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**NOTICIAS  
del  
PUERTO de MONTEREY**

**A Quarterly Bulletin of Historic Monterey Issued by  
The Monterey History and Art Association**

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**Vol. LI No. 2**

**Summer 2002**

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*Julia Morgan*

**Inside: Julia Morgan's Architectural Presence  
on the Monterey Peninsula**

Photo from Julia Morgan Collection, Courtesy of Special Collections,  
California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo.

*Noticias del Puerto de Monterey*, a quarterly journal devoted to the history of Monterey and the Monterey region, has been published by the Monterey History and Art Association since 1957. *Noticias* welcomes submissions on any aspect of the history, art, and architecture of the Monterey area from prehistory to the recent past. Writers are invited to send manuscripts or queries to the attention of the Editorial Committee, c/o Shelley McCabe, Monterey History and Art Association, 5 Custom House Plaza, Monterey, CA 93940. [shelley@mntmh.org](mailto:shelley@mntmh.org) (831) 372-2608 ext. 13.

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## Julia Morgan's Architectural Presence on the Monterey Peninsula

By Russell L. Quacchia

Monterey County is second only to Alameda County in concentration of work by Julia Morgan, one of California's most distinguished architects and perhaps this nation's most prominent woman architect.<sup>1</sup> Of the several hundred projects completed during her long career, twenty-two were realized in the Monterey area.<sup>2</sup> Of these, all but six were built at the Asilomar Conference Grounds. Some of the additional Monterey projects were modest bungalows, but among them was the only building she ever designed for her own use.

Julia Morgan was born in San Francisco on January 20, 1872 to Charles and Eliza Morgan, the second of five children: three sons -- Parmelee, Avery and Gardner, called Sam -- and two daughters, Julia and Emma. After Julia's birth, the Morgans moved to Oakland, where they built a three-story Victorian-style home at 14<sup>th</sup> and Brush Streets. Julia Morgan resided with her parents here until the mid-1920s, when she purchased two adjoining houses in San Francisco, converting them into a single building of rental apartments at 2229 Divisadero Street. She retained one unit for herself and this remained her home for three decades, until her death in February, 1957 at the age of eighty-five.

Charles Morgan, Julia Morgan's father, was a geological engineer raised in New Bedford, Massachusetts. On a business trip to San

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<sup>1</sup> Bernice Scharlach, in an article that appeared in the *San Francisco Sunday Examiner-Chronicle*, August 24, 1975, wrote: "She was America's greatest woman architect -- and probably the world's -- but Julia Morgan, who died in 1957, has received little attention."

<sup>2</sup> No final determination has been made as to the number of Morgan buildings presently extant in the Monterey area.



San Francisco in 1867, he was struck by the possibilities of earning great wealth, especially in mining, and also by the area's beauty and climate. After returning home to marry Elizabeth Parmelee in 1870, he brought his bride west via the newly completed transcontinental railroad and took rooms in the Palace Hotel. From his office in San Francisco, he pursued various mining and other investments, none of which brought the great wealth to which he aspired. On his daily ferryboat ride from Oakland to his office, he was often accompanied by his daughter Julia. These were the decades that saw San Francisco develop from a primitive frontier town into an urban center of serious architectural pretensions.

After graduating from high school with an outstanding record, the young Julia expressed her desire to become an architect. In 1890 she entered the University of California at Berkeley with a major in engineering. Her decision was due primarily to the influence of a New York cousin, Pierre LeBrun, himself an architect. During her family's frequent trips to visit their eastern relatives, Julia developed an early and lasting affection for LeBrun and his work. It was he who encouraged her to enroll in the College of Engineering program because the University of California did not at the time offer a program in architecture.

In 1894, Julia Morgan became the first woman to graduate in civil engineering from UC Berkeley. In her last year of study, the architect Bernard Maybeck arrived to teach technical drawing at the College of Engineering. Having discovered that most of the students were interested in architectural careers, Maybeck immediately inaugurated informal classes in architecture. Morgan attended these, and it was in this connection that Maybeck, recognizing in her a promising talent, became her mentor and lifelong friend.

It was for the most part under Maybeck's influence and encouragement that Morgan went to Paris in 1897 to further her studies, eventually becoming the first woman ever accepted to the 250 year-old École des Beaux Arts. Finally in 1901, at the age of 30, Julia Morgan became the first woman ever to graduate from the École, the most prestigious and influential architectural school in the world at the time.

