

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

March 20, 1957

A Report from Russia

"Only the things we give away, remain with us at the end of time." This quotation we have borrowed from the California History Foundation, which met in annual session at the College of the Pacific in Stockton recently.

It was quoted there advising the membership to advise others to look carefully through their keepsakes and those of their friends and relatives before submitting any old letter, document, picture or book to the fire or any other means of destruction. It may be valuable, it may be historic, or it might be of interest to a library or museum.

Why do we collect historical material? Why do we preserve the stories of pioneers? Why do we study history?

Is it simply for the thrill of the ownership of rare documents? For the increase in valuation of rare and unique items?

Or is it because all progress is based on the experiences of the past. Because every business, every state, every important human act is dependent to a greater or less extent, on what has gone before. Because in the review of any project, the first question raised is: "What is its history to date?"

We hear so much about Russia today and we have the opportunity so seldom to actually meet a person who has visited there recently and to hear a first-hand story of what one enjoys, sees and hears in that country today, we were most interested in the discussion of Dr. Robert Burns, president of the College of the Pacific, and Dr. Malcolm R. Eiselen, chairman of the college's history department, at the foundation's opening session.

"Russians in California - Two Californians in Russia" was the title of the talk as given by the two gentlemen who made the tour of Russia last summer. The program began with the showing of a collection of colored slides and a history of the Russians at Fort Ross in California, after which the tour proceeded behind the Iron Curtain into Russia.

Dr. Eiselen said there are only 25 filling stations in all of Moscow. But the sidewalks are crowded with

pedestrians and sometimes the people overflow into the streets to mingle with the cars.

"All over Russia, the common people are very friendly." Dr. Eiselen stated. He said the collective farms are unimpressive by California standards.

One of the fascinating things in Russia is the remarkable contrast, he continued. He showed a picture of a cart being pulled by oxen and explained that this was within sight of Moscow, yet the Russians have jet planes.

"Within 10 years, the Russians could increase productivity by at least 50 per cent if a little individual initiative were allowed," Dr. Eiselen stated in showing pictures of the government fields in contrast to the small plots of land allowed individuals to cultivate for profit.

Dr. Eiselen said he took over 300 pictures and only once did anyone try to stop him. That one time a guard indicated from a distance that he should not take a picture of a poster showing the electrical potential. "I just took the picture, waved, and walked away."

Neither Dr. Burns or Dr. Eiselen felt that any time they were being watched or followed, and that restriction on their movements was not limited during their stay. They even took pictures of the battleships in Leningrad harbor. Dr. Burns stated.