

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Preservation For Use

Aubrey Neasham, former state historian with the California Division of Beaches and Parks and well known in Monterey, has resigned that position after 14 years of service to become associated with Western Heritage, Inc.

Dr. Neasham believes the federal government's urban renewal program offers a chance to save the atmosphere of the Old West in California cities.

"Preservation for use" is the key phrase in the program of Western Heritage, Inc., a consulting firm organized by Neasham and others interested in history and California.

Dr. Neasham is announcing that one of the first projects to be tackled by Western Heritage probably will be a private redevelopment of a Sacramento block by a group of businessmen.

They hope to establish a kind of architecturally integrated area of period shops, hotels and restaurants - something like San Francisco's Jackson Square, but with more emphasis on old Sacramento atmosphere.

Western Heritage will act as historical consultants. Neasham believes that slum areas, often with structures of considerable historical interest or period beauty, should not be swept away, instead, he feels there can be a skillful blending of the old and the new which can preserve a city's sense of history while turning the other forms to modern usage.

Other officers of the new group include Donald I. Segerstrom of Sonoma, vice president, H. Putnam Livermore, San Francisco attorney, secretary; W. E. van Loben Sels of Carmel, treasurer; Robert Power of Vacaville (owner of the Nut Tree), and Gardner Mien, San Francisco board members.

It was Dr. Neasham who developed the Master Plan for Columbia, which preservation project Frederick Law Olmsted had reported upon earlier and also was interested in plans for Point Lobos State Park here which resulted in the park's acquisition a number of years ago. Even before Neasham's interest in Columbia he contributed much to the master plan of historic Monterey which was developed by Emerson Knight, and had outlined a path of history with the late Col. Roger

Fitch, president of the Monterey History and Art Assn., and Knight.

In 1949, he developed the California Historical Caravan, used throughout the state for California's Centennial Celebrations. This mobile museum contained replicas of some of the West's most significant historical places and events of California, such as the Marshall flake of gold and the gold spike of railroad history. The caravan visited Monterey and was parked where the Monterey Public Library now stands, where it was visited by thousands.

Aubrey Neasham was appointed California's first historian by Newton Drury, chief of the Division of Beaches and Parks, on Jan. 5, 1953.

He conceived the Monterey "Zone of Preservation" into which has been woven the state's program of historic building preservation in the community. This idea has had the full cooperation of the Monterey History and Art Assn., throughout the years and many of its citizens and organizations.

A most important mark in Neasham's career with the division in Monterey was his supervision of a group of University of California archeologists who dug from the middle of Alvarado street at the north end of the Old Custom House to find the exact spot on which the pole stood at the time of the raising of the first United States Flag in California on July 7, 1846.

It is understandable, after reviewing all of Neasham's works, why he wrote in 1953 in "News and Views" these lines: "If we teach our children that what we are today we owe to those who came before us, we can be assured the vestiges of our past will be saved. In addition, increased patriotism and a bulwark against forces that are striving to tear down our country and its traditions will be the result."

"To my knowledge," Dr. Neasham said, "Western Heritage Incorporated is the first of its kind in the West. I believe that throughout the coming years its usefulness to public and private groups will be demonstrated fully. The need is here. 'Preservation for use' is a logical approach in a modern, advancing world."