Returning home in 1902, Morgan joined the San Francisco architectural firm of John Galen Howard. Here she was the principal designer for the Hearst Mining Building and the Greek Theater, both of which were presented to the University of California at Berkeley by the philanthropist Mrs. Phoebe Apperson Hearst, wife of U.S. Senator George Hearst and mother of the newspaper publisher William Randolph Hearst. Morgan first met the younger Hearst, who owned and oversaw nineteen newspapers and magazines from his New York offices, when she was designing the Greek Theatre. It was during the later phase of this project that Howard reportedly remarked to colleagues that he had "the best and most talented designer, whom I have to pay almost nothing as it is a woman."<sup>3</sup>

Julia left Howard's firm shortly thereafter, opening her own independent professional practice in 1904 at 456 Montgomery Street. By this time, she had become the first woman to be formally licensed to practice architecture in the state of California. The social and business climate of the times was not hospitable to a woman practicing a profession that was completely dominated by men. Morgan was to experience considerable hostility throughout her career and once pointedly responded to an antagonist that she did not know that talent was gender-based. Devoted to her profession, she relied on her growing reputation to gain commissions, entirely avoiding self-promotion as a means of obtaining work. The architect-engineer

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<sup>3</sup> Susanna Reiss, *The Julia Morgan Architectural History Project*, Vol. 2, pg. 102.

Walter Steilberg reported that when he was leaving her firm to establish his own independent practice, she advised him never to turn down a job because he thought it beneath him or too small:

The reason I tell you this is that one of the smallest jobs I ever had was a little two-room residence in Monterey... when I first started in practice for myself. The lady for whom I did it was most pleased with the job, and now the lady is the chairman of the board of the YWCA and became a source for work.<sup>4</sup>

The Monterey cottage to which she referred is believed to have been for Mrs. Grace Merriam Fisher, a former sorority sister at the Omega Chapter house of Kappa Alpha Theta, which Morgan had joined in her second year at the University of California.<sup>5</sup>

Though Morgan was a diminutive woman, only about five feet tall and weighing little more than 100 pounds, she was endowed with great stamina, strong will, fearlessness, and keen intelligence. She had an artistic sense of design and a technical interest in how things worked. All of these qualities undergirded her unswerving determination and dedication to her chosen profession. Though she staunchly guarded her personal privacy, she was very caring and supportive of family, friends, office personnel and clients. She never married but loved and delighted in children.

Two major patrons were significant to her practice, the philanthropist Phoebe Apperson Hearst and her son, the newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst. In 1912, Phoebe Apperson Hearst played an

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<sup>4</sup> Susanna Reiss, *ibid.*, Vol. 2, pg. 83.

<sup>5</sup> Cary James, "Julia Morgan, Architect" Chelsea House, 1990, pp.64-65. No documents have been found among Julia Morgan's surviving office records to confirm the specific whereabouts and year of construction of this cottage.



instrumental role in having Julia Morgan appointed architect for the new YWCA Summer Conference Grounds in Pacific Grove, called "Asilomar."<sup>6</sup> William Randolph Hearst would also choose Julia Morgan to be the architect for his famous "Cuesta Encantada" complex at San Simeon, an enduring collaboration that began in 1919.

The earthquake and fire of 1906 forced Morgan to abandon her Montgomery Street location. She temporarily practiced out of the garage of her parents' home in Oakland, which she turned into a drafting studio. In 1907 she moved back to San Francisco, renting an office suite in the Merchants Exchange Building at 465 California Street, where she remained until she closed her practice in 1950. Morgan was known to work sitting up all night in sleeping car bunks while on her way to job sites by rail. Due to the large scope and remote location of the San Simeon project, she maintained a field office on the Hearst Castle grounds where much design work occurred, along with construction oversight activities.

In 1934, at the age of 62, she decided to purchase a house in Monterey, a decision probably prompted both by her fondness for the area and its convenience to the rail lines. The house, located just off Franklin Street, is currently identified as 373 Cedar Street. There she employed a housekeeper, Mrs. Sachi Oka, to look after things and to drive her to and from the railroad station. Morgan spent frequent weekends and holidays at this Monterey address, sometimes with family members.

