

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

February 17, 1961

Preserving Old Monterey

For the reason that we have just had an anniversary in the Monterey History and Art Assn., and an annual election of officers, it may be an appropriate time to go back 30 years and repeat a resolution "formulated by a committee from the association soon after the formal organization of the group in 1930. 'The newly elected president, Col. Allen Griffin, was one of the signers of "this resolution, as was S. F. B. Morse, Carmel Martin Sr., and the late Col. Roger S. Fitch.

The resolution is entitled: "The Preservation of Old Monterey." "In historic interest, Monterey is to California and the entire coast, what Plymouth, Jamestown, and Saint Augustine, together, are to the Atlantic Seaboard and the East. Monterey's historical heritage is not only of municipal and state, but also of national importance. Monterey was the point where Vizcaino landed in 1602 and claimed California for Spain. It was the Capital of the State of California. It was here our State Constitution was drawn. She is the mother of history in the West and the first seat of established government in all that tremendous area west of the Rocky Mountains.

"Fortunately most of her old buildings still stand and much of her romantic background has been preserved. Some irreplaceable buildings are gone, but enough are left to recall the past and to enrich the present and the future.

"Today (1931) the historic buildings that remain in Monterey are found principally in three general groups or areas. It is hoped someday to have these areas connected by appropriate plantings of trees in accordance with the Old Monterey Preservation Plan developed by George A. Applegrath of San Francisco.

"The smallest of the three groups of buildings contains the Old Custom House, over which the flags of Spain and Mexico successively flew and where, in 1846, Commodore Sloat raised the Stars and Stripes and took possession of California in the name of the United States. This group also contains the First Theatre in California, the first brick house in California, The Old Whaling Station and the place where Vizcaino landed and where Don Gaspar de Portola and Father Junipero

claimed California for Spain and Father Serra celebrated the first Roman Catholic Mass.

"The second area contains, as its center, historic Colton Hall, while nearby are the Larkin House, General Sherman's quarters, the Gov. Alvarado Adobe, the home of bandit Tiburcio Vasquez, the Stokes-Gragg Adobe, the Casa de la Torre and other interesting and historic buildings.

"The largest group of all, but the most widely scattered, is that in the neighborhood of the original Plaza of Old Monterey and the site of the Old El Cuartel, the first seat of U. S. Government on the Pacific Coast. (At present the Old Plaza is occupied by a gasoline station, and the Cuartel site by another.) Here the first presidio was established, and the first presidio church was built in 1770. The present church has been in use continuously since 1795 to the present day, and the only presidio church to survive. This area also includes such buildings as Casa Abrego, the old Cooper House, the Gov. Jose Castro adobe, the Amesti-Elkins Adobe, the first French Consulate, the Robert Louis Stevenson House, the Munras-Field home, and numerous other places of historic interest. At present this area possesses practically no buildings of over two stories and the opportunity for its preservation and for, in part, its restoration, still exists.

"The city authorities have agreed on their part to use the Cuartel site (owned by the city) as a restored plaza, making it the center of Old Monterey. An impetus for the preservation of nearby old buildings will result, and public opinion will insure that new buildings constructed in the vicinity will be of similar type, eventually making this center of Old Monterey one of the most interesting, as well as the most historic, sections of the entire city."

Now that you have read this resolution, written in 1931, go back and read it again, and decide for yourself how much has been accomplished in thirty years, what you would like to see accomplished in the months to come and how you may help to retain Monterey's charm, and its history along with the trend of progress which is again upon us.