

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Documents In Jeopardy

The original enrollment of the Constitutional Convention of 1849, the minutes of the committees of the 1849 Constitutional Convention in Monterey, and the petitions received during the first session of the state legislature, are all threatened with destruction unless prompt interest is taken by individuals, members of historical societies and other interested groups, according to an announcement just received from Frank M. Jordan, secretary of state.

"I am writing in regard to a subject which I know is of vital interest to every historical group. I refer to the original records of the pioneer period of the California state government, now on file in the state archives, and the very serious problem that now confronts the work of preserving them," writes Mr. Jordan.

These records include also such irreplaceable items as the original manuscript sheets of the special State Census of 1852, records of the Indian Wars, the Joaquin Murietta papers, the manuscript returns from the mining camps, the bills introduced and the petitions received during the first session of the legislature, letters of early governors, and many other items of similar historical interest and value.

The physical condition of many of these records, writes Mr. Jordan, owing to the character of the paper and ink of which the records are made, is now in the advanced state of deterioration. Some of them are too fragile to be used by researchers . . . The ravages of usage and time threaten the total destruction of a large number of them.

Fortunately, methods have been developed, notably by means of the Barrow process of lamination, which permit the counteraction of the perishable qualities of aging records. These methods have been extensively tested and proved by national institutions of various states and by the National Archives and the Library of Congress in their records preservation work.

We quote the secretary of state: "Now, in the present general session of the legislature, 1961, the critical moment in the long campaign to safeguard the pioneer records is at hand. The legislative analyst of the Joint Legislative Budget Committee is opposing the proposal of the secretary of state to preserve the original records

themselves, has recommended that aside from the lamination of a 'relatively few documents, such as the Constitution of California, the Lincoln letter, etc.' microfilm copies of the originals should suffice as a permanent file. An Assembly ways and means subcommittee, by a vote of 3 to 2, has adopted the recommendation of the legislative analyst. In addition to the loss of the inherent values of the original records, and the many problems involved in the use of microfilm by researchers, including that confronting the reproduction of documents, this recommendation has been made in face of the fact that the filmed copies will radically alter the character of many of the records and that a certain amount of information and detail will be lost in the photographing process."

The office of the secretary of state, it appears, has found it difficult to explain to the legislators why the originals of the pioneer records should be preserved. The efforts of his office alone have been unable to accomplish the task. It is apparent that the friends of history throughout the state must now bestir themselves, and let their voices be clearly heard, if these records are to be preserved.

Assembly Bill No. 1920 will provide the necessary funds to establish a record preservation laboratory in the office of the secretary of state. It will be incumbent upon the members of the California historical societies to contact their assemblymen and senators to insist that this legislation be enacted. It is also suggested that a letter be written to each member of the legislative committees where this bill will be heard, or to the committee at large in Sacramento.

Mr. Jordan pledges that his office will do everything in its power to provide protection for these valuable records which should be of great concern to Monterey where many of them originated.