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<sup>6</sup> The appointment to be the architect for Asilomar in 1912 appears to have been Julia Morgan's first YWCA commission. However, office records identify the Oakland Chapter house project at 1515 Webster Street in Oakland as Job No. 344 and Asilomar's Phoebe Apperson Hearst Social Hall (Administration Building) project as Job No. 380. Both were under construction in 1913. She received twenty-two YWCA building commissions over her career.

In a 1976 interview, her nephew Morgan North and his wife Flora provided their recollections of this house, including the studio that Morgan added in 1936:

There was a right of way [from Franklin Street] through a gate, and you'd walk about a hundred feet back and there was another little gate; then you'd prowl through the bushes and you'd be there. [The house] was surrounded by very natural, woodsy kind of growth; [there was] no formal garden idea at all. It was surrounded by very tall trees, so it was rather dark.

Some of the interiors were kind of a faded apricot stucco, which was very interesting in [relation to] the reflections of the green from the outside. She was counteracting it, I guess, with this warmer color.

The only thing she lived in that she ever built [for herself] was a studio. It was a very handsome room. It had natural wood [wainscoting] about three feet high. Above she had [about] twenty-two frescos. There was a fireplace. She loved a big, burning fire. There were lots of cushions and a sofa there. At the other end of the room were just a huge drawing board and all her working utensils. The ceiling was all paneled in heavy diamond-patterned woodwork."<sup>7</sup>

Morgan's special affection for the Monterey Peninsula derived from childhood weekend and vacation trips to the area with her family. The Morgans availed themselves of Southern Pacific's daily service from North Bay points to railroad depots at Del Monte, Monterey and Pacific Grove.<sup>8</sup> No doubt the family sometimes stayed at Monterey's Hotel Del Monte, which catered to a well-to-do clientele and was popular with San Francisco gentry.

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<sup>7</sup> Susanna Reiss, *op cit.* Vol. 2 pp. 234-5.

<sup>8</sup> Susanna Reiss, *op cit.* , Vol. 2 pp. 174-5.



In the late 1880s, several formally trained architects had arrived in San Francisco Bay area from the East Coast and England in search of opportunities to practice their art with greater flexibility and freshness. Among these were A. Page Brown, Albert Schweinfurth, Willis Polk, Earnest Coxhead, Louis Mullgardt, John Hudson Thomas, John Galen Howard and Bernard Maybeck. Maybeck designed the Byington Ford residence in Pebble Beach in 1924, the Harrison Memorial Library in Carmel-by-the-Sea in 1927, and is believed to have worked on other local projects, including the Forest Hill School in Carmel in 1921. Coxhead designed St. John's Episcopal Church in Monterey in 1891, and the Parish Hall, now named Edwards Hall, at St. Mary's-by-the-Sea in Pacific Grove in 1893. When Julia Morgan returned from Paris in 1902 to join this group, she was not only the youngest and the only female, but also the only native-born member. Their association was not a formal one, but they were all of the same generation and loosely linked by friendships, tastes, and ideas, and all of them frequently pursued Arts and Crafts ideals in their work

The Arts and Crafts movement, which had its origins in England, spread to the United States in the late 1880's. Although Julia Morgan practiced as an eclectic architect, fluent in a variety of styles, the majority of her projects follow an Arts and Crafts vernacular style. The Arts and Crafts orientation in architecture, as it came to be understood in the San Francisco Bay region, is thought to have begun with Joseph Worcester, a Swedenborgian minister and amateur architect who designed and built his own home in the Piedmont hills adjacent to Oakland in 1876. His approach awakened considerable interest and inspired the ethos of what was to be known as "the simple home." The spirit of this idea and the way of life it represented was captured in a widely read book of the same title, written by Charles Keeler, a university classmate of Morgan's, and published in 1904. Keeler's book focused on his own home, designed by Bernard Maybeck, who had used Worcester's house as a source of inspiration.

Julia Morgan's work at Asilomar illustrates much of what the Arts and Crafts movement sought – simplicity of approach and use of local vernacular forms, rustic-looking materials, and colors and textures that blended with those native to the site. Upon visiting the Pacific Grove site, Morgan immediately sketched an overall plan locating and arranging various buildings for the 30-acre coastal property. She apparently had a relatively free hand in the landscape site planning as well as the design of the individual buildings. In 1929, while discussing various projects in a note to her secretary, Lillian Forney, she wrote, "I [usually] design and build to please the client and their expectations. At Asilomar, the YWCA permitted me to landscape the buildings as I saw fit."<sup>9</sup>



Exterior of Phoebe Apperson Hearst Social Hall, 1950s. Photo courtesy of California State Parks. Copyright California State Parks, 2002.

