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The Changing Light

By MAYO HAYES O'DONNELL

The light which has burned continually through the years at the Lighthouse on Point Pinos has changed with the times. The first beam was equipped with a sperm oil lantern in which the oil was forced up from its tank to the light by a rude piston operated by gravity.

A shutter moved by a falling weight mechanism rotated around the light, blanking it out during the eclipse period. Some years later kerosene was substituted, and in 1915 the light was electrified.

Now a mere 500-watt

lamp is used, but through a focal plane 92 feet high the lens throws out a 29,000 candlepower beam which is visible 16 miles out to sea. The bulb now turns off and on to give the Point Pinos characteristic flash of 20 seconds followed by a 10 second eclipse, but the old shutter mechanism and gasoline lanterns have been kept in readiness through the years.

The fog signal too has been altered in recent years, an air diaphragm horn being substituted for the siren signal. The two fog horns are turned on by the keepers when-

ever visibility is less than five miles.

In 1939, in the interest of National Defense, the U. S. Lighthouse Service was consolidated with the U. S. Coast Guard, and now as men of the Lighthouse Service are retired they are replaced by enlisted men of the Coast Guard.

The first of the long line of highly efficient lighthouse keepers was Charles Layton, who served from 1853 to 1855. Upon his death his wife, Charlotte, took his place. Layton had come to California with Col. J. D. Stevenson's regiment in 1847. In 1855 he was fatally wounded while with a sheriff's posse attempting to capture Anastacio Garcia, a noted outlaw.

Another woman keeper of the Point Pinos Lighthouse was Mrs. M. E. Fish. Other keepers have been Capt. Allen Luce, 1871; Dick Williams, 1914; Peter Nelson, 1931 and Thomas Henderson, 1938-1954, followed by W. S. Williamson, and Robert Stone (U. S. Coast Guard), first assistant, and Ray Davis, second assistant.

The lighthouse log-books give a glimpse of everyday happenings through these hundred years — of periodic stops of the supply boat, S. S. Madroma, from San Francisco; of bear tracks on the reservation in 1860; and the birth of a litter of pigs to the keeper's sow. Visits of wild game are frequently mentioned, and even today a small herd of deer frequents the reservation, drawn by their fondness for geraniums, so the keeper of that day thought.

The Point Pinos Lighthouse has had a relatively quiet history through these more than one hundred years in comparison to some of the others, with no dramatic shipwrecks caused by the failure of the light. Behind it the Point Pinos Lighthouse has an admirable record of 112 years of efficient and faithful service to the men of the sea.

R. O. Rott is the present head of the Lightkeepers, with three men under him.

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