

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

February 18, 1953

Religious Heritage

Col. C.A. De Camp, in a recent address before the members of the Church of the Wayfarer, in Carmel, spoke of the deep religious convictions of three of our presidents of the United States: Washington and Lincoln, whose birthdays are celebrated in this month of February; and Dwight D. Eisenhower, the most recently inaugurated Commander in Chief; and of their historic inaugural address – each so entirely different in many respects, but each so alike in their appeal for Divine guidance in all their undertakings.

Colonel De Camp spoke first of the religious heritage of the country and we quote: "... when the greatest moment in a man's life come to him, and that moment is his assumption of the leadership of a great people, then is his character perhaps more fully revealed than at any time. Then, if ever, he bears his soul to God."

George Washington of Virginia had been elected President of the United States on April 6, 1789. Reviewing the situation in New York on that inauguration day in 1789, Col. De Camp recalled that the Continental Congress had given place to the Congress of the United States, and the members were assembled in Federal Hall, near the head of Wall Street and the arrival of the president-elect was nervously awaited.

By April 29, the journey of the courier, a Charles Thomson, for 13 years Secretary of the Congress, to Mt. Vernon, and Washington's return journey had been completed with a triumphal barge voyage from Elizabethport, New Jersey, to Murray's Wharf at the foot of Wall Street. Surrounded by a widely enthusiastic crowd, Washington was escorted to the home of Governor Clinton near Hanover and Liberty Streets, where he spent the night.

The next day, April 30, Washington was driven from the Clinton home, in what has since come to be known as the Inaugural Parade, in a stagecoach drawn by four white horses, and followed by carriages of the French and Spanish Ambassadors. They reached within about 600 yards of Federal Hall where the crowd was so great they got out and walked.

It is interesting to note how the President was dressed in 1789. He wore a full suit of dark brown cloth, with

metal buttons embossed with eagles, white stockings, and plain silver buckles on his shoes. He carried a dress sword, and wore powdered hair, as was the custom.

On a balcony of the Federal Building, Chancellor Robt. R. Livingston administered the oath prescribed by the Constitution; after which the crowd in the street, it is recorded, went wild with joy. After a few minutes the President repaired to the Senate Chamber and sat down.

As Washington arose to speak, those present arose also and remained standing and gave him rapt attention. It has been conceded that he was very nervous and agitated.

Washington, like Eisenhower, prayed: "... my fervent supplications to that Almighty Being who rules over the universe, who presides at the councils of nations, and whose providential aids can supply every human defect, that His benediction may consecrate to the liberties and happiness of the people of the United States..."

As opposed to Washington's near triumphal journey to his inauguration, his joyous reception and unrestrained general jubilation, the Lincoln journey had to be interrupted by a change of plans taken to circumvent an assassination plot.

It was a dull and dismal March 4, in the East portico of the then unfinished Capitol. Chief Justice Taney administered the Oath, in a state of fearful emotion so great as to render him near speechless – so the historians tell us. An overwrought audience looked on more in fear than in hope. As he left his friends in Springfield, Lincoln had said to them: "I now leave, not knowing when or if every, I may return, with a task before me greater than that which rested on Washington. Without the assistance of the Divine Being who ever attended him, I cannot succeed. With that assistance, I cannot fail. Trusting in Him who can go with me, yet remain with you, and be everywhere for good, let us confidently hope that all will be well."

In contrast with the dismal weather of the first inauguration, the record says that the sun came out at the second while Lincoln was speaking. It was then that he said: "With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have been born in battle, and for his widow and his orphan- ...".