the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts.

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(2) *It is said that the Superintendent of the Coast Survey at first refused to publish this information officially for fear that some of it might be erroneous.* (Editor).

(3) *Although 66 years after the first "American Coast Pilot" for the Atlantic Coast, it was published actually only 14 years after there was a West Coast.* (Editor).

