

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Another Firehouse Tale

The Book Club of California has just issued the last of 12 folders on the history of early California firehouses and equipment. These keepsakes have been mailed to members of the book club and each folder deals with an aspect of pioneer fire - fighting. The subject of each folder was chosen by the author of the text - in each case a person prominently identified with historical records of organizations. The series is edited by Albert Schumate and is designed and printed by L a w t o n Kennedy, San Francisco.

A particularly interesting and amusing folder is the one on Engine 15 Firehouse in San Francisco, now no longer in existence, The text was written by Charles St. George Pope, architect of historic Structures, a National Park Service preservation officer, and a member of the Northern California chapter of American Institute of Architecture. Pope visits the Monterey Peninsula very often, and has photographed most of the historic buildings here, as well as taking all measurements, historical data, etc., and has sent the results on to the Library of Congress for preservation in the archives there.

Pope's history of Engine 15 Firehouse and the picture of old brick, highly decorated building, urges that the firehouse be rebuilt as a fire department museum which would be a notable contribution to the city of San Francisco. Measurements, drawings, photographs, and many actual parts of the original have been saved from the building that stood on California street near Laguna. He suggests that a site near the new maritime museum would be most appropriate.

The building was built in 1885. P. J. O'Brien was the architect. He designed it with the exact requirements of the horse drawn equipment. The steam pumper was reversed on a turn - table; the horse stalls were ventilated through a courtyard dug within the hillside at the rear of the lot.

Pope writes: "The building itself; though plain and functional within, had an exterior of spontaneous charm. The Gothic revival exterior of brick and stone had many amusing details. The heads of Chief David Scannel and Captain Riley, heavily mustachioed from their corbelled positions of importance, stared

approvingly at the building cresting. There stood two corbelled finials designed as fire hydrants, flanking a central fire hydrant surmounted with an Engine 15 helmet. The tripartite facade had Tudor arch forms, replete with tracery, quatrefoils, parterae decorated strip courses, a gabled crenellated parapet. The asymmetrical hose tower was surmounted by a huge golden eagle on a weathervane."

Roby Wentz of Western Printer and Lithographer, the news magazine of Western Graphic Arts, has this to say about Lawton Kennedy, the designer and printer of the book club's 1961 series of Keepsakes: "The actual printing process is, of course, something which can only take place when the type has been set and placed in position. The beautiful and tasteful appearance of these keepsakes is, of course, due to Mr. Kennedy's design rather than merely to his printing. We expect printing to be well done; Mr. Kennedy is one of the finest pressmen alive today; but it is his artistry in the selection of the appropriate type face, etc., which makes these keepsakes and other specimens of his work the beautiful things that they are. We expect good printing: we are fortunate to have good design. This is of real interest to those of us who are proud of the truly fine typographic design which has made California the U.S. capital of fine printing today."