

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Preserving Landmarks

Other cities, aside from Monterey, are awakening to the value of historic landmarks, the preservation of which brings tourists and therefore is a profitable investment. Sacramento is now in the process of publishing a series of eight articles tracing the historic landmark developments in major cities of the United States. The Sacramento Bee reports that each city was consistent in two things: each has found landmarks are an investment and each has won distinction nationally for the historic appeal of the landmarks.

We, in Monterey, are proud of the fact that Sacramento chose this city as the first example of active preservation of historic monuments and old adobe buildings. The paper appealed to Earl Hofeldt of Monterey to report the activities of the Monterey History and Art Assn. and the part this group played in the preservation here.

"The City of Monterey has found that the preservation of historic buildings and monuments not only is a matter of culture and tradition, but is good business." Hofeldt wrote: "Members of the History and Art Assn., which has led the continuing crusade to preserve and restore historic buildings, make this point whenever they face the oft-voiced, critical question: 'Why are you standing in the way of progress?'"

The article continues: "The preservation and restoration movement began about 35 years ago. At that time, a number of residents took a good look at Monterey, the city they loved.

"They saw a town which had been founded on June 3, 1770, by Father Junipero Serra and explorer Don Gaspar de Portola: the town where Commodore John Drake Sloat landed with the American Flag on July 7, 1846, and where the first constitutional convention was held in the fall of 1849. The rich history jumped out at them and for some reason suddenly meant much more than lines in school text books."

To read on: "The interested people of the 1920's found these monuments neglected, some being torn down, others already gone. Even the Custom House, the first United States Federal Building built west of the Rockies was in partial state of collapse.

"Their mission then was evident. The 'historic monuments' must be restored and preserved; the public must be educated as to their great significance; they must be made available for all to view and enjoy."

The History and Art Assn. Was organized in 1930. Articles of incorporation were drafted and on January 19, 1931; the association came into existence. Col. Roger S. Fitch was elected the first president. The first year the group sponsored the first Merienda in honor of Monterey's birthday. Another important project was the painting of the "Path of History." The group marked out a map of the city's most historical buildings and the city had the orange line painted down the middle of the street guiding the tourists to the monuments. In 1935, the Custom House was declared surplus property by the federal government. A group of citizens associated with the History and Art Assn. Donated the money to buy it. The contributions were matched by the state and the Custom House was turned over to the State Division of Beaches and Parks.

Joseph R. Knowland, chairman of the State Park Commission, has often called the Custom House "the No. 1 historical monument in California."

"The 29 year old program of the History and Art Assn. Is a success. But the 607 members are not resting. It is also a policy that a forceful, active program be maintained at all times, adding to the brightness of Monterey's sparkling place in the sun."

So ends the special story in the Sacramento Bee concerning the restoration and preservation of the historic sites and building in Old Monterey.