

A trip down memory lane

by Marek Błus

Imagine it's 1935. It was the year Gustaf Ericson's fleet of sailing vessels amounted to 28 ships (the largest ever!). It was also when owners from Scandinavia still operated numerous schooners in domestic and short sea traffic. Visualise embarking as a deck apprentice on one such wooden vessel in Esbjerg (maybe with the intention and hope to join an Ericson's windjammer next time). Your small, two-masted ship was loaded with bagged grain destined for Gothenburg. Today, as a retired salty dog, you browse a stamp binder, recalling the good old days – and, of course, the sea views! And together with you – we do, too!

Just after leaving Esbjerg, your boat passed the Blåvandshuk lighthouse (built in 1900) starboard. Still, she didn't turn north immediately because of the Horns Rev shallows. Your skipper told you that cape Blåvandshuk is the westernmost point of the Danish soil and – obviously – the lighthouse's square tower is the country's westernmost building.

The schooner changed course north after passing a lightship that marked the western end of Horns Rev; however, she kept her distance from the shore (called Iron Coast because of the lack of shelters, a setting that wrecked many ships during western storms). The skip was a teenager when, in 1903, the steamship *Avona* got stranded nearby the Port of Hvide Sande (sadly, the entire 24-strong crew was lost). The disaster led to the construction of the Lyngvik lighthouse (1906), the flashing light of which you saw only slightly above the horizon, just like the following Bovbjerg lighthouse (1877).

Your schooner approached the shore close by the Port of Hirtshals, marked by a lighthouse bearing the same name and erected (1863) west of the harbour. Skagen was only four hours of sailing, it was late

afternoon, and you were surprised that there were two towers over the cape. A mate explained that only the taller, called the Grey Lighthouse (1858; with 46 metres, Denmark's highest at that time), is topped with a strong light. The smaller, the White Lighthouse (1747), was turned into a signalling station after 111 years of service (engraved by Czesław Ślania, only the White has a stamp).

With Skagen disappearing aft, you kept a good lookout as the Swedish coast should be visible after midnight. And there it was – first lit by the flashes of the Vinga lighthouse (1890) on the right bow, then the Råbbehuvud lighthouse (1933) began blinking on the port bow. The ship was on the right way but slowed down to reach the skiers at dawn. Passing Vinga by daylight, you noticed a small, round tower. Your tutors explained that it is also a lighthouse: raised in 1854 to accompany an older tower (1841) to cast "double light." When a fixed flame of fossil fuels was the sole light source, "doubling" the fire at the same height was the only method of distinguishing two adjacent lighthouses.

A few days later, after discharging in Gothenburg, on the way for the next cargo to the Port of Grenaa, your boat passed a unique

example of a "double light." It was Nidingen (both towers built in 1834, elevated in 1847), the very last active aid to navigation of its kind in the world (you don't remember the tallest, white tower with a black strip depicted by a stamp engraved by Martin Mörck; it was built in 1946, but you changed your job to brokerage earlier...). Grenaa got marked by the Fornæs lighthouse in 1982, located at the easternmost point of the Jutland peninsula. The next port of call was Trelleborg, with the Falsterbo lighthouse (1795) the closest to passage.

The freight was again booked in Denmark (Aabenraa, to be precise), and your skipper decided to sail via the Storstrøm strait between Zealand and Falster. The Møn lighthouse (1845) welcomed you to Danish waters here, the Omø one (1894) opened the Great Belt, and the Taksensand lighthouse (1905) marked the last miles toward the port of destination. Yet, there's a difference between the picture on the stamp and the one your memory holds. Yup, the tower was much taller in your youth: it was lowered from 32 to 19 metres in 1953. A very rare operation on a lighthouse tower indeed!

In the 1935's Aabenraa, you discharged for leave...

