

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Digging for Facts

During the past week Colonel C.A. De Camp and Mrs. De Camp entertained Dr. Alex D. Fowler of the Bell Laboratories at Murray Hill, New Jersey, and president of the Morris County, N.J., Historical Society. While here Dr. Fowler availed himself of the opportunity of scanning a part of the historical document collection of Thomas W. Norris of Carmel, the president of the Monterey History and Art Association, whose collection deals largely with early California and with Monterey in particular.

Dr. Fowler was fascinated, not only with the worth and rarity of the collection but also with the painstaking care with which Mr. Norris has arranged his subject matter for the benefit of posterity and for the uses of historical research. The Doctor would have gladly doubled or trebled the time allowable for study of the collection and has promised himself the luxury of a later visit.

Dr. Fowler's vocation is that of research, with current assignment to the task of anticipating by presumably five or more years, the telephonic needs and requirements of television as it develops. He has been on the coast in the interests of the furtherance of that object. His avocation is that of relentlessly digging for the facts of early New Jersey history and the spark plugging of the Historical Society of which he is president.

Dr. Fowler's mission in Carmel was that of accepting on behalf of his society the gift of a collection of early New Jersey, Revolutionary and War of 1812 documents having to do with Colonel De Camp's ancestors and in particular their relation to the iron industry of those times.

One of Colonel De Camp's ancestors was the owner of the Morristown, New Jersey, mansion turned over to General Washington for his headquarters during the winter of 1777.

Probably the most interesting single document in the collection is the original parchment deed for the 655 acres in Morris County from sons of William Penn, Thomas and Richard, being a portion of a tract of some 15,000 acres of what was known as Western Jersey, originally owned by their father, William Penn.

Dr. Fowler in discussing the difference between meander property lines of the East coast and sectional divisions of the West coast, said that it had come to him as a matter of surprise to discover the excellence of the surveys of those days. He said that one could take current road maps and overlay them on those early maps and find them registering almost perfectly; that the early roadmakers' instinct for best routes was proven by the way that the modern highways follow the original routes. This especially is true of interstate highways and routes of main travel.

His first trip to the Pacific Coast found Dr. Fowler an enthusiastic visitor, leaving with the determination to make a return visit with all of his family when next the demands of television anticipation relax enough to allow the time required.

Fitting in beautifully with the above bit of news is an article which appeared in the September issue of The Museum News, published by the American Association of Museums: "Woodlawn, historic estate near Mt. Vernon, Va. Has been turned over to the National Trust for Historic Preservation in the United States to be operated as an historic house museum. The mansion, designed by William Thornton, together with 126 acres of land from the Mt. Vernon estate was given by George Washington as a wedding present to his adopted daughter, Nelly Custis.

The lease provides that "the National Trust will immediately liquidate the existing indebtedness and administer the 126-acre historic property for the benefit of the American people." An anonymous donor has made a grant that will make possible the restoration of the mansion and its maintenance as a museum. The house opened by the foundation as a national historic site in 1949, will continue to be open during restoration. Its dedication as a museum will take place in the spring.