

NOTICIAS del PUERTO de MONTEREY

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MAYO HAYES O'DONNELL The Historian of Monterey

Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

What historical magic that name conjures up. What battles fought. What accomplishments heralded. What love bestowed. What volumes of lore bequeathed to generations yet unborn. What honors heaped upon this little but always determined lady.

Her tireless efforts over half a century to preserve the history of Monterey, both in words and in visible reminders of the pueblo's fascinating past, fortunately did not go unnoticed during her lifetime.

"The Historian of Monterey," as she was often called, was the recipient of tributes by the Senate of the State of California, by the City of Monterey, by the California Park and Recreation Commission and by the California Historical Society.

She held the Laura Bride Powers award of her dearly beloved Monterey History and Art Association which she helped found. She was chosen Woman of the Year in 1961. And outstanding Citizen of the Year for the Monterey Peninsula in 1968. To name only a few top accolades.

Yet to this writer she is not remembered most vividly as the tough historical protagonist, the ardent ecologist and preservationist, or as a legend in her own time, accepting the mantles of gratitude and adulation on public rostrums.

Instead, she is remembered as the kindly lady who in 1935 invited a young cub reporter to the warmth and friendship of her home, a haven in a new and familiar environment. A relationship which lasted for the rest of her life.

Her husband, William M. O'Donnell, was the managing editor and eventually co-publisher of the Monterey Peninsula Herald, and my boss. Mayo's "William" as she always referred to him, was a Cornell graduate, a warm and witty Irishman, and himself an ardent worker in the historical vineyard. They made a great pair. Unfortunately he did not live to see her receive most of her civic honors. He died in 1949.

In 1935, when I first knew them, they had been residents of Monterey for 10 years. They lived in a house up near Monterey High School. It was only in later years that they took up residence in the old Spanish adobe, the Casa Soberanes, built by Don Jose Estrada in 1830, and better known as the House with the Blue Gate, which they were ultimately to give to the state as a historic landmark and which is now open to the public.



Mayo O'Donnell was born on May 6, 1892, in Goshen Junction, Tulare County, California. But that was all to come out later. All of her interesting life, for reasons best known to herself, she carefully guarded the secret of her age. Only at the time of her death in January, 1978, was it revealed that she was 85 years of age.

She was always so full of vim, vigor and enthusiasm for the task at hand that not until the last few years of her life did anyone realize how old she really was.

She and her husband settled on the Monterey Peninsula in 1925, two years after their marriage, and a lucky day it was for Monterey and the surrounding area. For while there were others at work in the same cause, it is safe to say that Mayo O'Donnell, perhaps more than any other individual, kept alive the spirit of Old Monterey and spearheaded preservation and restoration of historic structures. Certainly over the long haul, both in years, continuity and versatility of interests.

Prior to coming to Monterey, Mayo had been the society editor of the San Jose Mercury-Herald. Writing was second nature to her, and for many years she wrote a regular column for the local newspaper, the Monterey Peninsula Herald, called "Peninsula Diary," devoted to historical accounts of early California and the significance of Monterey, first to Spain, then Mexico, and finally the early days of California.

But the real love affair of her civic life began on the night of Nov. 16, 1930, at Cadematori's restaurant in the historic Casa Serrano adobe, when she and 14 others signed the articles of incorporation of the Monterey History and Art Association.

The first official meeting was held Jan. 19, 1931, which makes this year of 1981 the 50th anniversary year of the Association. Interestingly, the place where the Association was born, the Casa Serrano, is now the Association's headquarters.

Although probably the best known and most ardent member over the years, Mayo was never president, serving for many years as the unpaid executive secretary and in later years as its honorary lifetime director. But there was little that went on in the organization in which Mayo did not have a hand, either directly or so subtly that those who carried out the work thought that it was their idea alone.

Of course, sometimes it also worked just the other way around, but I do not think that Mayo was fooled very often into pulling other people's chestnuts out of the fire.

There are a number of annual programs of the Monterey History and Art Association, the Adobe tour each April when charming hostesses open the old adobes for throngs of visitors, the Sloat Landing Ceremony, when the raising of the U.S. flag over Monterey in 1846 is commemorated with services at the Customs House and Sloat Monument at the Presidio of Monterey, an antique show, and various teas and luncheons during the year.

