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# KEEPER'S LOG

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## Point San Luis Lighthouse



Point San Luis cisterns, urgently in need of restoration. Photo courtesy of Bob Mihelic.

## Welcome to the Keeper's Log!

### Bus and Hiker Tours Run Wednesdays and Saturdays

The Point San Luis Lighthouse is open for tours on Wednesdays and Saturdays. To take a shuttle bus up to the lighthouse, purchase tickets [here](#). To hike to the lighthouse, register [here](#). The hike is free; bring \$10 for the lighthouse tour. Face coverings are required indoors.

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### A Note from the Executive Director

Most of the light station has been beautifully restored thanks to a dedicated corps of volunteers, visionaries, and donors. But the restoration of our cisterns remains an urgent need. The cisterns are historically important; they stored the water needed to produce the steam for our original fog signal – a 10-inch steam whistle. The cisterns, brick-lined, 28 feet in diameter, and capable of holding 50,000 gallons of water apiece, date back to 1890. Their wooden lids have deteriorated over the years to the point where they must be surrounded by security fencing – a real eyesore – for our visitors' safety. While water is no longer needed to operate a fog signal, it is vital for the station's fire protection. Please help us with this important restoration by donating now!

Happy New Year! *Deb Feaghtly*

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Issue 31, January 2022

### The Water Issue

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Why Restoring the Cisterns is So Important NOW. Page 5

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Water, water, everywhere,  
And all the boards did shrink;  
Water, water everywhere,  
Nor any drop to drink.

~ Samuel Taylor Coleridge,  
The Rime of the Ancient Mariner ~

[www.pointsanluislighthouse.com/donate](http://www.pointsanluislighthouse.com/donate)

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## Furnishing Water at Point San Luis

There can be no doubt that the two in-ground cisterns at Point San Luis are historically important structures. They were constructed in 1890, although not part of the contract won by George W. Kenney. Kenney's contract included the lighthouse and attached head keeper's dwelling, a double dwelling for the two assistant keepers, a fog-signal building, oil house, coal shed, two privies and three wooden above-ground cisterns.

These were the specifications for the above-ground cisterns, each capable of holding 10,000 gallons of water:

**Furnish and put up one cistern for the light-house and two for the double keeper's dwelling. The shape of the cisterns to be that of a frustum of a cone...15 feet diameter at the base and 14 feet at the top, 12 feet high, of 3-inch thick redwood staves, the hoops 1 foot apart of galvanized iron with screw-lugs to adjust. The covers to be of 1-3/8 inch grooved-and-tongue stuff, with 1-1/8 inch battens, and nailed together with 10d. wrought-nails. The top to have a fall of 1/4 inch from the center to the edge. Provide inside of the cistern, near the top, a diagonal bar 3 by 6 inches to support the cover.**

These above-ground cisterns are no longer there. The double-keeper's dwelling was demolished in 1960; the cistern originally placed on the west side of the Keeper's dwelling has not been rebuilt.

In early 1890, construction of the two in-ground cisterns was done. Their original intent was to store water needed for the boilers in the fog signal building, as the first fog signal was a steam whistle.

According to the Lighthouse Board's 1890 report:

**A separate contract was made for the duplicate fog signal set up in place. This contract was satisfactorily completed within the specified time. A space, within 100 feet of the signal, was cleared and cemented for a watershed, and under-ground cisterns, with a capacity of 100,000 gallons, were built for the storage of water.**

History does not record who did this work, but Henry Cowell & Company was employed to furnish 210 barrels of cement for the cisterns, at a price of \$777. The bricks used for the cisterns came from one of Ah Louis's brickyards. (The bricks used for the foundations of the structures built by Kenney came from a brickyard owned by Mrs. Jenes P. Schow, but there's no evidence her bricks were used for the cisterns. Instead, there is strong evidence the cistern bricks were Ah Louis bricks.)

