

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

September 22, 1961

The Old French Consulate

Now that the annual drive of the Monterey Peninsula Community Chest for funds to support the various organizations and charities on the Peninsula is open, it is an appropriate time to acquaint our readers with the history of the Old French Consulate adobe in which the Girl Scouts, one of the chest agencies, has its headquarters.

The historic old building is at present located on the shore of El Estero at the end of Franklin street. But it was not always there. It once stood on Fremont avenue between Munras and Abrego streets and popularly was known as the "tamale adobe."

On March 5, 1932, Colonel Roger S. Fitch issued an urgent appeal for immediate action to preserve from destruction the historic French Consulate building. In a letter to The Herald, he cited the historic significance of the old building, its practical value as tourist attraction and the sentimental attachment felt by old-time, local residents in a plea to prevent its loss to the community to make room for a garage. The late Col. Fitch was the president of the History and Art Assn., which had been organized the previous year.

The building is of decided historic interest, as well as being an adobe type rarely seen. It dates from the early 1830s, was built as a residence and used as a consulate from 1843 to 1846. Louis Gasquet was probably the first representative of the French government to live in the little adobe building. Until shortly before it was moved to its present location, it had been used as a tamale parlor.

On Dec. 4, 1933, at the meeting of the board of directors of the History and Art Assn, held in the Old Custom House, it was moved by Col. Gibson and seconded by architect W. O. Raiguel, that a letter be sent to the Monterey city manager stating that a committee of the association consisting of Miss Charlton Fortune, C. J. Ryland and others, had been appointed to cooperate with the city in moving the French consulate. The directors voted \$250 toward the expense of the materials required to complete the removal and restoration.

On Dec. 5, Col. Fitch sent the following letter to the council:

"The Monterey History and Art Assn. is extremely interested in the efforts of the city to preserve the historic first French Consulate in California by moving it to city-owned property in El Estero Park where it will be preserved permanently.

"This old adobe was built over a hundred years ago and except for the American consulate (Larkin House) it is the only consulate in California of the time preceding the Mexican War. It occupied a real place in early California history and is of great historical and architectural interest."

"Understanding that the cost of the materials provided by the city will amount to some \$500, the board unanimously voted to accept the responsibility for providing half of the amount so needed, specifically the sum of \$250."

Present at the meeting were the following directors: Col. Fitch, Mrs. Laura Bride Powers, Miss Fortune, Mrs. Jane Todd, Mrs. Vera Peck Millis, Col. Gibson, William M. O'Donnell, Mrs. Rague, Myron Oliver, Armin Hansen, Mr. Ryland, Ralph Hughes, Allen Griffin, and F. P. Howard.

In the fourth annual report of the History and Art Assn., Col. Fitch, president, made this notation:

"The taking apart, adobe by adobe brick, beam by beam, and plank by plank, the first French Consulate and its reconstruction on the El Estero was completed early in 1934. To this work the association contributed, first the initial saving of the building from destruction; next, a committee to work within the city; and third, half the cost of the additional material required. The City of Monterey furnished the other half, and the services of an expert building superintendent (J. C. Anthony), while the SERA produced the labor."

On March 16, 1935, a quest was made by the Carmel-Monterey Council of Girl Scouts that the first French Consulate be made available for use as the Girl Scout headquarters in Monterey. The request was referred to the association by the city manager, as the association had been the primary means of saving the historic building. It was approved by the board of directors on March 20. The city authorities soon afterward installed gas, electricity and water.

That the Girl Scouts appreciate the use of the building and its facilities is evidenced by the present attractive appearance of the old consulate. The city gardener and

his crew also are to be complimented upon the excellent care taken of the surrounding garden.

During 1937 the History and Art Assn, included the French Consulate in the list of 15 markers placed in front of that number of historic buildings in Old Monterey.