

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

May 1, 1959

Our Oldest Natives

The most picturesque native trees in California are no doubt the Monterey cypress, found on Point Lobos and Cypress point. Upon these points grow all the Monterey cypress inhabiting their native heath. They are noted among botanists as having the most restricted native range of any California tree and of any cone bearing tree in the world, it is said.

Since letters have been used here from Laidlaw Williams of Carmel and Ronald L. Church of the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology at the University of California appealing for preservation of an area on the Peninsula of undisturbed pines, there should also be an appeal to save the cypress. There is a Monterey Bay Chapter of Nature Conservancy of which Mr. Williams is vice chairman, working on these projects.

The cypress grove on the Peninsula was found by a scientist in 1846. Theodore Hartwig, collector who worked among California plants for several years, gathered the first botanical material near what is now Carmel, and the next year an account of his discovery was published in the Journal of Horticultural Society, London, England. Seeds had previously been sent to England by others, and the seedling trees, then of some size, were growing under the name of *Cupressus lambertiana*, in honor of the noted English botanist; but Hartwig's description in the Journal, under the name *Cupressus macrocarpa* (large coned), was its first scientific or official record and the provisional name was abandoned.

Many visitors to California, having learned of these trees, their limited numbers and restricted range, are lured to motor along the shoreline over the 17 Mile Drive, and also to visit Point Lobos. It was reported in 1934 that there were several thousand trees on the drive, but many of these have since died or fallen in storms. Many artists have spent hours painting these cypress trees upon large and small canvases which hang in home perhaps all over the world to be admired continually by their owners. They are also recorded on many a photograph, on slides and film, much to the delight of the recorder and viewer.

Scientists who have studied this and other extremely local species state that at some remote period these

cypress were much more limited in area, the mainland probably having been connected with the Channel Island, and they are now living under changed conditions.

Bones of mammoths found on St. Nicolas and Santa Rosa Islands link these trees with an interesting past. Very few of those now extant show great vigor, and, scientists report, when the last Monterey cypress shall have perished in its native habitat, an upheaval of the channel bed may come and reveal former vast forests as petrified trees, the result of long time submersion.

An article appearing in Westways in 1934, states that cypress were at one time common in the Los Angeles area and may have been continuous along the California coast as evidenced by finds in the La Brea Tar pits and the clay strata, once the ocean floor. A part of a log recovered from the tar beds in Hancock Park, Los Angeles, and now in the Los Angeles museum, was identified by scientists in Washington as a cypress that does not grow within several hundred miles of the spot where it was found.

In 1917 park employees widening a roadway in Elysian Park, Los Angeles, plowed out some fine sections of petrified cypress trunk, embedded in yellow clay. Doubtless the remainder of the tree is still there. Four sections of great weight and solidity were disclosed, each about 16 inches long and an average diameter of eight inches. A good specimen of this tree was placed in the Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden, founded by Susanna Bixby Bryant.

The second-best section was given to the Los Angeles Museum. These specimens record the fate that has overtaken cypress of former days in our semi-arid climate.