

Historic Light

By MAYO HAYES O'DONNELL

Continuing the history of the Point Pinos Lighthouse as told by John H. Hussey of the National Parks Service and published by the Book Club of California, we begin with the appointment of Mrs. Charles Layton as lighthouse keeper after her husband was mortally wounded while a member of a posse attempting to capture the bandit Anastacio Garcia in November, 1855.

Mrs. Layton was appointed Jan. 4, 1856, and served faithfully until her resignation in 1860. She was remarried to George C. Harris, keeper of the same station from 1861 to 1863. During the last century it was not unusual for women to serve as lightkeepers. The Point Pinos station has had two: Mrs. Layton and Mrs. M. E. Fish.

The station logbooks—unfortunately no longer preserved at Point Pinos—give intimate glimpses of the quiet lives led by the keepers during the early decades on the isolated headland.

One entry records the finding of bear tracks on the lighthouse reservation in 1860; another notes the birth of a litter of pigs to the keeper's sow. The periodic stops of the supply vessel from San Francisco provided eagerly-anticipated breaks in the station routine.

It is not often that the lightkeepers are enshrined in the pages of the world's good literature, but such was the destiny of "attentive and courteous" Captain Allen L. Luce, who reigned at Point Pinos for a decade or more following his appointment in October, 1871.

One day toward the end of 1879 a dark, thin young man, dressed like a Bohemian and gaunt

from illness, presented himself at the lighthouse after a ramble through the woods from Monterey. Keeper Luce welcomed the stranger with his usual hospitality. "He played his piano, showed off his ship models and displayed his oil paintings," wrote Mr. Hussey.

"Impressed by these interests which were so foreign to those of the hardy keepers in his native Scotland, the visitor took his leave. Luce was later rewarded with seven lines of description in Robert Louis Stevenson's essay 'The Old Pacific Capital!' Many a greater man has made less of a mark in history," continued John Hussey.

Over the years the Point Pinos Lighthouse has changed little. The only significant alteration came after the 1906 earthquake, which severely damaged the structure. During the repair process, dormers were placed on the roof, a porch built at the entry and the kitchen lean-to enlarged.

No vessel has ever been wrecked due to failure of the Point Pinos light. Though the lamps have been changed over the years to burn, successively, oil, kerosene and in 1915, electricity, the original lenses and prisms are still in use.

"Point Pinos Lighthouse is now the oldest on the Pacific Coast. The side wheel steamers, the proud clippers and the coastwise schooners which once were grateful for its warning beam have all now vanished, but the successors to Charles and Charlotte Layton keep the lamp burning for new generations of mariners."

So ends the story of the lighthouse as reported in the 1964 Keepsake Series of the Book Club of California.

The romance of the light has its human side in the keepers who served it over the years. These individuals were a special breed, willing to endure the enforced isolation, the loneliness and the constant vigilance necessary.

Point Pinos' first keeper was Charles Layton, who died before he could see the light in actual operation. His wife, Charlotte, was appointed keeper of the light by the secretary of the treasury, under whose direction the lighthouse service operated for many years. The service now is under the Department of Transportation. Charlotte Layton married George Harris in 1860 and he became the third keeper.

The fourth keeper was Capt. Allan Luce, whom Robert Louis Stevenson mentioned during his residence on the Monterey Peninsula.

Mrs. Emily Fish was the light's fifth keeper. The two women who tended the Point Pinos Light served a total of 40 years in lighthouse keeping service.

Truman Cook was the last keeper at Point Pinos and was also the last civilian keeper in the lighthouse service in California.

In the early days of the light, the keepers complained of not having a road on which to get a wagon in and out for supplies. As a result, a road was cut through the thick growth of brush and trees in 1872 to connect the lighthouse with the rest of the community.

This same road was used by the Methodists in establishing the axis of their summer religious retreat encampment.

The U.S. Coast Guard now is responsible for the care and maintenance of all lighthouses. Monterey Station has the Point Pinos Light under its aegis.

A ship out at sea can establish its position by observing, for example, the angle between the Point Pinos Light and the light at Santa Cruz Point 20 miles north or that at Point Sur 26 miles south, and then computing its location by triangulation. The lights therefore, serve not only to warn navigation of dangerous coastal hazards but to assure a ship of its exact latitude and longitude.

In May, 1975, the Point Pinos Light with its fog device was completely automated. The light's intermittent beam is visible 15 miles at sea. The fog horn is located several hundred

aid, a Class D radio beacon, situated in the lighthouse basement, operates on a 290-kilocycle frequency with a range of 20 miles. It transmits repeatedly the International Morse Code letter "P" for 14 seconds out of each 15 second interval.

Since the installation of the Point Pinos Light, fewer accidents have occurred at this hazardous spot than heretofore. But there is no question that the coast hereabouts is treacherous. In May, 1924, the SS Frank H. Buck ran aground at this site. The ship was refloated several weeks later only to collide with the SS President Collidge in San Francisco Bay. The Buck was a total loss!

Point Joe has been responsible for damage to such ships as the SS St. Paul in 1896 and the Celia in 1908. Cypress Point caused the wreckage of the SS Flavel in 1925 and the SS Stetson in 1934.

Even the local Coast Guard has not escaped the accidents caused by treacherous sea hazards. One of its forty-four footers was damaged at Point Pinos while going to aid the fishing vessel, Santa Rosalia in 1970. While the service boat received approximately \$100,000 in damage, the Santa Rosalia was a total loss with one man drowned.

Amusing as well as frustrating for the local Coast Guard has been the history of foghorns at Point Pinos.

In 1926 the service installed an electric siren to operate as a foghorn. But this proved to be unsatisfactory because its characteristics were too hard to control. Also, its particular sound annoyed the public. Another type, a Clark-Cooper Alhorn was substituted.

At the request from the local fishermen for a louder horn, the Coast Guard established a Diaphone Class C in the early 1950s. The result was an inch-thick fire of complaints, running the gamut from A— an offer from a hotel owner to sell his property cheaply to the Coast Guard (this document is on file) — to Z — a complaint from an irate cat lover that the foghorn was causing his pet to have convulsions. The Coast Guard obligingly changed the horn once more in 1962-63.

In 1974 the service decided to discontinue this particular fog device and use a battery operated horn mounted on the