

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Allied Arts Guild

During a short visit in the Santa Clara Valley we visited the Allied Arts Guild in Menlo Park. We had been there many times in the past but our visit last week was the first time that we became conscious that there might be an interesting history back of this delightful center in its beautiful setting with unusual buildings well planned gardens and entertaining shops, aside from a delicious luncheon in a patio garden.

The Allied Arts Garden stands on a small portion of what was once the vast Rancho de las Pulgas, land grant from the King of Spain to Don Jose Arguello, Commandant of San Francisco in the early 1800's. In 1929, three and one half acres of this beautiful property were bought by Mr. and Mrs. Garfield Merner, world travelers and collectors, as a site for the guild similar to those in Europe.

It was intended as a place where craftsmen could carry on the traditions of early California through their work. The Merners collaborated with architect and artist Gardner Dailey and Pedro Lemos and gradually the guild took form, with new buildings to continue the Colonial Spanish theme of the original but still usable barn and sheep sheds.

The gardens, reminiscent of those in Granada, were planned by Mrs. Merner and named in the Spanish manner: The Court of Abundance at the entrance to the main building; the Garden of Delight, or Blue Garden, and the Cervantes Court, the inner court featuring a mural of Cervantes dedicating his masterpiece, Don Quixote.

Paths were paved with stones from San Francisquito Creek, tiles and objects of art brought from Spain, Tunis and Morocco, murals and frescoes created by the De Lemos family and Maxine Albro, well-known artist. Craftsmen brought their skills with metal, leather, pottery, weaving and wood to the studios, shops were added, and the Allied Arts Guild became a unique landmark of the San Francisco Peninsula. All the persons we have mentioned either have lived or are living on the Monterey Peninsula, with the possible exception of Mr. and Mrs. Merner, and we are certain that they also must have made frequent visits here.

In 1932, the Merners, interested in the Stanford Convalescent Home for children, invited the Palo Alto Junior Auxiliary to maintain a lunchroom at the guild, with proceeds to go to the home. The members of this volunteer group who at first prepared food in their own kitchens to serve at the guild, now installed the necessary facilities and took full charge of all catering on the premises. And a more charming group of girls it would be almost impossible to find elsewhere. Their yellow smocks with handblocked decorations are admired by all guests and the service is all that one could expect.

Woodside and Atherton volunteers staff the Traditional Shop. They also staff the patio building where toys, baby clothes and feminine accessories are displayed. They serve on the board of directors; they help in the office, supervise the grounds and act as landlords for the shops and craft studios. Palo Alto Junior Auxiliary continues to serve luncheon and tea to scores of visitors every day.

The Allied Arts Guild carries on its reputation as a California showplace, beautiful, interesting and historical. It is known above all for its cause – participation in a joint effort to bring health to the children of the Stanford Convalescent Home.