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A History of South Carolina Lighthouses by John Hairr

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A History of South Carolina Lighthouses by John Hairr

Abstract

Ben Neal of Richland Library reviews *A History of South Carolina Lighthouses* by John Hairr.

Keywords

book reviews, South Carolina, lighthouses

A History of South Carolina Lighthouses

John Hairr

The History Press, 2014, \$16.99

Lighthouses still manage to be a source of fascination and a tourist destination for many; in some ways, this could be said to be the result of their dual nature. Lighthouses manage to both be a technological marvel and a relic of the past, just as they are eminently useful to this day and a destination for sightseers; they are structures that belong both to the land and the sea. South Carolina, of course, is home to many lighthouses of historical note and it is with that in mind that John Hairr's *A History of South Carolina Lighthouses* was released in the early part of 2014.

So many books on the subject fall under the category of "coffee table books"; glossy and expensive volumes that are made to be displayed and marveled at instead of read, and are most valued for their aesthetics rather than the information they present about lighthouses. With *A History of South Carolina Lighthouses*, author Hairr (*South Carolina Lighthouses*, 2002) seeks to not only rectify that problem, but also the tendency of myth (including the myths perpetuated by his previous volume as he notes in the introduction) and the apocryphal, not to mention the inclination not to "rock the boat" as far as local lore is concerned.

Covering about a dozen different lighthouses, Hairr uses previous scholarship and primary documents to provide brief, yet detailed histories of the many lighthouses that populate South Carolina's coasts. While some historical black and white photographs are present, this is no coffee table volume; but instead an earnest effort to inform. Hairr's work is obviously well-researched and documented, and is presented in a manner that is as accessible as local history titles can be; and is consistent with a chronological history and a recap of the current status of the structure in each chapter.

While the structure and depth of research make this an appealing title, some lighthouses are given more of a focus than others, with some just relegated to a few pages. It's unclear if this is a result of available documentation or author interest; but it gives one the sense that a narrower focus on a select few lighthouses may have made for a more fulfilling read. Hairr notes in the introduction that local provincialism and defensiveness had colored past histories of the lighthouses, and one must wonder if a desire to avoid angering locals by not including certain structures were a factor here as well.

Overall, this is an accessible and brisk read that will appeal to lighthouse aficionados, those with a general interest in South Carolina history, and those who enjoy maritime histories. This title would certainly be a welcome addition to both South Carolina academic and public library collections, and is a good counterpoint to the many glossy coffee table volumes that are published each year.

Ben Neal is a Librarian I at Richland Library