But the highlight of the year for members — and particularly for Mayo — has been the Merienda, the gem of the Association's celebrations, held each June in Memory Garden of the Pacific Building, given to the state by the Jacks sisters, Lee, Margaret and Vida Jacks, and Mary Jacks Thomas.

The Merienda was held sporadically until 1939, after which it became an annual affair. Mayo was into every aspect. I, personally, can remember her decorating Memory Garden into an orange grove, by tying oranges, one by one, on the branches of the Magnolia trees that shade the old patio. It was quite a sight.

Beginning also in 1939, a lovely young Favorita, usually from an old family, was chosen each year to preside over the festivities. And although Mayo stoutly denied having had anything to do with it, it was always known that no Favorita during her lifetime was ever named without Mayo's stamp of approval.

Having known most of them, I can say that she chose exceedingly well. They were all charming, vivacious and a credit to their antecedents.

As a three-time president of the Association this writer can testify first hand that whenever there was a real problem one went to the chief, the oracle, the historian of Monterey, to Mayo O'Donnell. A great and gracious lady.

The library of the Association is situated in the old St. James Episcopal church, Monterey's first Protestant place of worship, and of which Mayo had been a parishioner, and which later, threatened with demolition by urban renewal, was saved by the Association and moved to Van Buren Street. It is now the Mayo Hayes O'Donnell Library, a small but choice collection of California available to the public, particularly students.

Mayo, of course, served in many other civic capacities in addition to the Monterey History and Art Association. She helped organize the Casa Abrego Club for Women and served for five years on its board of directors. She was also a founding member of the Monterey Foundation, another organization devoted to historic preservation and beautification.

Mayo was a past president of the Peninsula Garden Club, and planned the El Estero Rose Garden for the garden club, a memorial to her husband.

She was a member of the Monterey Museum Board, the California Historical Society, and the Monterey County Historical Society.

She was a member of the Native Daughters of the Golden West, the USO board, and of Delta Kappa Gamma, a national organization for outstanding women in education.

She also served as the Grand Marshall of Seaside's Independence Day Parade of Champions in 1970. A bronze bust of Mayo was donated to the Association in 1974.

Monterey is unique in having preserved more adobe structures than any other California city, and in having made them an integral factor in planning for the future. And in nearly every acquisition and preservation, whether it be public or private, Mayo in some way had a hand, either in discovering the danger to its existence, a person or organization to give it tender, loving care, and the never ending battle to stave off "progress" in the form of industrial development at the expense of Monterey's past.

Mayo was honored as Woman of the Year by the Monterey-Pacific Grove Quota Club at a dinner at Asilomar in January of 1961, the first of her many civic honors.

Among the tributes paid:

"Someday the history will be written of the people who had the foresight to preserve the buildings that make our pueblo what it is — and her name will top the list."

"She won't need any monument. All the buildings which have been preserved, very largely through her efforts, are monument enough."

Speakers included Allen Griffin, publisher of the Monterey Peninsula Herald; Carmel Martin, speaking as one of her earliest associates in the History and Art Association; Corum Jackson, Allen Knight, and James F. van Loben Sels, president of the Monterey Foundation at the time.

Mayo responded by saying: "I don't deserve any credit. You don't deserve credit for doing things you enjoy. Everything that I have done I did because I wanted to . . . and I really enjoyed it." It was a theme she was to reiterate many times before her death.

Then in 1965 Mayo was honored by the state senate, in a resolution authored by Senator Fred Farr of Carmel. It stated that she and her husband "showed a deep and abiding interest in the history of Monterey from the time of their settlement there which has continued through years of leadership in the History and Art Association and the Monterey Foundation."

It adds that "Mayo Hayes O'Donnell, perhaps more than any other individual, had kept alive the spirit of Old Monterey."

The Laura Bride Powers award was presented to Mayo during her beloved Merienda.

Perhaps the highest honor of all, since it is regional and includes all the cities of the Monterey Peninsula, came with her recognition as Outstanding Citizen of 1967 at a January dinner of the Peninsula Chamber of Commerce in 1968.

A story in the Monterey Peninsula Herald said: "The audience was obviously thrilled and emotionally touched when master of ceremonies Joseph G. Ansel announced that Mrs. O'Donnell was the winner. Many persons dabbed at their eyes. She was given a standing ovation."

