

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Old Chinatown

Hanging on the northeast wall of the Old Custom House State Historical Monument No. 1, in Monterey is - an oil painting of "Old Chinatown Monterey" which is probably much more valuable than the casual visitor there may think. This painting was the work of Henry Chenowerck, dated 1880. It was presented to the Monterey History and Art Assn., about the time of the Association's organization in 1931, through the efforts of Laura Bride Powers, one of the organizers and first curator of the Custom House.

The painting was presented by Mrs. Charles W. Felton of San Francisco, the widow of the late state Sen. Felton, and has been hanging in the Custom House since that time except for a short period when it was loaned to the San Diego City and County Centennial Commission to be placed in an Historical Art Exhibition from Aug. 1 to Sept. 9, 1959.

We remember, and our memory was refreshed when we came across a letter written by Ivan Messenger, assistant director of the Historic Art Exposition, in which he asked for the loan of the painting, writing: "On a recent scouting trip (1950) for available material to be used in our exhibit I was quite pleased to see so many examples in the Monterey area. Could we have that oil painting of the old Chinese fishing village of Monterey?"

"We have nothing at all to represent the Oriental that was of importance in the early days of California, and even though the fishing village burned, the painting of it is a good exhibition item and would be of interest to visitors and nice to have for a representation from Monterey in the Centennial show here."

We learn from our records that the painting originally had a heavy gold frame. When the painting fell in the San Francisco home of the Feltons, a heavy two cornered tear in the painting happened. It was repaired by August Ray shortly after the painting arrived in Monterey. Before it was placed on exhibit in San Diego in 1950, Mr. Messenger again wrote: "I hope you will not mind my having improved this picture by renewing the false and off-color paint that had been spread inconsiderately over the seams, giving it that 'ragged cloud' effect on the right side. You will be interested to learn that the head of the Library of Congress

installation adjoining our historical exhibition considers this Monterey Chinatown painting his favorite. Thank you for letting us have it."

History News, published by American Assn., for State and Local History, has used six inches of valuable news space to tell its readers that the Monterey History and Art Assn. Ltd., has recently purchased a historical adobe, the Casa Serrano, and is at present in the process of restoring it as a permanent home for the organization.

Florencio Serrano, a teacher and alcalde for Monterey under Mexican rule, purchased, during the 1840's, Casa Serrano from a foreigner who had started but not completed the house. In the old adobe Florencio raised a family and had his school.

The Casa Serrano is taking on a new look under the supervision of Claude Faw, a member of the board of directors of the History and Art Assn. A new shingle roof has been placed on the one-story adobe, the wood work has been painted, the grounds cleaned of weeds and overgrowth of former plantings, and the interior and attic of an accumulation of odds and ends left there by former tenants. It is expected that very soon the Association will be able to move in and make the nice old building its permanent headquarters.