

POINT PINOS: A CONUNDRUM on the Monterey Peninsula

By Geva Arcanin, 1/19/23

Regarding Point Pinos, the question can be asked,

“Is there no history, if no one knows it?”

In 1883, the Chautauquan magazine posed this question and discussed, “If a tree were to fall on an island where there were no human beings would there be any sound? The magazine went on to answer, “No. Sound is the sensation excited in the ear when the air or other medium is set in motion.”

Later, the journal Scientific American concluded, “If there be no ears to hear, there will be no sound.”

This can be likened to Point Pinos history and the question asked, *“Is there no history, if no one knows it?”*

Point Pinos is the outcropping of land that separates the southern Monterey Bay from the Pacific Ocean. It was a habitation and gathering site for early people – also called Native Americans.

The first explorers and settlers were these early people who inhabited the land for 10,000 years or more. This is evidenced throughout the Monterey area, and especially at Point Pinos where the Lighthouse Reservation Land holds 11 documented archeological sites, including habitation, spanning thousands of years. According to a 1977 archeological survey, two of these sites were considered historic: 1) a registered archaeological site, holding remains, musket balls and cannon balls (perhaps a clash of civilizations;) 2) the Point Pinos Lighthouse, now on the National Register of Historic Places.

The land of Point Pinos was used to guard the coastline of California and the Monterey Peninsula for hundreds of years, beginning in the 1770’s with the Spanish Fort Cape of the Pines(Point Pinos) – used to guard against Russian invaders. The first Europeans to inhabit were the Spanish, claiming California as a part of Spain and creating the Monterey Presidio, one of four Spanish military districts in California. They also developed two redoubt(small forts) on the Peninsula, one at the site of the current Presidio and the other at Fort Cape of the Pines (Point Pinos.)

In 1850, the U.S. federal government claimed 25 acres of land at the point for the Point Pinos Lighthouse Reservation and subsequently the Lighthouse- to warn ships along the coast , preventing frequent shipwrecks and saving lives. The Lighthouse eventually was used to guard the coastline during WWII and included a separate watch tower, barracks and facilities for the military.

Beginning in 1950, the U.S. Navy built the Navy building, a bunker, eventually called the Navy/NOAA building, at Point Pinos in Pacific Grove. It is built on land that is the Point Pinos Lighthouse Reservation and is on another registered archeological site. At Point Pinos, the U.S. Navy and NOAA pioneered activities that led to the first transmission of weather data over telephone lines and of data and images by satellite to ships at sea, fleet meteorology, oceanography, environmental/climate variability in marine ecosystems with continuing significance today, in use by the U.S. and throughout the world.

Point Pinos, with many significant archaeological sites, the nationally recognized Lighthouse and Lighthouse Reservation land, the Navy/NOAA Building and activities, and the California Coastal National Monument, represents an iconic historic site spanning thousands of years. ***Again, it can be asked, “If history is not known, does it exist?”***

Physicist Abraham Pais reflected this view of Quantum Mechanics:

Existence in the absence of an observer is at best a conjecture, a conclusion that can neither be proven nor disproven.