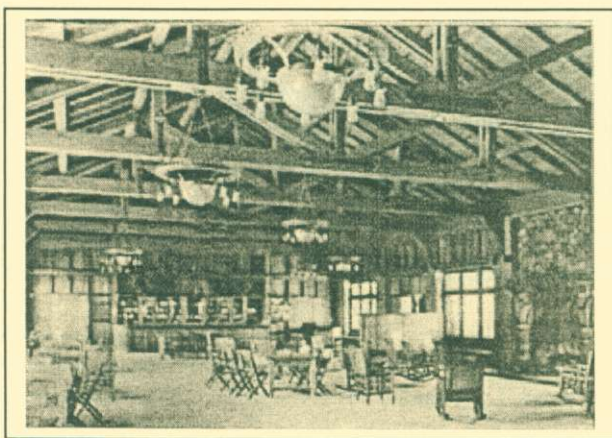
The first building that Morgan began designing at Asilomar was the Phoebe Apperson Hearst Social Hall, now known as the Administration Building, which was completed in 1913, along with the stone entry gates. The Social Hall is in many ways an illustration of Arts and Crafts aspirations. Its expansive, gently sloped wood shingle

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<sup>9</sup> Personal correspondence, J. Morgan to L. Forney, Bancroft Library.



roof with extended overhanging eaves provides a strong sense of shelter and a horizontal emphasis. The exterior displays large window bays located between riverrock-clad structural pylons, above which runs a decorative ribbon of bark clad half-logs, with inlaid diamond features, between each of the ornamental wood capitals of the pylons. To each side of the typically extra wide entry doors are hand-crafted iron lanterns. Within the interior of the building, wood structural trusses, utilizing decoratively shaped metal fasteners for holding all components in place, are left exposed, as are the ceiling joists and rafters above the trusses. These details provide aesthetic interest and create an effect of high-ceilinged space. This treatment, along with the use of unpainted redwood boards, large expanses of window bays for light and views, and a large stone fireplace with built-in inglenook seating to either side, make up the main features of the interior. The plain use of materials for their natural qualities, the exposing of structural components, the interest in the indoor-outdoor relationship, the featuring of handcrafted workmanship, and the straightforward expression of form and materials through the simplest economy of means are all part of the Arts and Crafts approach.



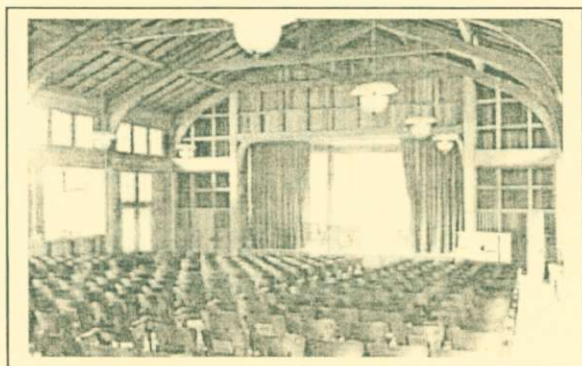
Interior of Phoebe Apperson Hearst Social Hall, 1918. Photo courtesy of California State Parks. Copyright California State Parks, 2002.



The role and importance of this building, however, is signaled more by its central location at the circular "commons" area in the overall plan of the grounds and by its façade facing west to the Pacific Ocean, than by its size, shape or appearance, which is similar to nearby buildings. Morgan's aim was to insert buildings into the natural setting, with a minimum of disturbance to the existing terrain and forest, clearing only those trees and plants necessary for buildings, roads and pathways. Virtually no cultivation of the landscape as garden was undertaken. The Phoebe Apperson Hearst Social Hall is, both practically and aesthetically, the central reference point in Morgan's overall Asilomar design.

Her subsequent buildings there included:

- 1913 – Engineering Cottage
- 1913 – Grace H. Dodge Chapel
- 1915 – Guest Inn (now demolished due to poor condition)
- 1916 – Warehouse building (demolished)
- 1916 – Visitors Lodge (currently known as the Lodge)
- 1917 – 40-car capacity garage (now demolished)
- 1918 – Stuck-Up Inn
- 1918 – Viewpoint Inn (currently the Health Cottage)
- 1918 – Mary Ann Crocker Dining Hall
- 1919 – Scripps Class Hall (destroyed by fire)
- 1923 – Pirates' Den
- 1927 – Director's Cottage
- 1927 – Scripps Lodge Annex
- 1928 – Merrill Hall (Auditorium)



Interior of Grace H. Dodge Chapel, 1916. Photo courtesy of California State Parks. Copyright California State Parks, 2002.

