

# Point Pinos Lighthouse still signals ships

Pacific Grove preservationists aid historic beacon

By Judy Hammond  
SCRIPPS HOWARD NEWS SERVICE

**P**ACIFIC GROVE — The beacon atop the Point Pinos Lighthouse flashed through the recent overcast, signaling a warning to shipping off the rocky coast, just as it has done for the past 140 years.

The lighthouse looks pretty much like it did more than a century ago. The light, automated in 1975, is cast by the same Fresnel lens that was manufactured in France in 1853 and installed in 1855.

Inside the Cape Cod-style building, newly refurbished and redecorated rooms bring back the homey look of the lighthouse between 1893 and 1914, when Emily Fish was the light keeper.

The lighthouse is now open to the public on Thursdays, Saturdays, Sundays and most major holidays, from 1 to 4 p.m. Newly trained docents, dressed in period costume, tell the lighthouse history. Admission is free.

They join a group of docents and, frequently, octogenarian guide Bruce Handy of Pebble Beach, a longtime mariner, who for the last 12 years has regaled visitors with stories of the lighthouse.

The city and the Pacific Grove Museum of Natural History operate the lighthouse museum through an agreement with the Coast Guard, which maintains the building and the light.

Refurbishing the old lighthouse, for many years occupied by government light keepers, is a project of the Questers, an international group devoted to the study of antiques and the restoration and preservation of historic buildings.

The Adobe Questers of the



ROBERT FISH/MONTEREY COUNTY HERALD

Monterey area took on the lighthouse project at the suggestion of Shirley Eljenholm of Pebble Beach, who proposed it in 1993 when she was president.

"It was my dream that we do something here," Eljenholm said.

With \$5,700 from the California State Questers, the living room was redone and work was started on Emily Fish's bedroom upstairs, both done to reflect the Victorian era when she lived there.

"We're restoring it to the time she was here and furnishing it in the turn-of-the-century period," said Merrill Leslie of Carmel, vice president of the Questers, who has redone several local Victorian homes and Carmel cottages.

Future projects are the kitchen-dining room downstairs and an upstairs room that will feature the Coast Guard, focusing on World War II years. Kent Seavey of Pacific Grove is researching that project.

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plaque that shows the lighthouse is on the National Register of Historic Places.

Point Pinos (Point of Pines in Spanish) was given its name in 1602 by the Spanish explorer Sebastian Viscaino. In 1850, Congress appropriated funds to build lighthouses on the West Coast and

two years later eight beacons were ordered to be built. The Point Pinos Lighthouse began sending its signal on Feb. 1, 1855.

The first light keeper was Charles Layton, who died before he could see the light in operation. He was killed in 1855 while a member of a sheriff's posse that was chasing

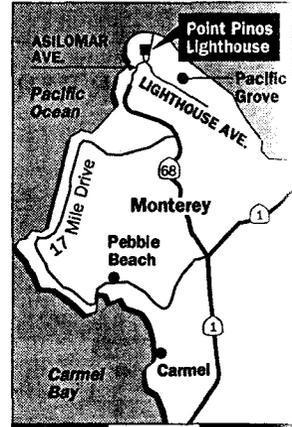
an outlaw. His widow, Charlotte, succeeded him, and in 1860 she married George Harris, the third light keeper.

Robert Louis Stevenson was said to have visited the next light keeper, Allen Luce, in 1879 on a walk through the woods from Monterey. He praised Luce's hospitality, piano playing, ship models and oil paintings. Luce retired after 20 years, and his replacement, Emily Fish, brought her own style to the lighthouse.

A world traveler and socialite, Emily Fish was a 50-year-old widow when she took the lighthouse job in 1893. A glimpse of her logbook, a copy of which is in the lighthouse, describes weather conditions, ships in trouble, the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, which damaged the lighthouse, and the Chinatown fire in Pacific Grove the same year.

On the second floor of the lighthouse is the tiny watch room, with a window overlooking the rocky

Now restored, the lighthouse at Point Pinos near Monterey looks much like it did when it was constructed more than a century ago



3 miles EXAMINER GRAPHICS

coastline. There Emily was served breakfast by her Chinese servant while she worked at her logbooks.

Known as the socialite light keeper, Emily frequently gave teas and parties in the lighthouse building, Eljenholm said.

After 21 years, Emily retired from her lighthouse duties in 1914. She bought a home on Sinex Avenue in Pacific Grove. She died in 1931 at the age of 88.

Vern Yadon, director and curator of the Pacific Grove Museum of Natural History for 35 years until his retirement in 1992, was always on a constant search for authentic lighthouse furniture, and often had to bargain for the valuable pieces, he said. The lighthouse has been open to the public since the 1960s. Yadon said.

"It's always gratifying for people who come to look at a building to see some of the flavor of it," he said of the renovation.

Bernie Ferrara, office manager of the Museum of Natural History, said the lighthouse is well visited by tourists and lighthouse buffs.

"From all over the world people come to Point Pinos — they're interested in lighthouses," said Handy, the former mariner and guide.

The Point Pinos Lighthouse is located near the intersection of Asilomar Boulevard and Lighthouse Avenue in Pacific Grove. Admission is free. For more information call (408) 648-3116.

San Francisco Examiner

Weekend escape  
The 140-year-old  
working lighthouse at  
Point Pinos in Pacific  
Grove, reportedly a fa-



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