

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

October 2, 1953

Our National Parks

We have written so much about our California State Historical Monuments and our State Parks, that we became aware of the fact that we might become a bit prejudiced if we did not go further afield and study about what the national government has accomplished in saving for posterity some of our beautiful and historic places in California. We find that we owe a great deal of credit to the National Park Service as well as to the State Division of Beaches and Parks.

We have learned that national parks can be established only "by Congress but the President has the authority to designate national monuments. A national park or monument not only protects the site and the land but also protects the plants and animal life therein. The National Park Service was established in 1916 to acquire property "for the benefit and enjoyment of the people."

It was a surprise to learn that Sequoia National Park in Tulare County was the first national park in California. Yosemite was made a national park just six days later on Oct. 1, 1890, and the same day Gen. Grant National Park was created.

Sequoia National Park was established by an act of Congress to preserve the best remaining specimens of Big Trees (*Sequoia gigantea*). The park was enlarged by an act of July 3, 1926, and now contains 604 square miles. Noteworthy among its great trees is the Gen. Sherman, 36.5 feet in diameter, and 272.4 feet high.

Yosemite National Park was established by an Act of Congress to preserve a valley of unusual beauty created by glacial action, waterfalls, big trees, and wild life. The park contains 1,176.16 square miles, of which the valley proper occupies but eight square miles. The valley was discovered in 1851 by Maj. James D. Savage, who led an expedition into the Sierra in pursuit of marauding Indians. The Indians were known as "Yosemites," meaning, in their tongue, "grizzly bear." Dr. L.H. Bunnell, a surgeon who accompanied the expedition, suggested that the name be given to the valley.

In was Oct. 1, 1890 that Gen. Grant National Park was created by Act of Congress to preserve the remaining specimens of the Big Trees (*Sequoia gigantea*). The park is four miles square and contains the Gen. Grant tree, 267.4 feet high, and 40.3 feet in diameter.

It was 26 years later before another Act of Congress created a fourth and last national park in California – Lassen Volcanic National Park on Aug. 9, 1916. This park was created to preserve the only active volcano in continental United States, together with the numerous hot springs and mud geysers.

This park, with its subsequent additions now totals 163 square miles in area. The volcano Lassen Peak, is 10,453 feet high and was in frequent eruption between 1914 and 1917. The park is named for Peter Lassen, a pioneer of 1840.

We find in "California Through Four Centuries", that Peter Lassen, with Isaac Roop, is noted as one of the leaders in a movement among the settlers in Honey Lake Valley in northern California to declare the region seceded from the State of California – and to be known as the "Territory of Nataqua."

(To be Continued)