

# Nature Notes

by Patricia Clark-Gray



## Point Sur State Historic Park

If you are like me, you probably are fascinated with lighthouses. When I was growing up I always imagined it would be romantic to live in a lighthouse. I think I must have seen movies with Lightkeepers rescuing people from shipwrecks and their lives seemed dramatic.

But what I have learned about lighthouses as an adult is that lighthouses are built to prevent shipwrecks. They are considered an aid to navigation. At Point Sur, they had a first-order fresnel lens and the light from the lens was visible for 23 nautical miles.



We are fortunate to have a lighthouse near Marina. Point Sur State Historic Park and Lighthouse is located 19 miles south of Rio Road in Carmel. Docents offer 3 hour tours of the park. Since it is winter now, the tours are offered on Saturday and Sundays at 10 a.m. and Wednesdays at 1 p.m. If you want to take a tour your meet along the west side of Highway I at the gate. If you take the tour you will park at the bottom of the hill and walk up the road to the lighthouse. When you get to the top there are two stairways that you need to walk up and the longer stairway has 61 steps. Before you visit, you should visit the website ([www.pointsur.org/](http://www.pointsur.org/)) to prepare for the tour and learn about the restoration.

The Lighthouse opened on August 1, 1889 and the first keeper and his three assistants staffed the lighthouse and fog signal 24 hours a day. They lived an isolated life as the trip to Monterey was long. Bulk supplies such as coal, firewood, animal feed and some food came on a "lighthouse tender" about every four months. Most lightstations were self-sufficient and they had a cow for milk, chickens, and raised vegetables in their gardens.

Until 1927, the keeper's children would stay with families on nearby ranches and come home on weekends. But in 1927, Head Keeper William Mollering requested that the school district provide a teacher. They lived with the Head Keeper and his family. Later, a one room school was built near the highway.

Once Highway 1 was built in 1937 life was less isolated. In 1939, the U.S. Coast Guard assumed responsibility for all aids-to-navigation. The Lighthouse Service employees were absorbed into the new program and become members of the U.S. Coast

Guard or remained civil service employees.

The U.S. Coast Guard automated the lightstation and in 1974 the last keeper left Point Sur. Today a U.S. Coast Guard crew services the lighthouse regularly.

When you take the tour, you will learn about the wreck of the Macon, the dirigible that crashed off the coast near the lighthouse. The views are dramatic as you walk up the hill. Once you reach the top, you can climb up into the lantern room in the Lighthouse. You will visit the Carpenter/Blacksmith Shop, Barn and the Headkeeper's House.

The Central Coast Lighthouse Keepers (CCLK) have been a very important partner in restoring the Lightstation. They have raised hundreds of thousands of dollars and have been involved in the restoration of the barn, carpenter/blacksmith shop, and the triplex. CCLK, State Parks staff and volunteers are currently restoring the Headkeeper's House. They have just completed the painting of the upstairs and downstairs and will be completing the kitchen. A Furnishing Plan is being written and once the plan is completed CCLK will help fund the purchasing of the furnishings in the house. Once the house is furnished, visitors will be able to step in and see what family life was like for the Headkeeper and his family. There will be photos of the families that lived in the house. In the living room there will be a couch, rugs, radio, knickknacks, magazines, books, and curtains. This room will be accurate to the time period as a family photo of the living room will be used to furnish the room as accurately as possible.

So I hope that you plan a trip to the lightstation where a few lucky families had the opportunity to live a isolated yet unique lifestyle.



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