It was this writer's pleasure, together with the late County Clerk Emmet McMenamin, to assist Mayo, at that time in rather fragile health, to the podium, where she accepted the honor in a clear, strong voice.

In 1972 Mayo was feted by the California Historical Society at its annual awards banquet at what is now the Lodge at Pebble Beach.

And in one of the most touching tributes, Mayo was honored with a plaque from the California Park and Recreation Commission in recognition of her long years of untiring service in the interest of historic preservation in Monterey and the state.

It was in July of 1970 and the presentation was made by acting chairman Mrs. Clarice Gilchrist of Piedmont. She, as well as her former husband, the late Joseph R. Knowland, for many years head of the state parks commission, were close and dear friends of Mayo, having worked together on many occasions.

Mrs. Gilchrist, choked with emotion as she made the presentation. "This could not go to any more qualified woman, to a more dedicated woman," she said.

"This woman has given her life to the preservation of the Peninsula she loves and has shown her devotion to the state by giving it her home."

In her response, Mrs. O'Donnell recalled the founding of the History and Art Association, and early efforts to restore the Custom House in Monterey.

And again she reiterated her creed. "A person should not take credit for doing a job he enjoys doing. I have had a great time, and I enjoy it so I don't deserve any credit."

There was a final party for Mayo including just a few old friends at Casa Serrano in 1977 where champagne flowed and toasts were made to the honored guest.

Allen Griffin, former publisher of the Monterey Peninsula Herald toasted Mayo's contribution to the community through her column in the newspaper.

Her considered reply: "I spent the best years of life at The Herald, and I think I made good."

Just a year later Mayo was dead.

As an old friend, I can vouch for the fact that Mayo Hayes O'Donnell enjoyed every minute of everything. And in spite of all her protestations, she deserved every honor that was bestowed upon her.

All we have to do is look around us. Everywhere she has left her mark.

Ted Durein

* * *

COL. ALLEN GRIFFIN



With the death on July 19, 1981, of Allen Griffin, was lost a founder of the Monterey History and Art Association and one of its strongest and most faithful friends during the first half century of its life, 1931-1981.

Col. Griffin was among the small group of Peninsulans that met 50 years ago at Cademartori's Restaurant in the Serrano Adobe—now the association's headquarters—to find ways and means to preserve what they felt to be the natural and historical heritage of their community and to provide a proper setting for the relics of the age when Monterey was the capital of California.

At that meeting, the Monterey History and Art Association was born, and Col. Griffin played a leading role in establishing the visionary goals of the association, of which he would become president and lifetime director.

In the years that followed, he and the association worked together closely in pursuit of these goals—to equate the preservation of the past with planning for the future and the orderly growth that was inevitable.

As a newspaper publisher, he was generous in campaigning for association programs; on the other hand, he would use the organization as a sounding board and for support of his dreams for the betterment of the community for which he and the members shared

an abiding love.

Col. Griffin, a handsome, sandy-haired young man retaining the bearing of the military that he had left only four years earlier at the end of World War I, came to Monterey and established *The Herald* in 1922 in "the graveyard of newspapers." He came, he told a friend not long before his death, at the request of several citizens of the small town. He launched his paper as a "reform publisher," and with borrowed money.

His first foray as a reformer, a sub-rosa investigation that ended hilariously, but ineffectually, had to do with suspected bribery involving a madame of the town and a local official.

Fortunately, the word "reform" soon took on a broader meaning for this amateur detective. His town did become a "clean town," but further, the entire Peninsula, mainly through constant prodding in his popular "New Comments" column (his answer to pontificating editorials) became involved in ecology (before the word became widely used) and the preservation of the beauty of the area as a setting for an attractive way of life.

In this vein, he early on launched a campaign for a city of Monterey bond issue to finance public acquisition of almost its entire beach frontage, from the tide line to Del Monte Avenue. Although the cost was to be only \$22,000, the proposal lost by a handful of votes at a city election.

Undismayed, Col. Griffin never lost sight of those goals he helped the History and Art Association enunciate.

He was among the several World War I veterans who pledged their bonuses to buy the Custom House for the state, thus saving the oldest government building in California from becoming a waterfront cafe.

