

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Some Notes on Local Trees

In an old paper published in Monterey in 1909, I have come across an article written by Harry A. Greene telling of the history, discovery and habits of the cypress pine and oak trees which inhabit the Monterey Peninsula.

Harry Greene, who passed away several years ago, was the owner of a large home in New Monterey, where the tall redwood Christmas tree is lighted each year. He had always been interested in the historical background of the old capital and was a student of botany and floriculture. At one time he was familiarly known as "Tin Can Greene," because he planted trees and shrubs by the hundreds in tin cans, and when they had grown to sufficient size, he would give them away to anyone willing to plant and care for them, so great was his desire to beautify the landscape.

In the article which he wrote for the Cypress in 1909, Mr. Greene declares: "The Monterey Peninsula is unique from various points of view, but in none more than in its trees. Here, on a granite point, by the breakers of the blue ocean, is found the Monterey cypress (*Cupressus macrocarpa*), in a grove only a few acres in area.

"There, and on the extreme end of Point Lobos, less than two miles southward, are now but a few hundred of these most noble of all true cypresses; and they are found nowhere else in nativity. A number of these prehistoric trees are said to be over 2,000 years old. At least they are of great age, and as well worth seeing as the sacred cedars of Lebanon, which they resemble only in age."

In 1909 Mr. Greene was of the opinion that the grove of these trees should be preserved and that the United States government should make it a national monument. Unless this was done he felt the extinction of the whole group would be but a few years off. At present, 40 years later, the Del Monte Properties Company is still preserving the trees, Cypress Point clubhouse has been built within sight of the grove and Point Lobos has become a state park.

The macrocarpa, meaning "large fruited," was discovered by one Colligon in 1786 while he was gathering botanical specimens for La Perouse, the

French scientist, on his voyage to the Pacific. In September of 1947, a bronze plaque was dedicated at Carmel Mission commemorating the 161st anniversary of the landing of Comte de la Perouse at Monterey. The credit of the discovery of the tree is given, however, to Professor Hartweg, who visited Monterey in 1846. The worthy botanist named the cypress and regularly published its discovery.

As early as 1831 the Horticultural Society of London, writes Mr. Greene, had macrocarpas growing from seed obtained from A.B. Lambert, but it is not known from whence the seed had come.

Again, in 1834, in Clapton, England, macrocarpas were growing from seed obtained at St. Petersburg, Russia, where the tree was named *C. Californica*. Still lacking proper data as required, it seems these facts did not establish an official name. Large specimens of the tree are now growing in many places throughout the British Isles, even in Orkney, where they have withstood a most trying climate.

Quoting again from Mr. Greene's article: "About three miles distant from Point Cypress, almost due east, is another cypress grove of another species. Covering about an acre, with a few scattering ones southward, is found the *Cupressus Goveniana*, commonly known as California cypress, and it is an excellent tree for hedges. It was named after James Robert Gowen, secretary of the London Horticultural Society by K.T. Hartweg, who has the honor of being its discoverer."

Another tree listed by Mr. Greene was the agrifolia oak, named "Encino" by the Spaniards. In another reference I find that this species of oak may be considered the companion to the Monterey pine, yet the pine is unkind to its friend here on the Peninsula, by shading it to such an extent as to often deform its slower growing companion.

Throughout a large section of California the agrifolia oak, more than any other tree, adds special charm to the landscape.