

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Building Fort Mervine

Two years ago, last May 20th, old Fort Mervine, an earth and block fort which was built on the present site of the Presidio of Monterey in 1846, was to come to life again.

We wonder what happened to the committee from the Monterey tri-county chapter of the Assn. of the United States Army Meeting at Fort Ord, Joe Fratessa appointed the following members to serve: Maj. Gen. Robert B. McClure (ret), awards; Allen Griffin, resolutions; Capt. Bob Avon, Fort Ord liaison; Joe Juri, membership; Maj. Gen. E. J. Dawley (ret), program; and Tom Hudson, nominating. Frank Groves a retired businessman of Carmel, who formerly served in the British army, was chosen to head a committee to study the Fort Mervine restoration, selected as first on a list of local projects it desired to tackle.

On Jan. 23, 1957, the Army Language School authorities were in possession of the first concrete evidence of the appearance of Fort Mervine, the Peninsula's first U. S. military installation, which the Army hopes someday can be reconstructed on the slopes of Presidio hill as a historical monument.

At that time, Herman Schaneuer of Carmel, a retired Coast Guard officer and amateur historian, produced an ancient volume of official government documents of the 1840s and '50s containing an Army field map of the fort showing its location, shape and dimensions. He also contributed a clue as to the character of the man who built the fort, a lieutenant of engineers named Wager Halleck, later Gen. Halleck, who commanded the Army of the Potomac during the Civil War, The small adobe in the garden of the Larkin House is named for him as well as for Gen. Sherman, who shared headquarters there.

"He was a stickler for regulations," said Schaneuer in 1957, "and you can be sure that Fort Mervine was built the same as every other fort at the time. He would not deviate an inch. His Civil War record shows that. He was eventually removed from command by Lincoln."

The map shows the fort was built on the location now marked by the historical sign placed by the Monterey History and Art Assn., the remains of earthen breastworks and a pair of old cannons. It was on the summit of the northernmost Presidio hill, embracing

the area now also occupied by the Sloat monument and the Presidio swimming pool.

According to the map, the fort was diamond-shaped, about 650 feet from north to south, and about 400 feet from east to west. A stone house in which ammunition and stores were kept, was located at the southern end of the enclosure.

Other historians have indicated the fort was surrounded by a 12-foot moat and possibly a wooden fence in front of the earth barricade.

Built in 1846, shortly after Commodore John Drake Sloat seized California for the U. S., it was occupied for a time by U. S. troops. Among the officers was Lt. William Tecumseh Sherman who plundered Georgia as a Civil War general.

Fort Mervine, named after a captain in Sloat's command, was abandoned in 1852 and the stone house was leveled. It was reoccupied during the Civil War when log barracks were built for Union troops. A very good photograph of one of these barracks is owned by the History and Art Assn., taken by Louis Slevin of Carmel. It was in 1901 that the present Presidio was begun.

The Presidio of Monterey, now the location of the important Army Language School, occupies a 360-acre military reservation. With the Presidio of San Francisco, founded in 1776, it is one of the two Army posts to retain original Spanish names; and The Presidio of Monterey is the older of the two. Fort Mervine has been known as Fort Stockton and as Fort Halleck in the past.