In addition to her work at Asilomar for the YWCA, Morgan served several individual clients in the Monterey area over a twenty-five year period.<sup>10</sup> Available office records indicate that one of her earliest commissions in the area was a house for Mr. and Mrs. William Dinsmore at 104 First Street on the corner of Ocean View in Pacific Grove, constructed in 1914. In the previous year Dinsmore, a successful Oakland merchant, had commissioned Morgan to design one of his stores.



104 First St., Pacific Grove. Photo by Christie Nanawa, 2002.

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<sup>10</sup> Lynn Forney McMurray, Morgan's goddaughter, is presently examining the archives deposited at various repositories (Kennedy Library at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, CA; College of Environmental Design and Bancroft Libraries at the University of California Libraries, Berkeley) as well as records remaining in her own possession, in order to verify with documentation Morgan's known, attributed or alleged projects.

Her next area project was a small vacation house for Theodore Columbus White, located in Carmel-by-the-Sea at Carmelo and 15<sup>th</sup> Streets (southwest corner) and built in 1914-15. In 1915-16, Morgan designed a cottage for Mr. W. T. Beatty on Live Oak Meadow Road in Pebble Beach. In 1923 she was commissioned to design a residence for Mrs. Edward Lacey Brayton at Ronda and Cortez Roads, also in Pebble Beach. She had designed two previous residences for this family, the first in 1909 in Oakland and another in 1912 on Mountain Avenue in Piedmont.

In 1928, Morgan was commissioned to develop studies for a proposed church to replace Monterey's San Carlos Cathedral, also known as the Royal Presidio Chapel. Built in 1794, this is the oldest building still standing in Monterey. It appears that this project did not advance beyond early schematic sketches.

In 1939, Morgan made alterations on a house in Monterey for James N. Parsons. Her last work in the area, in 1940, was a residence designed for Drs. Charles and Emma Wightman Pope at 2981 Franciscan Way in Carmel-by-the-Sea.<sup>11</sup>

The most noteworthy monument to Julia Morgan's presence on the Monterey Peninsula is surely the Asilomar Conference Grounds, put under the care of the California State Parks System in 1958 and subsequently placed on the Federal Registry of National Landmarks. This masterpiece, as well as the various houses and cottages that she designed here, are testimony to her conviction that "my buildings will speak for me long after I am gone."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Office archives identify a home in Carmel Valley, 1941, for Joe Willicomb, Mr. William Hearst's secretary. No other information is currently available on the address or status of this home. Julia Morgan design 'attributions' have been made for the Cooper House at 1008 Franklin Street, for the Moorish Mediterranean revival home at 580 El Dorado Street and for the cottage at 1086 Hellam Street, Monterey, but no archival records have been located to date for any of these dwellings.

<sup>12</sup> Susanna Reiss, *op cit*, Vol. 1, pg. 94.



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### Author's Bio

A graduate of the University of California, School of Architecture at Berkeley, Russell Quacchia practiced architecture in San Francisco, and was a partner in the firm of John Funk and Associates for many years. Until recently he was an architectural project manager at Stanford University, and is now an independent consultant. He resides in Los Altos and Carmel-by-the-Sea. He is currently writing a book: *Julia Morgan, Architect, & the Creation of the Asilomar Conference Grounds*.

## Book Review

*Storied Land: Community and Memory in Monterey* by John Walton.  
University of California Press, 2001. pp. 346

A history of Monterey by a UC-Davis sociology professor? Well, yes -- a work in a tradition that, a hundred years ago, was called "the sociology of knowledge" -- the study of how social factors color and limit what we know, or think we know, about our society. This social historian deftly juggles, on the one hand, the facts about what actually happened, the political and social history of our community, and, on the other hand, the stories that successive generations told themselves about what they believed had happened -- stories relating also to what they wanted to happen in the future. And Walton is especially eager to point out what these successive narratives did *not* tell -- tidbits of Monterey history that these accounts suppressed because such facts did not fit into their own picture of themselves and their past.

