

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Rebuilding the Capitol

Here comes another plan for "progress." This time our National Capitol in Washington, D. C. is the target.

Plans to rebuild the central portion of the east front of the United States Capitol, and extend the portico forward about 32 feet, has led to the formation of the Committee to Preserve the National Capital. Julian E. Berla, AIA, is chairman of the committee, and Wilbur H. Hunter Jr., director of the Peale Museum in Baltimore, is executive secretary.

The purpose of the committee is to preserve the historical and architectural integrity of the United States Capitol, and to defeat plans which will destroy the original facade designed by Dr. William Thornton and approved by George Washington in 1793. The east front has been the background for presidential inaugurations since 1825, and current remodeling plans will destroy, the beauty and unique architectural qualities of the building. This information is contained in an article in History News published by the American Association for State and Local History.

The article goes on to say that the American Institute of Architects and the Society of Architectural Historians are on record in opposition to these alterations. Speaking for the American Association for State and Local History, President Clifford L. Lord stated that "every step should be taken to prevent any architectural abomination upon our national capitol,"

We are also informed that lead editorials in well-known magazines, and newspapers have opposed the remodeling plans. All are sympathetic to the needs of Congress for additional space and housekeeping facilities, but they feel other means can be found to satisfy these demands without disturbing the east front of the Capitol.

Another historical group which has been established in California sounds interesting: Dr. Robert T. Burns, president of the College of the Pacific, announced the formation in the February issue of the Pacific Historian of "The Westerners," whose work will parallel that of the California History Foundation, The California Conference of Historical Societies, and the Jedediah Smith Society.

"The Westerners" was first conceived in March 1943, when a group of Chicagoans interested in western Americana met in a private home to discuss a book which had just come from the press. About a year later the same group gathered again, an organization was discussed, and the name adopted, with this first chapter being called the Chicago Corral.

Later the Brand Book was published and continues to be the official organ of the group. Corrals have been established at Denver, Los Angeles, New York, Washington, Spokane, Kansas City, Tucson, in the Black Hills, St. Louis, Paris, London and now California.

In announcing the formation of the Far West Corral in California, Dr. Burns writes: "Recently, certain founding members of the Chicago Corral have had a desire to help provide for this organization a purpose, a growth plan and a standing that is more in keeping with the importance of the activity today. Hence, the specific proposal was the establishment of a Westerner's Foundation at the College of the Pacific which, through its demonstrated activities in this field, would provide a suitable home."

At a meeting in Chicago on Jan. 12, the Foundation was established with \$30,000 underwritten as a beginning. Necessary headquarters space will be provided by the College where an executive secretary will be located. Activities will include organizing other corrals, collecting historical material relating to the West, and publishing a magazine periodically, administering a national speakers service on Western subjects. Not the least of these will be publishing ventures financed by the resources of the Foundation.

"This new venture bids fair to be a new milestone for 'The Westerners' as well as the college. Both cooperating together will add luster to an era in American history which must be perpetuated at all costs," Dr. Burns concludes in his report of the establishment of this newest history group.