

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

July 6, 1966

The Point Pinos Light

Mrs. Hazel Burr Sorley has sent to the Monterey History & Art Association the original copy of the notification to Mrs. Charlotte A. Layton of her appointment as "keeper of the Lighthouse at Point Pinos, California, the duties of which office you will perform until further notice, at a salary of one thousand dollars per annum, taking the place of Charles Layton, deceased." Signed: Your obedient servant Secretary of the Treasury.

Mrs. Sorley enclosed this information concerning her grandmother who received this appointment: "Grandma Charlotte Layton came to Monterey in January 1847 on the ship 'ERIE', making the trip around the Horn. She was a native of Beaufort, N. C. She came to California with her first husband, Charles H. Layton, ordnance sergeant third regiment, United States artillery. They were quartered at Fort Halleck this city with Gen. W. T. Sherman, when the latter was a lieutenant in the Army.

Mr. Layton was the first keeper of the Point Pinos lighthouse filling the position until 1854 when he was shot while a member of the sheriff's posse in the county. Following his death his widow was appointed to succeed him and filled the place for many years until her marriage to George C. Harris.

"Grandma Layton-Harris died Dec. 14th, 1890 in Monterey. She had three sons and one daughter, Caroline Layton Burr, my mother", wrote Mrs. Sorley from her home in Honolulu. Mrs. Sorley who is 75 years old says that it is years since she has been in Monterey—friends like the Jacks and older members of the Doud families have all passed away.

The Point Pinos Lighthouse is celebrating its 112th birthday this year and is about to be declared surplus property by the United States government, if it has not already done it. The building and reservation should be saved and put to some useful purpose.

The original 25 acres of the Point Pinos reservation was purchased by the United States government about 1852. The land was part of the Rancho Punta de Los Pinos of 2,666 acres, granted to Jose Maria Armenta in 1833 by Mexico and later confirmed by the United States government to Henry de Gaw in 1868. The Pacific Improvement Co. bought part of the land from David

Jacks and sold 67 acres of it to the Lighthouse service to be added to the original 25 acres.

For over 100 years a beacon of light has flashed nightly from the Point Pinos Lighthouse as a guide and warning to many ships sailing off the rocky California coast.

Through the cooperation of the Monterey Public Library and the lighthouse keepers, I have been able to gather an interesting history of the lighthouse which is familiar to all visitors to the Monterey Peninsula.

Before the lighthouse, the point of land had a long history of which we know very little, and Indian arrowheads found there are the only remaining evidence of the earliest inhabitants. First seen by white men in 1602, it was named Point of Pines by its discoverer, Sebastian Vizcaino. The building of the lighthouse was ordered by Thomas Corwin, secretary of the treasury in 1852 and completed two years later. The lighthouse was constructed of local stone, the dirt around the building was brought from Yerba Buena Island In San Francisco Bay.

The heavy lenses, prisms and mechanism controlling the shutter was made in France by Henri Lapaute, a Parisian craftsman. Although this was not the first lighthouse established on the coast, beacons had been placed on Point Loma, the Fallaron Islands, and Alcatraz Island in 1852—it is the only lighthouse which still uses the original granite building and the original lenses and prisms. The only major change in the structure was made in 1939, when a new keeper's cottage was built.

(To be Continued)