

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

June 20, 1961

I'll Meet You In Sonora

Looking forward to the 1961 meeting of the Conference of California Historical Societies to be held in Columbia State Park, about four miles from Sonora, from June 22 through the 24th. The conference opens with a reception at the Columbia residence of Dr. and Mrs. Robert E. Burns. Dr. Burns is the president of the University of the Pacific at Stockton.

Most of the meetings will be held in the Fallon House Theatre which dates back to 1854 and is used each summer for productions by the drama department of the University of the Pacific.

The Monterey History and Art Assn. is a member of this Conference but owing to the date falling on the day of the association's annual Adobe House Tour, the Monterey members will be unable to attend. Mrs. Margaret Hanna Lang, now a resident, of Columbia, will represent the Monterey association at the Conference.

Mrs. Lang formerly lived on the Peninsula and took an active part in all historical events and is continuing that interest in the Mother Lode community. We are in receipt of a small folder compiled by Mrs. Lang revealing the history of the Tuolumne County Jail which is now cherished as a museum by the County Historical Society. The old jail in Sonora is 105 years old, while the Monterey jail next to Colton Hall was built 107 years ago and is also a museum and open to public each day.

More than 500 visitors viewed the Tuolumne county jail one day the first part of April 1961 when open house was held there by the Tuolumne County Historical Society with Mrs. Lang heading the volunteer guides.

In Sonora individuals and groups were given the free tours of the brick and stone jail. They saw the massive iron doors and grill work which safely guarded a century of county criminals - and the brick walls which did not. It was pointed out that several cells had iron rings embedded in the concrete floor; unruly prisoners were shackled to prevent escape. The old Monterey jail at the rear of Colton Hall also has at least one such cell.

An antique "booking desk" was brought forth from storage in Sonora and once again served to hold as a register for guests - this time for willing guests.

Mrs. Lang writes: "It - the jail, has experienced the flames of fire and flames of political criticism. It took more than the agonized wailing of successive grand juries to spur the supervisors, to build a new jail in 1857. In 1855 the old jail provided no security.

"The year 1856 was full of killings without extenuating circumstances: It was in front of this jail that sheriff 'King' Solomon outwitted the mob that waited to lynch the Chileno, who had stabbed a popular police officer of Sonora, John Sheldon.

"In 1857, the friends of young William V. Davis, the wanton slayer of a Chinese on a lonely road, and of the ruffian, Edward McCauley, who had stabbed Wesley Bond, a young miner of Shaw's Flat, attempted to 'cayote' under the feeble wall. One of the liberators who was detected was Robert Poer who along with James Lyons was destined to enjoy the comforts of the new jail in Sonora as their last habitation on earth before they were hanged for the murder of John Blakesley.

"Water for the jail was supplied by a well in the yard until 1857 when it was furnished by the Gold Mountain Water Company. In the minutes of October 5, 1861:

"Ordered that the Sheriff of Tuolumne Co. be and is hereby allowed sixty cents for feeding each prisoner confined in the county jail. He is to furnish food, water, stove, cooking apparatus, provisions, etc., at his own expensed"