W. H. Heuer, the twelfth district lighthouse engineer at the time, wrote to the Lighthouse Board in April 1980 that the cisterns and tanks at Point San Luis had a combined capacity of about 130,000 gallons. But Heuer was concerned about the lack of water. He wrote:

**I have caught from all available sources and now have on hand at this station about 30,000 gallons of water, and no prospects of getting any more from rainfall, or from a spring now dry, before next November.**

**The quantity of water on hand is ample to supply the keepers and their families until next November but is far from sufficient to establish and maintain the steam fog-signal. The nearest good water to the station is in a creek about 3-1/2 miles distant from the station. This water is excellent in quality and ample in quantity, and I estimate that I can lay a pipe and fill all our cisterns and tanks, in fact procure an abundant supply for all the wants of the station by laying a pipe from the station to the creek about 20,000 feet long; the estimated cost of this pipe including all fittings and laying is \$.25 per lineal foot.**

*(continued on page 4)*

Those stationed at Point San Luis over the years have plenty of memories about water at the light station and how it was collected.

Bob Cogburn, stationed there in 1956, recalled that Guardsmen frequently used the station's Jeep to ride up to one of the station's water sources, Pecho Creek. Cattle would trample the rusty pipeline that fed water from the creek to the station, so there was constant maintenance. Cogburn was responsible for all the pipeline repairs.

Gail Settlemier Lay, daughter of Guardsman Robin "Bob" Settlemier, lived at the light station during 1959 and 1960. She recalled that the two in-ground cisterns were extremely off-limits. She and her siblings were told not to play near them, and certainly not to play on them. This was drilled into them. Gail recalled a time when her father had to measure the water level in one of the cisterns. With a tether attached, he walked onto the cistern cover and two other Guardsmen opened it up. Gail burst into tears, worried her father would fall in.

Darrel Beerbohm, stationed there from 1965 until 1967, recalled the pipeline from Pecho Creek leading to the in-ground cisterns that were next to his quarters:

**Water always seemed to be plentiful as the spring never dried up, and of**

## **Pecho Creek, Cisterns, and Broken Pipes**

**"The ground was rough and I had a tricycle. It was a joy for me to ride my tricycle on the smooth wooden surface that covered the cistern, but the possibility that it might break through and plunge me into the water frightened my mother beyond words. What a spanking I received when my father caught me one time riding my tricycle at this forbidden location."**

**-- Judy Moorefield**

course we had the water tested often and chlorination systems to keep it safe. Just above the station there was a large cement slab where at one time rainwater was caught and drained into the cisterns, but this system was no longer in operation. When I left there was talk of drilling a well.

Apparently a well was eventually dug.

Jay Conlin served at Point San Luis during 1971, just a few years before automation was complete and the station was left unmanned.

Conlin recalled that water came to the light station from a well about a mile away, through inch-and-a-half PVC pipe:

**The water went into two large [in-ground] holding tanks to the right of the Keeper's residence on the same level. We then pumped it up to the water tank on the hill behind the station. Once a month the chief would send one of us up with a gallon of bleach to pour into the tank for chlorination. Can you believe that? Climbing that old ladder and pouring it in after avoiding rattlesnakes on the climb up?**

**Twice when I was there the water stopped flowing. We'd have to go see why. We had wire cables stretching across the canyons with the PVC clamped to holders. Sometimes, when the wind would blow, the PVC couplings would separate. We had a harness that we strapped on with a clip. We would clip onto the wire, shinny out to the coupling that was spraying water in our face, and pull it back together so the water would flow again. At twenty-two years old, you didn't think about the seventy-five foot drop below you.**

## Furnishing Water at Point San Luis (continued from Page 2)

As there is no wagon road to the station, water cannot be hauled there, and there is no practicable way of getting it there other than by piping it. The creek is on private land; the parties owning the creek also own the land between the creek and the lighthouse reservation. They will not object to laying a pipe on their land, but may want some compensation for permitting us to use the water, as well as for the use of the land on which the pipe may be laid. If the compensation which they ask should be reasonable and fair, I deem it proper that we should pay it and I should not consider \$500 for the privilege an unreasonable price to pay in case that much should be asked.

At all events we must get water to run the fog signal and maintain it until the next rainy season sets in or else defer the establishment of the fog-signal until the rains commence next November, and if we can get, say, 10,000 gallons of water in our tanks and cisterns from this course at a total expense to the Government not exceeding \$5,000 (and I think it can be done for less), I would urgently recommend it be done. I have a surplus of about \$17,000 left from the appropriation for establishing this station, and if permitted to get the water in the way above-recommended, I think our tanks can be filled with 15 days after the receipt of authority and that we can have an abundant supply of water thereafter as long as our pipe lasts without additional expense to the Government. If my method of getting this water supply should be approved, I request to be informed by telegraph so that I can get bids for the pipe and have the station in running order at the earliest practicable moment.



