

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Drama Revival

Among the picturesque old buildings in Columbia one of the most representative is the solid brick, iron-shuttered Fallon House Theatre. The first unit of the old hostelry was erected in the early 1850's by an Irish immigrant Owen Fallon. The second section, including the tap room – with the bar that was “shipped ‘round the horn”, was built within a few years.

On our visit to Columbia recently, we were privileged to attend a delightful performance of Henry Arthur Jones' “The Liars” presented by the summer drama class of the College of the Pacific Columbia Company. De Marcus Brown, well known on the peninsula, was the producer and director. The old Fallon Theatre was packed to the doors with those persons in attendance at the California History Foundation, also sponsored by the College of the Pacific, and other guests from far and wide.

Some years after the building of the Fallon House and the bar, Jim Fallon, the son of the original builder, added the theatre. When the State Division of Beaches and Parks took over Columbia as a Historical Monument, in 1945, the division of architecture began a restoration program which has resulted in a beautiful, authentic revival of the Fallon House Theatre. With the co-operation of the California Centennials Commission the job was completed in time for California's official Forty-niner Centennial Celebration. Here the Pacific Theatre company, directed by De Marcus Brown, played nine performances during the three-day festival, including a midnight “command” performance for Governor Earl Warren.

The redecoration of the old Theatre was accomplished with a great deal of feeling for the authentic, rather than modernization. The ceiling decorations had been the work of Jim Fallon. The color scheme was in green and brown on blue grey canvas, fastened to the old wooden ceiling when completed. From that original decoration the remainder of the theatre, including the horse-shoe balcony was refurbished.

In 1943, many years after the once gay theatre had fallen into disuse, the College of the Pacific, through the gifts of friends interested in its California History Foundation purchased the Fallon House. When Columbia became a State Park in 1945, the College

deeded the property to the State of California. The present year is the fourth since the reopening of the old playhouse.

We learned during our recent visit to Columbia, that not only did the early inhabitants of the community make their own brick for the construction of the buildings there, but they quarried much marble, and shipped a great deal of this stone to San Francisco as early as 1854.

Columbia's first brick building was completed in 1853, and torn down in 1866 and the bricks sold in Sonora. Other brick buildings were demolished in the early 1860s in order that the gravel might be mined beneath the structures.

Most of the historic buildings in Columbia are signed, some by the State Division of Beaches and Parks, and some with small artistic hand-lettered markers designed and executed by Oletha Weston, well-known artist who has many friends on the Monterey Peninsula.

Among the buildings thus marked are the D.O. Mills building, erected in 1855, the Gold Nugget Saloon built in 1857; the Hildebrand Building, now the Native Sons' Hall, erected in 1855; the Levi Block built in 1854, and the Pioneer Saloon, the Sum Tun Sing Company building, St. Anne's church, completed in 1856; the Odd Fellow's Hall and the Springfield Brewery. The Masonic building is directly across the street from the Fallon House. It is a reconstruction, built of old brick instead of wood as was the original structure. It was restored by the grand lodge of the State of California and was presented by that body to the State Division of Beaches and Parks when Columbia became a State Monument.

The old Wells Fargo Express office, built in 1858, and recently deeded to the State of California, is now in the process of restoration. When the work began with the floor and foundation, all the dirt was carefully screened and many interesting and valuable objects were unearthed including some gold dust and nuggets, which are now on display in one of the ancient state own buildings. Wells Fargo Express Company will furnish many historical pieces of equipment, pictures etc., when the building is finally completed and open to the public. The original safe and gold scales are now in storage awaiting their return to their original office. The cast iron grill work on the Express building was made in New York, we were told by our guide, Dr. Burns.