

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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The Japanese God Unscathed by Fire

"What the Academy of Science is Doing," is the title of a full page story taken from a San Francisco newspaper bearing the date of March 22 1908, which met my eye in a scrapbook kept by the late Edward Berwick of Carmel Valley and Pacific Grove. Just having visited the Academy for the – well, we can not name the number of times – the story fascinated me and I read through with a great deal of renewed interest. The page was profusely decorated with drawings of huge prehistoric animals and five cuts, the very top one being a likeness of the late E.J. Molera of Monterey and San Francisco, the president of the Academy. General L.H. Foote, the treasurer, the old Academy building on Market street before the fire, the proposed new building taken from the designers drawing and the wooden Japanese God who came out of the 1906 fire unscathed.

The surprise to me was that the article had been written by the late Edward Berwick of Pacific Grove who was a director of the Academy of Science – making two of the Peninsula's prominent citizens who were interested in the advancement of science.

Mr. Berwick wrote in his article "Science adds to life's joys and subtracts from its sorrows. Science creates for us health, wealth and gladness. It beautifies our homes, betters our food, girdles our globe in five seconds, drives away our prejudices, superstitions and fears. Science is the keystone and touchstone of life."

Over half a century ago – to speak by the book, on May 16, 1853 – an institution was born whose aim was to serve some of these ends. It later grew into the California Academy of Sciences, now really a three-fold entity – a natural history society, a museum of research and popular instruction, and lastly a corporation holding property and doing business under the laws of the State of California.

It might be well before we continue this story as written in 1908, two years after the disastrous earthquake and fire in San Francisco, to inform those readers who have not visited the Academy of Science that it is now located in Golden Gate Park in San Francisco, across the plaza from the de Young Museum and in close proximity to the bandstand. The aquarium is in the same building.

In the early years of the Academy it was simply a natural history society, composed largely of men eminent in science, the activities of the society being manifested in the personal scientific work of the members.

When the end came for James Lack at the age of 80 on October 1, 1876, and the Academy received more than \$600,000 from the residuary of his \$4,000,000 estate, a large expansion of its work was planned, the erection of the building on Market street, near Fourth, and the establishment of the museum of research and popular instruction, with its staff of devoted curators was within reach.

Like other San Francisco institutions the Academy of Sciences seemed utterly wiped off the face of the earth, Mr. Berwick wrote, when the earthquake and fire hit San Francisco. There were one or two curious freaks of the event which Mr. Berwick mentioned in his article. It seemed quite impossible that anything combustible could have remained unhurt in that fiery furnace that raged unquenchable for days and remained red hot for weeks. But when the ashes cooled there was found a huge wooden Japanese God, with never a feature marred, and six plate glass cases, containing textiles in the anthropological collection so little injured that a little skillful repairing made them as good as new.

Only eleven short days after the fire, on April 29, 1906 a temporary office was rented and the work of rehabilitation had actively begun. The executive committee appointed to take charge of all the business interests of the Academy was composed of William H. Crocker, chairman, J.C. Cebrian, E.J. Molera, president of the Academy and Leverett Mills Loomis, director of the Museum. Joseph D. Grant was added later.

Very soon the Board of Park Commissioners, acting as trustees for the people, granted permission to the Academy to erect a temporary museum building on the plot of ground situated where it is now located in Golden Gate Park.