1894 photo of in-ground cisterns. Above-ground cistern by west side of double keeper's dwelling is at far left. Photo by Herbert Bamber. Courtesy of the National Archives.



Dan Mosier, California brick expert, examining the cistern bricks in August 2019. His examination confirmed the bricks came from the Ah Louis brickyard in San Luis Obispo. Photo courtesy of the Point San Luis Light Station archives.

***The cisterns need to be restored.  
Please help us reach our  
\$320,000 goal.***

Let  
Point San Luis  
Host Your Special Event

Private Group Tours,  
including Lunch , for 25 or  
More Guests

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Weddings and Renewals  
of Vows, for up to 100  
Guests

~

Club Meetings

~

Corporate Retreats

~

Celebrations of Life

~

Call 805-540-5771 or email  
sanluislighthouse  
@gmail.com to plan your  
event.

## Why Restoring the Cisterns is So Important NOW

The restoration of the in-ground cisterns has been pending for several years due to lack of funding, but has recently become a more pressing need because of climate change and the constant threat of fire to the Point San Luis historic site.

Our remote location is only accessible by a one-lane, one-and-half mile steep and winding road. In case of fire, these cisterns are our sole source of water for fighting the blaze. The extreme fire danger was recently demonstrated by a controlled burn conducted behind the lighthouse which took off like a tinderbox even though brush was still damp from a recent rain.



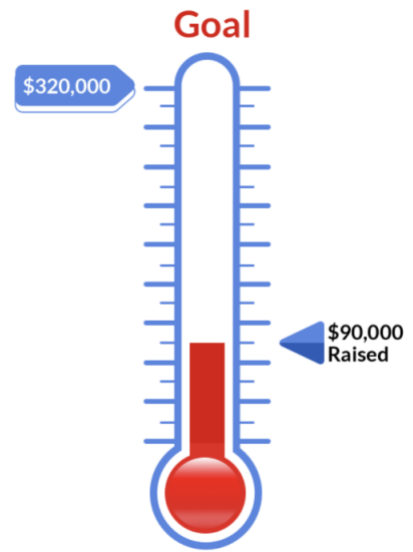
Controlled burn near Point San Luis November 12, 2021. Photos courtesy of Hal Martin.

Through the generosity of donors like you and the continuing fundraising efforts of our dedicated volunteers, we have accumulated \$90,000 toward this restoration.

But this falls short of our need.

We need to raise an additional \$230,000 in order to complete the project this year.

You can help us do this!



Click [here](#) to donate.



Youth learning about fire protection at Point San Luis circa 1970. Photos courtesy of George Homenko.

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Point San Luis Lighthouse

KEEPER'S LOG

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As a way to honor the memory of a loved one in a very special way, Point San Luis offers dedication benches. Only a limited number are available. For information and pricing, contact [SanLuisLighthouse@gmail.com](mailto:SanLuisLighthouse@gmail.com) or call (805) 540-5771.



## Give the Gift of Membership

*If you're looking for a unique gift idea, consider giving a Point San Luis Lighthouse Keepers membership as a birthday, anniversary, or holiday gift for someone special in your life.*

### Memberships Now Available Online!

Visit [pointsanluislighthouse.org](http://pointsanluislighthouse.org)

*Annual Memberships help preserve a special piece of California; each membership level comes with premiums – check them out online.*

- \_\_\_\_\_ Lighthouse Keeper - \$50
- \_\_\_\_\_ Lighthouse Mariner - \$100
- \_\_\_\_\_ Lighthouse Navigator - \$250
- \_\_\_\_\_ Light Station Inspector - \$500
- \_\_\_\_\_ Light Station Commander - \$1000

Or, send a check to PO Box 308, Avila Beach, CA 93424, payable to the Point San Luis Lighthouse Keepers.

Donations and memberships allow Point San Luis to stay in operation. Consider donating or becoming a member today.

Special thanks to all who support the lighthouse!

If you shop on Amazon, use [AmazonSmile](#). Choose Point San Luis Lighthouse Keepers as the non-profit you're supporting. The AmazonSmile Foundation will give us 0.5% of the price of what you buy!