

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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A Burned Capitol

The San Jose capitol building as compared to Colton Hall in Monterey, which was the first capitol, was a sad duplicate indeed. The building was a two-story structure of adobe, 60 feet in length and 40 feet in width, with a piazza in front. The upper floor was not partitioned but consisted of one room with a high ceiling. This was occupied by the Assembly.

The lower portion, intended for the Senate, was divided into four rooms. The largest one, 40 by 20 feet, was fitted up for the Senate chamber. The other rooms were used by the secretary of state and various committees. As this lower portion of the building was not ready when the legislature met, the Senate held its sessions for a short period in the home of Isaac Branham, located at the southwest corner of the market square, where the San Jose Municipal auditorium now stands.

A visitor of that day who looked in upon the sessions of the Senate and Assembly, describes the building and furnishings thus:

"The Senate room is ill-lighted, badly ventilated with a low ceiling; and rough railing a little inside the door, beyond which none but members and officials could pass. Every member has a rush-bottomed armchair and a small desk with stationery. At the farther end the Speaker is perched in a species of pulpit. The floor is covered with a number of small carpets of various shapes and patterns, looking as if every member has contributed a piece to make up the robe which had quite a mosaic appearance. An impression of antiquity is produced by the threadbare state of the floor covering". The upper floor occupied by the Assembly has the advantage of great loftiness and exhibits at once the difference of grade between the two bodies in the style of furniture. Here plain common chairs, flat deal tables, and a strip of matting are the extent of the accommodations.

"The Legislature meets about 10:00 in the morning and is let out for dinner at 1:00, then the members come out with a rush.

"It is necessary to add that smoking, chewing and whittling do not constitute an infraction of the rules of either house." This second State house was destroyed by fire on April 29, 1853. The loss was stated to be

\$5,000 - contrasted with the \$34,000 which the committee of San Jose residents paid for it.

When San Jose celebrated the centennial of this first meeting of the governing bodies of the State of California in 1949, a replica of the first State House was built near the first site of the building. Later this building was moved to the Santa Clara County Fairgrounds and is now an historical museum of great interest to visitors.

Each lawmaker received \$16 a day during the session together with \$16 for every 20 miles in traveling to and from the capital. This mileage allowance of 80 cents per mile contrasts with the present rate of 5 cents per mile and illustrates the expense of traveling by stage in those days.

The cost of food was also high in those days, Herbert C. Jones of San Jose, remarked in his address before the meeting of the California Historical Society meeting in San Jose in 1949. Meat was 75 cents per pound, butter \$1 a pound, eggs \$3 a dozen, milk \$1 a quart. Meals at hotels cost \$2 each, while boiled eggs for breakfast cost 50 cents apiece.

The crowded and uncomfortable conditions early gave rise among the legislative members to a demand moving of the capital, an agitation which the citizens of San Jose temporarily allayed by giving a grand bail in honor of the Legislature, according to an amusing detail told by former Senator Jones.

On Monday, Dec. 7, the Legislature organized and elected its officers. A resolution was passed asking the general postmaster agent for California to establish a daily mail from San Francisco to San Jose. On Dec. 20, Governor Peter Burnett was sworn in and delivered his inaugural address. Two U. S. Senators were elected, namely: John C. Fremont and William Gwin.