

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **Saving Our Heritage**

"Wanton Disregard of Our Heritage" by Blake Clark, appeared in a recent issue of The Reader's Digest. The article is worth reading for many reasons. To quote: "Why save old places? What can they contribute to living in the world today?"

"A nation with no regard for its past will have little future worth remembering. We need authentic, tangible reminders of our national virtues and heroes to make us feel a part of the best of our heritage. Properly presented, they breathe life into past experience. The most cleverly illustrated children's books cannot compare with the Farmers' Museum at Cooperstown. N. Y. for example. as a means of giving boys and girls the feel of rural living before the Civil War. The housewife churning and cooking, weavers fashioning fabric from wool or flax, the brawny blacksmith working red-hot iron, the country storekeeper cutting into a generous head of cheese - all create a vivid picture of industrious men and women of the time. City youngsters are enchanted by Cooperstown's farm animals, the team of sleek black oxen pulling a cart, the parade of gray geese and goslings. A morning there is not merely a history lesson, but an unforgettable taste of early America."

Many Americans are alarmed at the wanton razing of places previous to our heritage. All over the country structures that help recreate our past are being sacrificed to make way for shopping centers, supermarkets, superhighways, sky scrapers and "sub-topias." Studies indicate that at least 25 per cent of the finest architectural monuments that existed in the United States in 1941 have been destroyed, according to the Digest article on this subject

Deciding just which structure to select, how to raise the money for preservation and restoration and present it to the public is a baffling job for amateurs. Fortunately, they can get advice from the National Trust for Historic Preservation, a private, nonprofit organization, supported entirely by patriotic individuals and organizations. Anyone can join.

Chartered by an act of Congress in 1949, it owns a number of historical properties, but its chief task is encouraging and guiding other groups over the country. The Monterey History and Art Assn. and the Monterey

Foundation are both members of this organization. The National Trust is the owner of Casa Amesti, now the Old Capital Club in Monterey. This old and beautiful adobe home was willed to the National Trust by the late Mrs. Frances Elkins, the owner.

Its president, Richard Hubbard Howland, is an architectural historian and he and his staff of five experts are continually at work advising townspeople how to make the most of their best. More than 250 preservation organizations are affiliated with the National Trust and support its programs in their own areas. Trust services are rendered by mail or by on-the-spot consultation, we learned as we studied the Reader's Digest story.

"The true preservationist, however, is not motivated by money. His is the spirit of Ann Pamela Cunningham, the South Carolina woman, who almost singlehandedly saved the proudest prize of all our past - Mount Vernon. Washington's home was in sad disrepair and in danger of falling into ruin when she formed the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association. In 1858 the Association bought the historic place for \$200,000 and restored it as a national shrine."

Now is the time for every town to take stock and determine what is worth preserving. As Lewis Mumford has said. "The concrete cloverleaf is becoming our national flower." In the next few years 41,000 miles of new highways will barge through some of our last surviving wilderness, areas, through major cities; along historic old roadways. Many communities may not attempt to save their historic places until it is too late.