

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

April 1, 1957

How the Gamblers Helped . . .

In 1896 the public school of Monterey printed a small booklet entitled "Sketches of Leading Places of Interest in Monterey," written by pupils of the school and published by the New Era office on Alvarado street in Monterey. We have been privileged to have the use of a copy of this old booklet and have found it most interesting and informative.

In the "copyright Applied For" issue of 1896, Annie Miller wrote on Colton Hall,

"Colton Hall is perhaps more widely known to the people of California than any other public building in Monterey. It was here that the first Constitutional Convention took place during September 1849."

These were the opening lines of young Miss Miller's contribution.

"It was in session for one month and drafted the memorable instrument by which our state was governed for 30 years (1896)." It is now in 1957, 108 years since the document was drafted in Monterey.

"For six months prior to the meeting of the Constitutional Convention, Colton Hall had been used for a school. Afterward it was used as the County Court House of Monterey County until 1873, when Salinas became the county seat, and Colton Hall again came into use as a school building," Annie Miller continued.

"It was erected by Walter Colton, the first Alcalde after the American occupation, a man of great enterprise who took an active part in the affairs of Monterey. He had been previously chaplain of the American frigate Congress. As Alcalde he had great power and made rigorous regulations to keep down gambling and intemperance. Quite often, while a number of gamblers were assembled enjoying their game, the Alcalde would enter, and, placing his cane on the table at which they were playing, stop the game, none daring to oppose; he would then take all they had on the table and walk off. In this way he secured large amounts of money for the town treasury from which he built Colton Hall, completed in Dec. 1848."

In his "Three Years in California" Colton says: -"the Town Hall, on which I have been at work for more than a year, is at last finished. It is built of white stone

quarried from a neighboring hill, and which easily takes the shape you desire. The lower apartments are for schools; the hall over them - 70 feet by 30 - is for public assemblies. The front is ornamented with a portico, which you enter from the hall. It is not an edifice that would attract any attention among the public buildings in the United States, but in California it is without a rival.

"It has been erected out of the slender proceeds of town lots, the labor of convicts, taxes on liquor shops and fines on gamblers. The scheme was regarded with incredulity by many; but the building is finished, and the citizens have assembled in it and christened it after my name, which will go down to posterity with the order of gamblers, convicts and tipplers."

Little Miss Annie Miller added to her story the following notation: "Of those who were employed in the erection of this building all have been lost sight of except R. Morey of Monterey, who was employed to haul the stone."

Adjoining Colton Hall is the jail, built in 1854, and used for many years as the County Jail. It is still used as the city jail, and "occasionally during school hours it happens that prisoners are brought in who glance up with sad and pitiful faces as they are being guided by the constable to the prison."

The story of Colton Hall is ended by Annie Miller with the following paragraph: "These two buildings stand, the one teaching the glorious lesson of liberty, and reminding all of the constitution framed nearly 50 years ago by which they enjoy the blessing of free, education in a country free to all who obey its laws; and the other warning against the course of those unfortunate ones who have broken laws of their country and so have lost liberty which they were born to enjoy."