

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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History Never Stops

A recent article in the Christian Science Monitor reminded me of our recent motor tour of the Pacific Northwest and so we will share with our readers today a bit from that comment by Emilie Tavel, and our own observations.

Can you picture packing the children in the car some fine spring Saturday, driving eagerly down the highway and then piling out to look at a bronze tablet on some office building that says Gen. Somebody-or-other did something great here 300 years ago?

Children would not be interested. It is not much that they do not like to read. They just like to see the real thing. Adults do, too.

How much more fun to pull up outside a historical monument read the sign and then walk in and imagine how it looked a hundred years ago and visualize how the person or persons who lived there lived, worked, and dreamed. We are thinking of the life at Fort Ross in California and its occupants who came from a foreign land to colonize in this Far West. We are thinking of Fort Columbia and how the soldiers there guarded the now peaceful entrance to the Columbia River, and many other historic places we visited within the last month. It was visual education to a grandniece and nephew of 10 and 12 years of age who thoroughly enjoyed and profited by these experiences.

How much more fun to pull up outside Paul Revere's little brown house, peak through the diamond-shaped leaded glass windows and then lift the latch and roam around upstairs and down where Paul and his family ate and slept and talked politics and silver-making.

And how infinitely more fun than reading history in the open air it is to squeeze up through the tiny dark secret passageway between the chimneys in the House of Seven Gables in Salem, as we have done. You can practically hear the war whoop of Indians outside and history begins to live.

"Somewhere between the joys of discovering historic sites and the boredom of looking at bronze plaques lie the great granite monuments, obelisks, and towers that dot our land. Their common denominator is one thing children appreciate and most adults leave alone - steps, thousands of steps", wrote Miss Tavel in the Monitor.

There is really nothing wrong with monuments.

Certainly, every American who ever visited the ones in Washington, D.C., loves and reveres the men they nobly honor. But somehow in the last century Americans got mixed up on the difference between monumental organization and preservation.

Take Bunker Hill. In 1825, our informant relates, some patriotic citizens got together and bought 15 acres of the battlefield including the remains of the breastworks on Breed's Hill. Instead of just hanging on to what they had, they sold part of the land to raise money to build the monument.

We might go back to our memory of 1952 when we visited the Greenfield, Ind., birthplace and home of James Whitcomb Riley, the beloved Hoosier poet. The visit through this old home made us think again of "Little Orphan Annie" and our sight of the "rafter-room, an' cubby-hole, ana press. . . . the chimney-flue, an' ever' - wheres", made the poem real to us. We visited the Old Swim'-Hole and saw the spotless kitchen where "Our Hired Girl" and "The Raggedy Man" entertained the children. We wonder if children ever read Riley's Joyful Poems for Children these days? Ours do.

Can't you imagine that children and just folks enjoy re-reading Robert Louis Stevenson's works after a visit to that old adobe home on Houston street in Monterey, even though Stevenson only lived there for a short time. The taking of Monterey and California by the United States means much more to our visitors after a tour of the Old Custom House, where the American Flag was first raised in 1846. The constitution of California and the men who drafted and signed it becomes more real after visiting Colton Hall and the museum of history there. History never stops and let's not ever let it stop in Monterey!