

GUIDE TO THE POINT CABRILLO LIGHT STATION STATE HISTORIC PARK  
PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION

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## POINT CABRILLO LIGHT STATION STATE HISTORIC PARK PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION

### Park History

Point Cabrillo Light Station State Historic Park contains roughly 385 acres of scenic and historical resources. Located in Mendocino County, the park lies between Point Arena and Cape Mendocino Lights on the Pacific Coast and is bordered to the west by the Pacific Ocean and to the east by Point Cabrillo Drive; it is directly south of the census-designated place of Caspar. The park is accessible by car via Point Cabrillo Drive.

Prior to the installation of the light station, the area containing the present-day park served the Pomo people as summer hunting grounds for thousands of years. Moving from encampments further inland, the Pomo harvested ample supplies of abalone, mussels, kelp, and sea salt and hunted seals, sea lions, and deer every year before returning to their permanent villages. With the incursion of Anglo-American settlers, cattle-grazers, and lumbermen into the area in the late 1850s, the Pomo found their traditional lifeways severely disrupted. Today, the Pomo descendants occupy portions of their ancestral homelands and work to revive their language and customs.

In 1850, the clipper brig *Frolic* struck a reef near present-day Point Cabrillo on its way to San Francisco. Securing the wrecked ship in present-day Frolic Cove, the captain and crew left the site to spread word of the disaster. Hoping to salvage cargo, Jerome Ford, employee of San Francisco lumber dealer Harry Meiggs, found nothing left to salvage upon his return to the shipwreck. He did, however, note the area's abundant redwood and Douglas-fir groves. Ford's find ultimately yielded the founding of Mendocino and the establishment of the timber industry in Northern California.

In the wake of the 1906 earthquake, the Point Cabrillo Light Station was built to guide cargo ships transporting lumber along the treacherous Redwood Coast to the devastated city of San Francisco. Construction began in 1908 and concluded the following year. The light station comprised roughly 30 acres, which included 15 buildings and structures: Lighthouse and Fog Signal Building, three keepers' residences, storage buildings, the Blacksmith and Carpentry Shop, the Oil House, water towers, pump houses, a barn, and a utility building. The light tower was first outfitted with a state-of-the-art Fresnel lens: an oil-lit lens turned via wind-up clockworks, one of only three made in the U.S. by the British firm, Chance Bros. The original lighting technology was first replaced in the mid-1930s with electric lamps and motors, and later updated with an automated beacon in 1972.

The light station was originally managed by the U.S. Lighthouse Service until 1939, when authority transferred to the U.S. Coast Guard, who ran the station until 1991. One year earlier, the light station was approved for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. In 1991, the California Coastal Conservancy acquired the property and raised funds for and implemented a comprehensive restoration program, including restoring the original Fresnel lens in 1999 (**Figures 1 and 2**). The conservancy also restored the Blacksmith and Carpentry Shop as well as the Oil House

during its tenure. In 2002, California State Parks acquired the property and additionally restored 12 of the original 15 buildings, resulting in one of the most complete historic light stations in the U.S. today. The park unit was named and classified in 2008.



**Figure 1.** Fresnel lens, April 23, 2012. Catalog # 090-P77111.



**Figure 2.** Lighthouse, April 24, 2012. Catalog # 090-P77073.

California State Parks, coordinating with the Point Cabrillo Lightkeepers Association, preserves and interprets historical resources at Point Cabrillo Light Station State Historic Park. In addition to maintaining the historic light station, the park provides guided Sunday site tours and additionally provides day-use picnic areas and a museum housed in the historic inn. The park also holds numerous events, including the Whale Festival in March and summer Lantern Room tours. The park is open from sunrise to sunset.

## **Scope and Content**

The Point Cabrillo Light Station State Historic Park Photographic Collection covers the years 2008 and 2012. There is a total of 143 cataloged born-digital images. Photographs originated from California State Parks staff.

The collection documents a few scenic and historic resources at the park. Images feature exterior views of the lighthouse, including the restored Fresnel lens, the adjacent Pacific coastline, picnic areas, and visiting painters enjoying the scenery. Also depicted are interior and exterior views of a restored light keeper's house. Interior views document the living room, kitchen, and study with all attendant period furnishings.

The Point Cabrillo Light Station State Historic Park Photographic Collection is chronologically and conceptually limited. Confined to 2008 and 2012, the collection would be greatly supplemented by the inclusion of more historic photographs depicting the light station's change and development over time. Additionally, the contemporary images would benefit from more comprehensive coverage of the park unit, as they are currently limited to the lighthouse, one light keeper's residence, and the scenic Pacific coastline.

## **Related Collections**

Point Cabrillo Light Station State Historic Park Collection, California State Parks Archives.

Records of the U.S. Coast Guard, National Archives and Records Administration: Various Locations.

## **Catalog Subject Search Terms**

Exterior  
Fresnel lens  
Inn  
Interior  
Light Keeper's House  
Lighthouse  
Pacific Ocean  
Shoreline  
Visitor