

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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In Old Natchez

We are accepting the invitation of the two garden clubs of Natchez to step into the past for an enchanted visit in the Southland during the Natchez Pilgrimage. It is truly a treat for the lover of antiquity and the traditional lore of the South. The flowers typical of the Deep South are blooming to welcome the hundreds of visitors who are arriving from all parts of the country.

We have been admiring the dogwood, all colors of huge azalea bushes and bridal wreath with which all the gardens abound. We have visited ten of the most beautiful homes and gardens we ever expected see, but these are only one-third of the homes in Natchez which will be opened on various days.

We have learned that the story of Natchez goes far beyond the halcyon days preceding the War Between the States. Indian, French, Spanish American and Confederate - each has striven for possession of its fertile acres; each has left its imprint on the land.

The women of the two garden clubs who sponsor the Natchez Pilgrimage, and whose talents and efforts pioneered this event which has become nationally renowned, have adopted a restoration and beautification program to perpetuate for posterity the perfect and rare example of Natchez as a heritage to all Americans.

As the visitors travel from one house to another over a well-marked route, we appreciated not only the homes and the furnishings, but the beautiful period gowns of the hostesses and their assistants. With but one or two exceptions, every one of them was in costume, creating a perfect picture of another era. This same program should be carried out in Monterey when the Monterey History and Art Association, has its annual Adobe House Hour. Maybe we can inaugurate this custom this year.

We are house guests at The Elms, a home built in 1782 during the Spanish era. It is mellowed by age and set in the midst of an old-fashioned garden. Mr. and Mrs. Joseph B. Kellogg are the owners, and both are tremendously interested in all phases of this annual pilgrimage.

There are great elms and sturdy live oak surrounding this wide, rambling house, its galleries banistered with graceful iron grills surrounding three sides of the house.

Elms was for many years known as the "old Drake House," Mrs. Kellogg is a direct descendant of the Drake family. Benjamin Drake was president of Elizabeth College, which has the distinction of being the first college in the United States to permit the teaching of branches of higher education to women. Rare antique rosewood furniture was inherited by Mrs. Kellogg with the house.

A striking feature of this old-house is a lacy wrought-iron staircase unlike any other in all America and believed to have been imported from Portugal. Ceilings are low and give a Spanish atmosphere to the architecture. In several of the other old homes we visited, the ceilings were 16 feet high. We will be sleeping in huge four poster beds surrounded by antique furniture of the most beautiful design and workmanship.

We must compliment the Garden Clubs of Natchez upon the pageant which is presented throughout the month in the Community Auditorium. We never expect to see anything more perfectly executed than this "Confederate Pageant." Since the origin of the Natchez Pilgrimage in 1932, the pageant has been the outstanding social event of the gala month. The king, queen, and court, the tableau groups, the dancers, all are members of the Natchez social group, who, for this brief period, turn back the clock a century or more to those faraway, courtly days of stately bows, of rustling silks, of fluttering fans, or 'swords and roses', to present, in a bright, fleeting moment the charm of a gracious past.