

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

December 1, 1949

Colonel Roger S. Fitch has resigned as president of the Monterey History and Art Association. His final resignation was accepted with deep and sincere regret at a recent meeting of the board of directors of the association of which he has been a faithful and untiring leader for most of the years of its existence. It was Colonel Fitch, with Mrs. Laura Bride Powers, then curator of the Custom House, and a group of friends of Old Monterey, who organized the History and Art Association, Ltd. in 1931.

Colonel Fitch will remain as a director of the association, his term in office extending until January, 1953. Carmel Martin, vice president of the association, has been acting president during Colonel Fitch's recent illness, and will continue to fill that office until the annual meeting in January.

Recent gifts received by the Association and now on display at the Old Custom House are a froe (a knife blade with two wooden handles used to shape logs for beams in the old missions in early days), the gift of Dr. David Cleaver; a huge iron bear trap with unusually large teeth, said to have been used in the Big Sur Country about 1852; and one of the first record books kept in the Custom House in very early days.

Several changes in personnel at the state-owned Historical Monuments in Monterey have been announced. Mr. Henry Collins, who has been the curator at the Stevenson House since its opening, has been transferred to Old Shasta in Northern California. Mrs. Amelie Kneass, formerly assistant curator at the Custom House, has been placed in charge of the Stevenson House, with Mrs. Vera Stewart still retaining her position as the assistant there. Mr. Hubert McNoble, formerly of Stockton, has arrived to assist Mrs. Mary Greene, the curator at the Old Custom House.

"A Child Goes Forth," by Dr. Nellie McKnight Doyle, was the book chosen for review by Mrs. Edward Gross as her contribution to a program on California Pioneer Women at a Monday Afternoon Club meeting at the home of Mrs. May Hare. Previous to the meeting, Mrs. Hare entertained the membership of the club at a luncheon.

A story of the life of a woman doctor from early childhood through her graduation from medical school

in San Francisco to her life as a practicing physician and her marriage, it is a fascinating tale of hardships, love, motherhood and ministrations to the sick and dying in the early days of the state of Nevada. The author's descriptions of San Francisco before the fire were a delightful part of the story.

Mrs. Gross continued her discussion of early California pioneer women by including two Monterey women from life stories as told to her by Mrs. Antonia Bach Thompson, and we quote:

"The women of old Monterey were strong in character, kind, charitable and thoughtful of others. Outstanding among them was Dona Prudenciana Vallejo Amesti, affectionately called "Tia Potana," sister of General Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo. In 1824 she was married to Don Jose Amesti, a Spanish Basque, who had come to Monterey in 1822. For a wedding gift, the handsome two story adobe, built by him in 1825, he presented to his bride. It is now owned by Mrs. Frances Elkins.

"Never robust in health, the years took their toll and for many years she was wheeled to church and to her visits of kindness and mercy.

"Small as Monterey was in population, there were families in straitened circumstances, but once their plight reached her, food appeared on the table and clothes were provided and work found for the men. When death visited the poor and there were no undertakers, in spite of her invalid condition, she prepared the body for burial and often paid for the coffins made by the local carpenter.

"Dona Prudenciana donated the large acreage, where now stands the church of Our Lady of Perpetual Help and the Boys' school near Watsonville, to the Catholic Church.

"The Elkins Adobe, as the Amesti Adobe is now called, was left by her granddaughter, Flora McKinley Duckworth, for an old ladies' home, but in the settling of the estate that important fact was forgotten.

"Another remarkable and fine person was Dona Concepcion Munras McKee, eldest daughter of Don Esteban Munras and Dona Catalina Munras, owners and builders of Casa Munras, who when nearly 100 years of age, accompanied by her maid, would attend daily mass at the Royall Presidio chapel of San Carlos. "For many years she had charge of the altar decorations and cleaning of the sanctuary. Through the years she made with own hands the dainty altar linens."