Through his influence and that of his paper, and sometimes his unabashed leaning on his friends, many Monterey adobes were saved from destruction. As a result, Monterey now has the greatest collection of buildings from the Mexican era in the state, a feature that draws thousands of visitors to the Peninsula.

A proper setting for these historic relics was a necessity, and Col. Griffin pioneered in promoting zoning and planning to this end. The Peninsula and Monterey County became pioneers in planning.

Billboards were banned from Monterey County roadsides mainly through his efforts, as were overhanging, flashing neon signs from the streets of Peninsula cities. He campaigned vigorously against an oil refinery at Moss Landing and against a freeway across the Peninsula which would have placed a major interchange structure hard behind San Carlos Cathedral.

Some of his projects and campaigns (and they were as varied as they were numerous) were highly controversial, and not all were popular or successful. But his convictions were strong: his campaign for reapportionment of the supervisorial districts of the county he took to the California Supreme Court and a landmark decision. This, based upon the principle of one man, one vote, resulted in district boundary changes in Monterey County that gave more voice to the Peninsula in county affairs.

Put simply, he was a leader in mapping the future of the Peninsula—and was proud of the part he played.

Col. Griffin's public voice, of course, was his "News Comments" column. He used it to announce, to propose, sometimes to cajole, sometimes to berate or to praise, to discuss world affairs or to give tips on the culture of roses, to lament the spread of genista across the Peninsula or to share the beauty of the live oaks as they bud in springtime.

As Col. Griffin would be the first to admit, any leader, to be successful, needs support. He found his in several places. Col. Griffin was a member of the Round Table, a group of Peninsulans that met for luncheon at the old Mission Inn, now the Estrada Adobe. It was here that the problems, the ailments and cures of the Peninsula were discussed and plans were hatched, and possibly, approved. Griffin sent up many trial balloons there.

His next source of support would be the History and Art Association, and then the chamber of commerce. In marshalling support for a cause, he was very persuasive, either in person or through his column.

His "News Comments" was, after all, the most widely read feature in The Herald.

Always ready for a party, Col. Griffin was one of those at the launching of the Merienda, and his Hester, together with some of her friends, assumed the task of pinning artificial blossoms on the Memory Garden magnolias, then too small to produce their own display.

As someone has pointed out, there is very little of the Peninsula that does not show the color of the colonel's brush. He left an enviable and enduring legacy.

As a lad, Col. Griffin dreamed, he said some years ago, of both military and publishing careers. He was a lucky man, he said, because he was able to follow both—as he did with distinction, while at the same time not confining his interests to these fields.

Col. Griffin anticipated our entry into World War I, and was instrumental as an undergraduate in getting Stanford University to undertake a military training program, which he joined. He emerged a captain, and commanded an infantry company in action in France. Again, he saw the inevitability of United States involvement in World War II, and in 1940 secured a commission as a public affairs officer. This soon was traded for line duty, and he took his own regiment to France, fighting it over some of the ground he had traveled a quarter of a century earlier.

In both wars he was wounded, and in both he was decorated. He held every United States Army decoration for valor, save one, together with a couple from France.

As a small-town publisher, Col. Griffin was unusual, perhaps unique. He said so many times he wanted his Herald to be a newspaper of record in local affairs, yet his broader interests demanded coverage of the world around him. His was a small-town paper with a cosmopolitan point of view.

Col. Griffin, of course, stepped outside the boundaries of the two professions he loved: he became a diplomat and spent considerable time in China and Southeast Asia on government missions.

Education, too, was of prime importance to Col. Griffin who was proud of the fact that his typing—and he was a whiz—helped finance his years at Stanford. Through The Herald, he established annual dinners to honor high school students for their scholastic achievements, a program which continues. He was a strong supporter of Robert Louis Stevenson and Santa Catalina schools, and of the Monterey Institute of International Studies, on whose board he served for many years. Not too long ago he endowed a chair at Stanford.

Perhaps the enlisted men of his World War I infantry company best characterized this man who was so unashamedly devoted to his country and his community. At their first reunion in 1919, those doughboys presented him with an officer's saber, and on the blade they had inscribed

"...For valor and excellent leadership."

—Jimmy Costello
City Editor of the Monterey Peninsula Herald under Allen Griffin

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AND ART ASSOCIATION**

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