

Coastal Lights

BY MAYO HAYES O'DONNELL

In addition to the Point Pinos Lighthouse near Pacific Grove the history of eight other lighthouses along the Pacific Coast is told in the 1964 Keepsake Series published for the membership of the Book Club of California.

During the Spanish and Mexican periods there was not a great deal of shipping activity along the Pacific Coast; consequently, there was little agitation for aids in navigation, wrote Francis R. Holland Jr., who had called the attention of the Book Club of California to the Bache drawings reproduced in the series and who wrote its introduction. Mr. Holland is park historian at Cabrillo and Channel Islands national monuments.

After California came into the union and the discovery of gold brought an influx of people to the coast, the western shores of the United States began to take on aspects of a modern-day freeway. The surge of shipping activity brought forth cries for increased aid to navigation.

Congress heard the plea and passed several bills to construct lighthouses and place buoys marking river channels. By 1852, 16 lighthouses were ordered for the West Coast, but only enough money was appropriated for eight or nine.

Purchasing a ship, the contractors hired skilled workmen, procured wood, plaster, paint and glass — everything for building the houses, they later reported, except brick, lime and stone—loaded all aboard and sailed around the Horn to San Francisco. Construction was begun immediately on Alcatraz and Fort Point lighthouses.

Completing these, they moved to Monterey and built the Point Pinos lighthouse, then erected the Farallon Islands lighthouse. In seven months they built four lighthouses, but only three were left standing. A few months after the Fort Point light had been finished the Army decided to build a fort on the site and consequently tore down the recently completed structure.

Next the builders headed north to Cape Disap-

pointment. But misfortune reared up, and the contractors' ship struck shoal near the mouth of the Columbia River, and quickly sank, taking with her the materials for the remaining lighthouses.

Returning to San Francisco, the builders obtained additional equipment and materials and resumed their project. Finally, in September, 1854, the last structure of the eight, Cape Disappointment, was accepted by the government.

The West Coast had its first seven lighthouses. But none had a light, and it was over two years before all were illuminated. The first lighthouse inspectors of the Eleventh District displayed something less than inspired activity, and the Lighthouse Board was displeased.

In July, 1855, they transferred Maj. Hartman Bache from the Fourth Lighthouse District to the West Coast. He brought to the job experience and the energy which had been lacking. Not long after his arrival, lights began to pop on, and new lighthouses were built along the West Coast.

Maj. Bache, an historian at heart, felt that the archives of the Lighthouse Board should contain measured drawings and pictures of each lighthouse. Sketches were taken to San Francisco and rendered into finished drawings. It is supposed that they were then sent to Washington. They next appeared at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco in 1915.

But what happened to the collection after that? It is known that one of the Point Loma drawings was hanging in the office of the commissioner of lighthouses in 1935, but an intensive search for this picture by the National Park Service in 1961 was fruitless.

Two of the drawings, one of Point Loma and one of Alcatraz, found their way to the Smithsonian Institution and now reside there. The other drawings have disappeared completely.

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.