

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

May 29, 1951

The Cannonball Express

The Cannonball Express, symbol of the stagecoach era in California rests today in the Shasta State Historical Monument dedicated by the McCloud Parlor of the Native Sons of the Golden West, in perpetuity to the State of California.

The stage was escorted from Redding over the Middle Creek road, the original stage route, by 100 colorfully garbed members of the Shasta County Sheriff's Posse. The trip took more than two hours for the little more than six miles.

In making the presentation in behalf of the Native Sons, Judge Ross of Redding pointed out that 1951 is the centennial year of the establishment of stage routes throughout California and Southern Oregon. The Native sons purchased the stage 25 years ago and are now donating it to the California Division of Beaches and Parks.

A letter from Mrs. Ina Gerber of Del Monte Heights, Seaside, a pioneer of Pacific Grove having gone there on her honeymoon and lived there from Dec. 2nd 1889 until March 31, 1906, tells several interesting things about the Peninsula at that time.

The Seventeen Mile Drive was the first trip she took on her wedding day. Chinaman Joe's shanty was there then, and she reports, "he sold abalone shells and had a few chickens, which seemed to be his means of livelihood. At that time there were a few donkeys around but no sheep." She writes that she saw "the St. Paul stranded on the rocks at Pt. Joe the morning after the wreck. There were no lives lost and cattle on board were saved. This occurred in 1897."

Mrs. Margaret Chamberlain of the Carmel Valley had presented a very old and very beautiful gown to the Monterey History and Art Association for display in the Old Custom House. Before the proper showing can be made, Mrs. Mary Greene, the curator, must have a dress form. Is there anyone who would be willing to either give or loan such an object?

Mrs. Chamberlain, a member of the Association, tells an interesting story of origin of the gown. In the early 1840s her great aunt Johns was a bride in New Orleans. Her husband wanted his wife to be one of the best dressed women at the Mardi Gras so he sent to Paris

and engaged two expert dressmakers to come to New Orleans to make and design a dress for her. Both were men and the gown they made must have been the most beautiful one in all of the south. The material is black velvet, with the most exquisite embroidery imaginable around the neck and down the front of the blouse and skirt. In a rose damask [?] of 1849 she carefully packed and brought the dress to California. Being a good church woman, when the Episcopal parish where she lived needed some altar hangings, she cut the white satin from the skirt and supplied the required material.

The Monterey County Historical Society held their May meeting at San Juan Bautista. Picnic luncheon was enjoyed at tables placed in the garden at the rear of the Castro adobe, following which a tour of the State Historical Monuments was made by all present.

An amusing sight and interesting to those in attendance from Monterey was the old San Juan Eagle Fire Truck which occupies a conspicuous setting in the Plaza livery stable (built in 1874). A very large sign told this story: "San Juan Eagle Truck which won the World's championship from Monterey, July 4, 1884. Time 48 seconds.

The San Juan Bautista State Historical Monument was incorporated into the State Park system in 1933 when the property was purchased from the descendants of Patrick Breen, who was a member of the ill-fated Donner Party.

Mr. Harry J. Breen, the grandson of Patrick Breen, talked informally at the luncheon, expressing his gratification that the buildings and plaza were being preserved by the State and telling of his recent gift to the California Historical Society of three documents pertaining to the sale in 1851 to Patrick Breen of 60,000 bricks and "also one lot with all improvements thereon" in Monterey.

The improvements thereon included the old Gallant Duncan Dickenson house, and the bricks were part of those from which Dickenson built his house in 1847, it being the first brick house in California.