

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Some Old Clocks

Under the title "Business Californiana" the "Notes from the California Historical Society" tells this story. Various historical publications across the nation in the past few years have emphasized the illustrative and research value of business records. There is no better evidence than the heavy demand in the library of the society for information brought out on the printed handbills, photographs, catalogs, calendars, illustrated letterheads, and just plain old bills issued by California firms.

A small leaflet issued by Cineograph Parlors, San Francisco in 1898 is found to be a most valuable illustration of early motion picture enterprise. In the 1885 catalog of Feigenbaum & Co. importers of Yankee notions, musical instruments, and toys, carries illustrations of dolls, a prize find for the doll collector.

Through the collecting of these items California culture and the way of life are discovered and eventually presented to its people through all media of communication.

Recently while spending a few weeks in Tucson Ariz. we viewed a valuable collection of antique clocks, presented in one of the large department stores by a well-known firm. Hundreds of persons came to see the exhibit and stood in line for a chance to see the 35 clocks on display. There were wall clocks, mantel clocks, table clocks, water clocks, and dwarf clocks, clocks from many nations and many manufacturers all fascinating to see.

The smallest clock in the world, so an advertising pamphlet told us, was made by the famous American horologist, Mr. Barny, in 1942. It took three years to complete this time piece.

The oldest clock was an Italian night clock made in 1650, an extremely rare and one of the earliest examples of the illuminated dial for night use. A lighted candle was placed inside the case to provide illumination. The minutes were not registered for the reason that they were not important in the 17th Century since clocks were shockingly bad timekeepers.

One of the most amusing was an automatic picture clock in this Tucson display clock. It was a fine example of the artistry of automation craftsmen. The clock itself

evidently became less important as the artisans created animated pictures, and sometimes an entire animated stage peopled with moving figures. The one we saw was a Viennese creation, the approach to a picnic where there were seven moving objects on the face of the painting. It is about 100 years ago that this craft began to die out and will probably never be revived.

Probably the most unique dock we saw was the Winchester water clock, made about 1680. an example of an ancient timekeeping device. This one was of the type used in Shakespeare's time, but the principle, we read, had not changed since earliest antiquity. Water dripped through a tiny faucet from an upper cannister to a lower one and the level of the water actuates the movement of the hand. In later years sand was substituted for water.

The very oldest clock was a fire or lamp Clock, dated 1580. The glass globe contained oil, which, as it was consumed, recorded the hour on a metal hand. Lamp clocks made of pewter were used extensively in Germany during the 16th Century as a means of illumination as well as a timekeeper.

This review of several of the clocks we saw in Arizona, reminded us of a visit we paid to the Museum of Science in the Golden Gate Park in San Francisco where we saw a marvelous collection of timepieces of all sorts and sizes, from the tiny watches to giant Grandfather's clocks — an exhibit worth anyone's time to see.

Also, we recommend to residents of the Peninsula and visiting tourists, to see the various types of clocks, collected by the Monterey History and Art Assn., and on exhibit in the Old Custom House and the Stevenson House in Monterey. Mrs. Mary Greene, curator of the Custom House, is always happy when she is winding and playing the music box in the tall old Alvarado clock; and Mrs. William Kneass, curator of the Stevenson House, will take the visitor on a tour of the old adobe on Houston street and explain the history of the several old clocks there.

We have been told that Mr. and Mrs. Frank Enea Lucido now own the former home of the late Harry Ashland Greene, and that they have repaired the lighting equipment on the great redwood tree in the garden and lighted it at the Christmas season. We are happy to know that New Monterey still honors its distinguished citizen who did so much to carry on the traditions and beauty of Old Monterey.