

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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The Missing Wall

In April of 1923 there appeared this item of interest in The Monterey Peninsula Herald: "Summer tourists visiting the Peninsula will likely see a changed aspect at Colton Hall, the First Capitol of California. Instead of the wire fence now gracing (?) the front of the lot on Pacific Street, there will be a fine stone wall."

Once upon a time there was a fine stone wall about Colton Hall, but many years ago some local citizen, with more ambition than foresight, counselled the demolition of all the adobes. He started to work on the wall about Colton Hall, and would have wrecked the historic building itself, had it not been for others more interested in the early history of the State.

But the wall was gone, and the stone used in a school house construction.

The Herald reporter goes on to tell the story: "Many old-timers likely forgot the episode, but not C.D. Caspar, local contractor. When the old grammar school was torn down, the stone which had once graced Colton Hall lot, beautiful pieces, every one hand-hewn, passed into his possession.

"Mr. Caspar sought out Mayor J.P. Dougherty and put the matter up to him. The result was an order from the Council to the mayor last night, whereby it is probable that the stones will again return to their original home in the form of a neat wall in front of the historic Old Colton Hall, cradle of California history and the birthplace of a great State."

Mr. Caspar was the owner of Mission Inn in Monterey until his death a number of years ago. His grandson, Bernie McMenamin Jr., is now owner-manager of the historic structure which had been restored by his grandfather along lines reminiscent of the past era in Peninsula history. Mr. Caspar lived in Monterey more than 42 years, always interested in its history and development.

A special walking trip to the Friendly Plaza and Colton Hall failed to reveal this old stone wall mentioned in the newspaper of 1923. We have come to the conclusion that it was never restored or that it may have again been torn down when the garden was remodeled, after the building of the Few Memorial and the addition of the Friendly Plaza.

Pertinent to the foregoing is the following excerpt from a recent bulletin of the National Council for Historic Sites and Buildings, with which the Monterey Foundation has a charter affiliation:

"Soil can be conserved, forests replanted, substitutes found for exhausted mineral resources, but once destroyed, our historic sites and structures are forever lost to the nation (not to Monterey alone.)

"They are the tangible reminder of our past; they are the priceless treasures of the national wealth; and they are irreplaceable, for although copies can be made, they never have the meaning of the originals."

Monterey, capital of California under Spain and Mexico, seat of government during the American occupation from July 7, 1846, to September 9, 1850, when statehood was achieved, is truly one of the historic places of the nation. This I thoroughly believe!