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# Point Pinos Lighthouse

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THIS MONTH ON THE MONTEREY PENINSULA

August 1983

Point Pinos is the oldest, continuously operating lighthouse on the West Coast. (Alcatraz light now in disuse preceded Point Pinos by one year.) Since February 1, 1855, its beacon has flashed nightly as a guide and warning to shipping off the rocky California coast.

Point Pinos was named by the Spanish explorer Sebastian Viscaino in 1602. The name translates to "the Point of Pines." In 1734 the Spanish admiral Gonzales reported the Punto de Pinos, the southern headland of Monterey Bay, as a point heavily wooded to the shoreline. The Franciscan missionaries are believed to have walked here from their camp near Carmel in 1769. Their records make reference to a pond which is considered to be Crespi Pond on the reservation. The point was part of a large grant (2,666 acres) made by Mexico to Jose Maria Armenta in 1833 and which was later confirmed by the U.S. Government to Henry De Gaw in 1868. In 1852 the government purchased 25 acres for the light site. Later the Pacific Improvement Company having purchased some of the adjacent land from David Jacks sold an additional 67 acres to the Lighthouse Service.

In 1850 Congress appropriated funds for the construction of lighthouses on the West Coast and in 1852 the Secretary of the Treasury ordered the building of eight beacons, one of which was to be at Point Pinos. In March 1853 the bark Oriole was sent from San Francisco with men and materials. Construction started but difficulty with delivery of the lenses and prisms from France delayed the opening of the light until 1855.

The first keeper was Charles Layton, appointed to the post at \$1000 per year. Layton was killed in 1855 while a member of a sheriff's posse chasing the notorious outlaw, Anastacio Garcia. He was succeeded by his widow Charlotte who in 1860 married the third keeper George Harris.

Later in 1879 Robert Louis Stevenson wrote of visiting the keeper Allen Luce after a walk through the woods from Monterey and praised Luce's hospitality, piano playing, ship mod-

els and oil paintings. One other woman, Mrs. Emily A. Fish, was appointed keeper in 1893. She planted the trees that stand around the building today.

The light is a third order Fresnel (catadioptric) with lenses, prisms and mechanism manufactured in France in 1853. A larger, second order light had been planned but delay in shipment caused the present light to be substituted. The first light source was a sperm oil lantern in which the oil was forced up from a tank by a gravity-operated piston. A falling weight mechanism rotated a metal shutter around the light causing the beam to be cut off to seaward 10 out of every 30 seconds. This mechanism is still in place and could be used in case of a power failure. Lard oil soon replaced sperm oil and in turn was replaced by kerosene in 1880. At the turn of the century the incandescent vapor lamp was used, followed by electricity in 1915.

The present light source, located 89

feet above sea level, is a 1000 watt bulb, which amplified by the lenses and prisms produces a 50,000 candle-power beam visible under favorable conditions up to 15 miles at sea. Formerly the light had the rigid schedule of being lit one hour prior to sunset and extinguished one hour after sunrise. With automation completed on May 27, 1975, a small backup light was installed outside the tower and the main light was turned on permanently as you see it today. The present signal is a simple on-off arrangement.

As a further navigational aid, a Class D radio beacon operates continuously on a 290 kilocycle frequency, on for 14 seconds, off 1 second, with a range of 10 to 20 miles. A foghorn located several hundred yards from the station nearer the shore consists of two electric Tyfons diaphragm units. It was formerly turned on manually by Coast Guard personnel when lack of visibility warranted. It too is now automated.



Point Pinos Lighthouse, Pacific Grove.

LIGHTHOUSES

Monterey  
Public Library  
Alcatraz Room