

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

May 16, 1951

A Judge's Top Hat

"Keep Smiling" was the salutation tacked to the front gate at the home of Miss Bessie Prehn in Old Shasta a few months ago when a group of the residents of the old town held a house tour that they might finance the purchase of bound copies of the Old Shasta Courier covering the period from 1853 to 1905 for the Shasta Museum.

The greeting and advice to those who visited the Prehn home on that occasion was placed there for a very good and sad reason. Mrs. Prehn, the mother of "Miss Bessie" had passed quietly away the night before. Her going had been unexpected, for she had assisted very materially in the plans for the tour and had placed her house in order, gotten out all her prized possessions for show and had altered her best dress of years gone by, to wear for the important event.

Because of this interest her daughter and her friends went on with the original plans and "Miss Bessie" took her guests through her home, telling the story of her grandparents' arrival in Old Shasta before the Gold Rush, and reciting the history of the very old and very beautiful pieces of furniture which she now possesses as heirlooms from her grandparents.

When we asked Miss Prehn where the guests came from who made the pilgrimage, she replied, "As far north as Alaska and as far south as southern California," as well as Shasta County and the neighbors. When the several hostesses were asked to open their homes they hesitated because of inexperience and because they could not imagine anyone would be interested in seeing their "old things," but at the day's end when the silver offerings were counted, they found that over \$400 had been given. The event had been a success and the files were now safe.

The original idea had been given to the Shasta Historical Society by Henry Collins, the curator of the Shasta Museum, who was formerly the curator of the Stevenson House in Monterey.

On March 15, 1951, the Shasta Courier was 100 years old. One of the oldest papers in the state the Courier has maintained weekly service since its first issue in 1852. It is now published in Redding – 6 miles from Shasta.

The complete file of the Courier is now at the Bancroft Library in Berkeley where it will be photostated for the University Library and then returned as a permanent exhibit in the Old Shasta Museum, now a state monument.

We did not have the privilege of seeing the files of the old paper, but we did have a personally conducted tour of the museum by Mr. Collins and a charming visit with Miss Prehn, who repeated her historical tour for our pleasure, just as she had done for the guests who helped to purchase the Courier files.

The Shasta Museum was one of the highlights of the tour of the Mother Lode. There the state owns a bit over 6 acres. The old courthouse and jail have been restored and here the museum is located. The courtroom is a delight to behold, many of the furnishings are original, and the appointments are so perfect – even to the judge's top hat on the desk – that the visitor would not be too surprised if the judge and jury appeared.

An art galley of at least one hundred pictures painted by famous artists has been the gift of Mrs. Mae Helene Boggs, whose ancestors helped to found the city of Shasta, now reduced almost to ruins. Many Peninsula artists are represented in the valuable collection which occupies wall space in two rooms. Mrs. Boggs has also given a complete set of her family's parlor furniture – rosewood with handsome violet velvet upholstery and a library of Californiana.

The Shasta Parlor of Native Sons of the Golden West raised \$400 with which to purchase a collection of antique guns and revolvers, probably worth several times the price.

Old Shasta was once named Reading's Springs. Upon Shasta centered the 2000 mules and pack horses that were busy carrying the supplies to the camps along the rivers and creeks of Trinity County. Two significant changes took place in the city's brief span of life, a fire in 1853 and the building of the stage road through to Downieville, which took away the terminus from Shasta.

Shasta is today a profusion of half-fallen brick walls, the courthouse, an armory, a few stores, and the old Masonic Temple, built in 1851, to be the home of Western Star Lodge, the first chartered in California.