

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Moving The Consulate

Colonel Roger S. Fitch reported to the membership of the Monterey History and Art Assn. at the fourth annual meeting of the association held at the Old Custom House Jan. 21st, 1935. He said that several of the association's projects had been completed to the great satisfaction and appreciation of all concerned - namely the French Consulate rebuilding and the erection of the recreation hall at the Presidio of Monterey, in addition to the placing of 19 historic markers along the Path of History.

The Colonel wrote: "The taking apart, adobe brick by adobe brick, beam by beam, and plank by plank, of the first French Consulate and its reconstruction on city owned El Estero Park was completed early in 1934. To this work the association contributed, first, the initial saving of the building from destruction; next, the services of its committee, F. P. Howard, Miss E. Charlton Fortune and C. J. Ryland; and finally, half the cost of the additional material required. The City of Monterey furnished the other half and the services of an expert building superintendent, while the SERA (State Emergency Relief Administration) provided the labor. It is hoped that in the near future the building will be utilized for purposes not inconsistent with its history."

Shortly after this statement was made by Col. Fitch, the historic building was taken over by the Girl Scouts and is still in their possession. The City of Monterey keeps the building in excellent condition and the surrounding lawn and gardens are always a joy to see.

That year the association received the thanks of Col. Ralph M. Parker, commandant of the Presidio of Monterey, for its assistance in the planning of the new and attractive Monterey-type Recreation Hall built in the Presidio during 1934, and which was designed by one of the association members, Walter B. Snook. Miss Charlton Fortune, a member of the art committee, recommended the colors used in repainting the post buildings, a great improvement over the former deep, drab-yellow.

That year success crowned the efforts of the association toward the restoring of the First Theater, as nearly as practicable to its original appearance, inside as well as out. Funds for materials came from the State Division of

Beaches and Parks and the necessary labor from the SERA, while the History and Art Assn. was requested by the Division to provide the necessary guidance and direction plans. Estimates had already been prepared by the association and approved by them. The plans included the erection of a stage, old time foot light effects, curtains and scenery, a men's dressing room and a women's dressing room, 38 wooden benches for the audience and old-fashioned side lights. An old-time bar was also built in the north room in the same spot as Jack Swan's famous one of 1847. "The completed whole", Col. Fitch wrote, "should be an appropriate setting for the revival of plays of the period as well as an interesting exhibit for tourists."

Early in 1944 the State of California, acting favorably upon recommendations from the association gladly accepted the "Memorial Cactus Garden" presented by Myron K. Oliver in memory of his father, J. K. Oliver, one of Monterey's best known merchants and late member of the Monterey City Council. In the setting of the garden of the Old Custom House, along the stone wall recently constructed there to hide the railroad tracks, the plants were placed, under the direction of Dan Hull, landscape gardener from the Division of Beaches and Parks, now a resident of Carmel. The City of Monterey cooperated heartily with the state technicians and the result of this 1944 project still speaks for itself.

In August, through the initiative and prompt action of one of the directors of the association, William M. O'Donnell, the ancient and interesting bronze anchor which had been surprisingly brought up from the bottom of Monterey Bay, was saved. The association bore the expense of placing it appropriately on the Old Custom House grounds. The late Armin Hansen, Monterey's noted artist, designed the setting at the north end of the building.

Fifteen years ago, the Monterey History and Art Association's annual report concluded with this statement: "The value of Monterey's romantic background and historical buildings cannot be overestimated. Today such values are very generally recognized. Also, it is now generally accepted that they, in combination with her climate and recreational opportunities, play a most important part in making Monterey a mecca for visitors and the intended home for many. Our association should join forces with other interested groups, civic planning commissions and far sighted citizens to recognize that Monterey's brightest,

future lives in the preservation and development of such attractions. Monterey should never let herself become 'Just another California city.'"