

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Pt. Pinos Light

"Early West Coast Lighthouses" is the subject for the series of Keepsakes, consisting of nine folders, issued for the membership of the Book Club of California.

The series has just arrived at my desk and each is fascinating reading. Old drawings used as illustrations are most interesting, especially the one of Point Pinos on the Monterey Peninsula.

The series is edited by John A. Hussey and designed and printed by Arlen Philpott at the Tamal Land Press in Fairfax. The drawings were reproduced by George Waters Colors Production Inc. San Francisco.

Colored views of Point Bonita and Alcatraz lighthouses are reproduced from original drawings in the Smithsonian Institute, Washington, D.C.; the remaining prints are from photographs in the National Archives. Texts accompanying the drawings were written by authorities on the histories of the lighthouses depicted.

In October, 1849, Gen. Persifor F. Smith, a man of positive opinions in his first year as commander of the Army's Pacific Division urged Washington to build lighthouses at once on several obvious "bold and prominent points" along the Pacific Coast. One of the points he recommended was Pine Point, the southern headland of Monterey Bay.

It was not until March 1853, that the bark "Oriole" was sent from San Francisco with men and supplies to start construction on the pine-clad headland that sheltered the port of Monterey.

Contractors offered their choice of three sites, quite logically selected the one requiring the short haul for stone used in construction.

Maj. Hartman Rache, later 12th Lighthouse District inspector and artist of the drawing reproduced, was to upbraid the builders for choosing the "worst" location from the standpoint of navigation. But the selection cannot have been too much of a mistake, since the lighthouse still sends out its guiding beam from the original site.

By July 31, 1853, the little stone lighthouse was essentially complete. It was a story and a half affair, measuring 20 x 30 feet, with a round brick tower rising from its center and a wooden kitchen shed appended to

the rear. All the woodwork and fittings had come around the Horn from the East Coast. Its cost was \$26,000.76, considerably more than the contract price of \$15,000 due to specification changes and charges for transporting materials from San Francisco.

John Hussey writes: "But it was still two years before Point Pinos displayed its light. Washington A. Bartlett, a naval officer who had served in California during the American conquest, had been sent to Paris to obtain lenses for the West Coast lighthouses.

"He purchased a second order Fresnel light for Point Pinos, but the apparatus did not reach San Francisco until December, 1854. Meanwhile, a third order Fresnel light intended for Fort Point on the Golden Gate had been going begging since the new lighthouse there had been torn down to make room for fortification.

"It was decided to install this smaller light at Point Pinos, but first alterations in the tower were necessary. Thus it was not until Feb. 1, 1855, that the Point Pinos light was exhibited. It was the second placed in service on the Pacific Coast.

Tragedy clouded the first year's operation. The first keeper was Charles Layton, an Englishman who had served in both the British and American armies. After a fling at the gold mines from 1849 to 1852 he settled in Monterey and won appointment to the \$1000-a-year position of principal keeper at Point Pinos.

Then in November, 1855, Layton was mortally wounded while a member of a posse attempting to capture the bandit Anastacio Garcia.