Walton emphasizes the liberal ideology of the Mexican revolution against Spain and the positive aims of such "Californio" revolutionists as Alvarado. And within their "bourgeois revolution," not only lower-class Mexicans but even Native American Indians began to sue for their political rights as citizens -- "a revolution within a revolution." Meanwhile such outsiders as the Scotsman Alexander Forbes and the Yankee Richard Henry Dana judged California by their own standards and found it in need of a more energetic regime. Such foreign visitors "read local customs inaccurately as evidence of indolence or a carefree lifestyle. Californios had style, to be sure, but they also had plenty of cares." (Walton is a graceful and witty writer.)

Walton puzzles that local historians attach so much importance to Robert Louis Stevenson, a relatively unknown writer when he lived

in Monterey for three months, and so little importance to David Jacks, the widely-hated Scot who in 1852 gained control of all the lands of the former Pueblo of Monterey and then of vast properties throughout the region, dominating Monterey until the Southern Pacific Railroad and its allies finally managed to install a functional city government in 1889. While Jacks battled “squatters” on land that he claimed was his, the railroad with its Hotel Del Monte led the way in transforming Monterey into an elite tourist resort and property market. Having acquired extensive land, much of it from Jacks, the Pacific Improvement Company, real estate arm of the Southern Pacific and ancestor of the Pebble Beach Co., developed the 17-Mile Drive, carrying tourists in horse-drawn vehicles from its luxurious hotel to the ruins of Carmel Mission. All along the way, tourists viewed truly gorgeous real estate -- which the Pacific Improvement Co. graciously offered for sale.

Central to this enterprise of tourism and land sales was the selling of Monterey as the picturesque “old Spanish capital” of California. Walton takes repeated delight in ridiculing the “potted version of local history” produced for tourists and for well-to-do Americans who perhaps came here first as vacationers and remained to bask in the romantic story of Monterey’s Spanish (not Mexican) heritage. The history they believed in was “a narrative of American progress. In general the Franciscan missionaries are admired as the founders of California at Monterey. Indians disappear . . . Following secularization, Mexican California was chaotic and directionless. The men are ‘indolent’ and the women long-suffering.” This version of Monterey history, Walton reminds us, was “developed in the context of public action intended to control the disorderly conduct of Mexican Californios, the threat of Chinese immigration, and the urban blight presented by the fishing industry and the poor.” Among the surprises of “suppressed history” Walton offers us is that the burning of the Del Monte Hotel in 1887 was surely arson -- very probably arson by its



Chinese employees. Such hints at local unrest would never fit the prevailing historical picture of charm and romantic delight.

Much of the twentieth century saw a struggle between forces who wanted to keep Monterey a genteel tourist mecca and those supporting the profitable and ill-smelling industries of fishing and canning. Urban beautification, city planning and finally urban renewal were code words that implied razing the modest neighborhoods where Sicilian, Portuguese, Chinese, and other low-income workers lived between Del Monte Ave. and the bay. In this context Walton describes the 1931 origin and work of the Monterey History and Art Association, publisher of this periodical. At first elitist, always committed to preserving Monterey's Spanish and Mexican structures and heritage, it finally exercised its civic power to crucially moderate redevelopers' plans for a too extensive and insensitive razing of old neighborhoods.

Walton reminds us that Steinbeck's *Cannery Row* is a charming tale mostly about feckless bums that has "very little to do with fishing, manufacturing, working people... and Cannery Row as it evolved over half a century.... Yet Cannery Row has been reconstructed, true to nothing particularly historical, as a mythical place that conflates fact with fiction." A final illustration of Walton's method is his treatment of the movement to canonize Serra -- a story involving local and church politics, much fund-raising, the Pope's visit to Carmel in 1987, and a Catholic authority's efforts to discourage publication of a story, based on Native American oral tradition, that Serra's body was removed from the mission about the time of secularization -- which, if true, would seem to put the kibosh on veneration of the putative saint's relics, and miracles attributed to those relics, if there are no relics there.

Nobody's perfect. Walton muddles the genealogy of leading Spanish-Mexican families, locates El Carmelo Hotel in Carmel on one page and in Pacific Grove on another page, and thinks the archives of the Monterey County Historical Society are in Monterey. But such non-essential slips do not disfigure Walton's central purpose. His account of Monterey history and historiography is really a treatise in the philosophy of history, a study of how historical narratives emerge from the collective memories of communities and how such narratives function and change.

Noble Stockton

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