

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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New History Books

With publication this month of its 18th issue, American Heritage marks its third anniversary as The Magazine of History in book form and reaches a new circulation high of 250,000. Publisher James Parton commented: "This is an increase of 75,000 over a year ago, and 170,000 over the first issue in Dec. 1954 Most of our readers are annual subscribers, but bookstore sales continue to be substantial."

Especially notable in the third anniversary issue of American Heritage is "The Course of Empire," called by one critic "the most extraordinary series of painting in American Art." Intended by artist Thomas Cole to edify his contemporaries and "improve posterity," the five pictures in the series show Cole's concept of the never-ending struggle of nature versus civilization. Each of the five pictures shows the same geographic setting at various stages of mankind's rise and fall. From "the Savage Stage or the Commencement of the Empire" a pristine wilderness, the series traces man's development through to "The Ruins of Empire." In the final picture, a broken column is all that remains of man's presumption to improve on unspoiled nature with his monuments to human progress. Never reproduced since it was painted over a century ago, the series is now presented in full color.

The October issue also tells of the first man to go all the way across the continent, Alexander Mackenzie, eleven years before the Lewis and Clark expedition; of the secret and serious operation performed on President Cleveland during a national crisis; of the heyday of the Mississippi River steamboat. It also includes two lost letters of Mark Twain and Walt Whitman, which brings us back to California history.

Many a young child would be delighted to receive at Christmas time The Golden Book of America, adapted for young readers from the issues of American Heritage. This is a book full of names and places, the sights and sounds of yesterday's America. The heroes and stirring scenes of our country's past are made vivid in a brilliant narrative and in more than 300 full-color paintings, old prints, photographs, and rare posters, beautifully reproduced.

From this handsome book young Americans will read of Columbus; of La Salle exploring the Mississippi; of the Indians of the "longhouse" and the Indians of the prairie; of Daniel Boone, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Robert E. Lee. They will find pictures and stories of the pirates who infested the Atlantic seaboard in Colonial times and see the great herds of buffalo grazing on the plains of the Old West.

Added to the above there are nostalgic pictures of sailing ships and steamboats, of stagecoaches and trains, of country stores, dime novels, guns, Valentines, and street vendors of a vanished age.

A book of modern history which we have enjoyed reading is "Princess of Monaco" the story of Grace Kelly by Gant Gaither. The author is the brother of Mrs. Jane Campbell of Martin Street in Monterey, where he has recently visited and where we were entertained with his personal experiences crossing the Atlantic and attending the wedding as a member of the bride's party.

Gant Gaither was born in Hopkinsville, Ky. He attended the University of Mexico and the Royal Academy in London and received his B.A. at the University of the South in Tennessee. He later did graduate work at Yale University. His diversified professional career, both in the out of uniform, includes credits as producer, playwright, scenic designer, stage manager, and director. Among the shows he produced are "Winged Pigeons" (for the Army), "Craig's Wife," "The First Mrs. Fraser," "The Shop at Sly Corner," "Gayden," and "Seventh Heaven." "The Princess of Monaco" is his first book. He first met Grace Kelly in 1951 when she tried out for a part in "Alexander" and they have been close friends ever since.