

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

September 4, 1961

Popular Colton Hall

September 11th has been set as the date for the 1961 reunion of pupils who attended school in Colton Hall, so what is more appropriate than to review a bit of the history of that bit of life in Old Monterey.

As far back as January of 1850, the common council was worried over the crowded condition of the city-owned buildings in Monterey, about the school system and proper housing, about the property in front of Colton Hall and to whom it belonged and most of all about where to put the public library. They were also excited about the prospects of making Monterey the first state capitol again.

At a meeting of the common council on April 6, 1850, the report was "on motion, that the school master be requested to vacate the room which he occupies in Colton Hall. Carried. It being needed for the use of the council. (Repealed May 27, 1850)."

It was not until November 17, 1886 that Resolution No. 56, was passed to print "to clear the title on the property known as 'Colton Hall,' now held and claimed by the trustees of the Monterey school district and others." At this date, W. W. James was the president of the board of trustees. Just one year later, on Nov. 2, 1897, "The city attorney reported the decision of Judge Dorn in favor of the City vs. The Monterey School district for the Colton Hall property."

President Johnson of the Council informed the board on Feb. 17, 1889, that he was in receipt of a letter from Assemblyman Feliz stating "that his bill for the restoration and preservation of Colton Hall had been reported favorably by the committee,".

The school in Colton Hall was again on the agenda for the May 14th meeting: "On motion of Ald. Abrego that a committee be appointed to inquire into the report upon the state of the schools, setting forth what is taught, and what salaries are paid the teachers and what rooms are furnished and by what authority said rooms are furnished.

"Resolved furthermore that the resolution passed on Monday, the 22nd, 1850 be, and is hereby repealed. Carried."

The school and Colton Hall were still uppermost in the minds of the common council of the city when they met on June 10th, 1850.

"Report received from special committee on schools. Ordered that the same report be filed, and committee instructed to confer with the master of the Spanish school as to whether he desire's a room which is now vacant in Colton Hall and at the disposal of this body."

On July 29th, the common council passed: "On motion of the school master was given permission to use this building upon Sundays for Sunday School."

Monterey or the common council once had a chance to sell Colton Hall to the Catholic church for the "establishment of an Academy for Young Ladies amongst us." The minutes read on Feb. 6, 1851:

"The new Catholic Bishop, Rt. Rev. Joseph S. Alemany, accompanied by one of his clergy, was introduced by Mr. David Spence to the council. The clerk read a lengthy petition from the bishop, bearing also the signatures of 37 of the citizens of Monterey which, after stating the importance and the great advantages that would result from the establishment of an academy for the Young Ladies amongst us, concluded by praying that the Council would sell Colton Hall, with the ground thereto belonging, at as low a price as possible, to the bishop for the purpose already stated in the petition. On motion, the petition was received. Ald. Cooper moved that a committee be appointed to report on the subject at the next meeting. Carried."

The proposed sale was turned down at a meeting of the council on Feb. 10, 1851, when a committee of three gentlemen, Messrs. Cooper, Diaz and Curtis, were appointed to inform the bishop that his proposition could not be accepted by the common council.

On Jan. 13, 1852 the council received a letter from the Assembly of California, stating: "From the diversity of opinion existing at present as to where the next legislature shall hold its session, we are of the opinion that the contingency may arise, which may enable us to urge the claims of Monterey, to the Seat of Government. As your representatives we desire to be empowered by your honorable body to offer for the use of the State the public buildings at your disposal. We invite your instant attention to this matter as it is of deep interest to 'the people of Monterey.'"