

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

May 6, 1953

Nineteen Historical Sites

The 171st birthday of the founding of Santa Barbara Mission and city coincided with California Division of Beaches and Parks historical area conference, several weeks ago, in Santa Barbara. The event was celebrated with a birthday party to which members of the conference were invited – highlighted by a program of historic interest and Spanish entertainment.

Among the “special guests from out of town” were Mrs. Mary L. Greene, Old Custom House; Mrs. William Kneass, Stevenson House; Mrs. Lester Hartigan, California's First Theatre, Mrs. Vera Dolbow Stewart, assistant curator; Neill Power, ranger, and J.T. Chaffee, district superintendent; all of Monterey. Also in attendance were: Newton Drury, chief of the Division of Beaches and Parks, and Dr. Aubrey Neasham, historian for the state park system in California.

Dr. Neasham has been called “the keeper of our conscience in historical matters, and the chief coordinator of our historical interests,” and he has already embarked, according to his announcement in Santa Barbara, upon a program of renewing knowledge of historic significance that can be passed on annually to the thousands who visit California's famous landmarks.

Among suggestions made by Dr. Neasham was that San Miguel Island off the Santa Barbara coast, El Presidio in Santa Barbara and the late William Randolph Hearst's castle at San Simeon in San Luis Obispo County, among other sites, be acquired as state historical monuments. He discussed these items as a long-term master program for historic sites and buildings which would embrace 19 points of California history and development.

“It is our hope,” he said, “to set up a master program for acquisition of historical sites and extension of boundaries of presently existing sites, so as to record for all time to come the great story of our great state.”

Newton Drury, chief of the Division of Beaches and Parks, pointed out that the work of his division is becoming more carefully defined. He said that there are four overall parts of the work, acquisition of land, administration, lands operation development and interpretation.

Attending the conference were 50 curators, rangers, supervisors and Sacramento officials of the State Division of Beaches and Parks. One of the afternoon meetings was given over to a discussion of “interpretation” of the division's work, led by Mrs. Kneass. Taking part in the roundtable discussion were Carroll D. Hall, J.R. Dyson of Sutter's Fort and Madie D. Brown, curator of the State owned historic monument, “Lachryma Montis,” General Vallejo's home in Sonoma. Mrs. Mary L. Greene of the Old Custom House took part in a panel discussion on “Encroachments to State Memorial Landmarks.”

Neasham, in discussing his efforts toward forming a master plan for the state's historical sites, listed three “themes” as a basis of such historical work:

Aboriginal (Indian) period, Spanish exploration, Spanish colonization, the Mexican period, American exploration and immigration, the Gold Rush, early statehood days, development of transportation, development of communications, military affairs, development of agriculture, development of mining, development of industry, advancement of education and science.

He said that from the English period through the advancement period there is but a scant representation among the state monuments.

He listed the Santa Barbara Presidio, along with the presidios in San Francisco, Monterey and San Diego as worthy of preservation as sites to illustrate the Spanish colonization period. He suggested that Hearst's San Simeon castle be acquired as “a fusion of culture and American newspaper history.”

As a final number on the two days' program the conferees had the opportunity to inspect La Purisima Mission State Historical Monument at Lompoc.