

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Colton Hall

I paid several visits to Colton Hall during the past week and each time I was happy to see historical items of great interest on display.

There should be more, but care should be taken that each and every item pertains to the Rev. Walter Colton, the builder; to the Constitutional Convention of 1849, which was held in the building; or to the early Californians who made up the roster of delegates to that historical meeting.

The furniture should be carefully chosen that it may fit into the period in which the State's history was first made, and care should be taken that the arrangement should be proper and the beautifully proportioned upper Constitutional Hall always as clean and neat as it is possible to make it.

A bit of attention should be given by the City of Monterey, the custodians of the building, to the need for a painting job, on the walls, specially at the north end of the room over and around the old fireplace. Certainly, Monterey should not neglect one of its most important shrines.

In the near future, a bronze plaque will be placed in the Convention room of Colton Hall in honor of Walter Colton.

On May 9, 1797 Colton was born in Vermont. He was the third of 12 children born to Walter and Thankful Colton. His father, a deacon in the Congregational Church, was a cloth weaver. Walter Colton died January 22, 1851.

A copy of an original picture of the entire Colton family hangs in the small room to the rear of the Convention room.

Early this month, C. M. Drury of the Theological Seminary at San Anselmo, sent to Mrs. Pauline McCleary, the curator of the Colton Hall museum, a black and white reproduction of the painting of Chaplain Colton by Clayton Braun. The original is in the office of the General Commission on Military Chaplains in Washington. Drury also sent a picture of the plaque dedicated to Colton in the David Adams Memorial chapel at Norfolk. These pictures will also be on display in Colton Hall within the near future.

"They also Love Religion" is the heading of the tablet of the cornerstone of the chapel which contains this phrase written in 1846 by Chaplain Colton, USN. The complete quotation reads: "The American people love valor, but they also love religion. They will bestow their highest honor only on him who can combine the two."

For those who are not familiar with the history of Walter Colton, we might add that he arrived in Monterey as Commodore Stockton's chaplain on the U.S. Frigate Congress during the conquest of California. He was appointed by Stockton provisional alcalde (governor) of Monterey, one of the three provinces into which California was then divided.

While Alcalde of Monterey, he built the first schoolhouse, established the first newspaper, held the first jury trial, and conducted the first election in which he was confirmed in his office as governor. He was also the first chief justice of the court of admiralty for California. These activities were in addition to his duties as chaplain of the Congress.

Colton was the author of many books and editor of several newspapers. A letter from him published in the Philadelphia North American, first announced the discovery of gold in California and precipitated the Gold Rush of 1849.