

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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City of Firsts

We have feasted our eyes on thousands upon thousands of dogwood blossoms and an equal number of crepe myrtle and redbud, with a backdrop of elm, cypress and pine trees, all through these southern states. The highways as well as the private gardens have been ablaze with the flowers of the huge azalea plants for which this part of our country is famous.

We have been told that June is the best time to travel in North Carolina to see the Mountain Laurel and the rhododendrons in bloom, but we have enjoyed just seeing the treelike plants on both sides of the highway as we travel through the Carolinas.

Before we leave Charleston, we must refresh our memory by repeating some of the history of this old city. Charleston, unique among American cities, was founded in 1670 as the capital of the Province of Carolina. Jamestown, settled in 1607, and Plymouth, settled in 1620, alone among the stable (missing words) with her in importance as early focal points from which the English-speaking people spread themselves over this great America.

The Province of Carolina was granted by King Charles II to eight favorite noblemen - the Lords Proprietors - who in gratitude named the capital city in his honor. With this city as the central point, they began to develop what they hoped would be the empire of the New World. Lordly titles were bestowed, and great estates were given to the lordly class. Indigo and rice gave to Carolina money crops not equaled by the other colonies, and there was nurtured in Carolina, and especially in Charleston, a way of life not prevalent elsewhere in America. Sons of the wealthy were educated abroad, and this city became one of America's early seats of culture.

In one of the folders advertising the tour of the historic homes we noted this remark made in 1774 by Josiah Quincy of Boston, who wrote of Charleston as follows: "I can say in general that in grandeur, splendor, buildings, decorations, equipment, number of commerce and in almost everything it surpasses all I ever saw or expect to see in America." Charleston is said to have more firsts than any other city in the United

States, but we say that Monterey has had her share. A few of these firsts for Charleston, we here enumerate:

1 - Middleton Place Gardens, in process of building from 1740 to 1750. Is America's oldest landscape garden. 2 - The Dock Street Theater, erected in 1736, was America's first theater building. 3 - Charleston's Chamber of Commerce was organized in 1773 and therefore is America's oldest chamber of commerce, 4 - The Charleston Museum, organized in 1773, is the oldest museum in the United States. 5 - The College of Charleston, chartered in 1785, became America's first municipal college when it became city-supported in 1837.

6 - The first apartment house in America was built in Charleston in 1800. 7 - The first prescription drug store in America started operations in Charleston in 1780. 8 - The first cotton exported out of the United States went out of this harbor to England in 1784.

From then on there were many firsts which are worth mentioning. Charleston believes that it had the first golf course. Joe Kirkwood discovered in the Carolina Gazette of 1776 mention of golf games and clubhouse collations on Charleston's Green. The first time the British flag was hauled down and replaced by an American flag was in Charleston in 1775.

The British suffered their first naval and army defeat in Charleston on June 28, 1776. Masonry had its beginning in America when Lodge No. 1 was organized in Charleston in 1735. Scottish Rite Masonry had its beginning there in 1801.

The so-called Fireproof Building on Washington Square, designed by Robert Mills, architect of the Treasury Building and the Washington Monument, and erected in 1826, constituted the first attempt at fireproof construction in this country.

The first steam train ever to operate with passengers, and freight - "The Best Friend" - began plying between Charleston and Hamburg, S. C., in 1830; This same line was the first to transport troops and U. S. mail.

The first shot of the Civil War was fired from Fort Johnson at Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor in 1861. The first submarine ever used in warfare was "Hunley's Boat," which was operated in Charleston Harbor by the Confederate States navy from 1863 to 1865.

Now, in 1956, the City of Charleston's purpose is to preserve the charming old section from modern

intrusion. However, the modern is welcome. There are many properly placed, handsome, tall buildings and others under construction and many lovely new residential sections have sprung up.