

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Query On The Gordon House

The Monterey Chamber of Commerce has turned a letter over to us to answer an interesting question from Ned Simmons of Arcata, Calif., in which he inquires about the history of the Gordon House in Monterey:

"I am asking" your help with a problem of history. A house next to Colton Hall is called the first wooden house in California. The historic marker says that it was built of milled lumber brought from Australia. Now Australia with the exception of the area on the northern shores is almost treeless."

Last year when a former chief of the Australia Forest Service spoke to the Humboldt State College Forestry Club, Mr. Simmons asked him if he knew about the Gordon House in Monterey. It was the first he had heard of it and was hard for him to believe.

If this is true, it is a paradox because the most important tree in Australia is Monterey pine. In other words, Monterey got its first lumber from Australia, and Australia received its lumber trees from Monterey.

Now to go back and give a brief history of the Gordon House. The Path of History was planned and the first historic markers were placed by the Monterey History and Art Assn. in 1932 and much has been learned through research since that time, so the association is happy to receive suggestions and criticism at any time.

The Gordon House, a one-story frame house at the corner of King and Pierce streets was one of the first milled lumber houses erected in Monterey. It was built by Philip Roach, being one of two houses, he imported around the horn in 1849. Roach, who was the last alcalde of Monterey and the first mayor (1851), built the house about 1849 or 1850.

At that time the very short street on the side of the building was unnamed, and this excerpt is taken from the meeting of the council, dated June 3, 1853 - "It was moved and seconded that the street between Colton Hall and the house of W. S. Johnson be here after called 'King Street'."

In 1850 Roach sold the property to Wm. S. Johnson, who was sindico (trustee) to the ayuntamiento (council), the first meeting of which was held in Colton Hall, Jan. 2, 1850. Johnson was born in England and

came to California with Col. J. D. Stevenson's regiment in 1847. Johnson eventually was elected the first recorder of Monterey County, and later elected county clerk. His son, R. F. Johnson, was born in Monterey in 1862, and in April of 1897 was elected mayor of Monterey.

The next owner was John Burke Phillips, an attorney, to whom Johnson disposed of the residence in 1853. Phillips arrived in California in 1847 with Company D, New York Volunteers.

In 1871, Samuel B. Gordon, from whom the house takes its name, became the owner. Gordon was well known in civic affairs, and was president of the board of trustees, 1877-1883.

Twenty-nine years later, in 1900, Gordon conveyed the house to T. A. Work, Monterey banker, with Work turning the property over two years later to C. D. Casper, former owner of the former Mission Inn. Casper held the property for about two years. In 1902, the records show that Bert Guidotti became the new owner. Guidotti sold to J. A. Davis in 1903. By a deed dated 1903, but not recorded until 1912, Davis conveyed it to Mary C. Davis. In 1925 it was purchased by Julia C. Stohr. It has changed ownership several times since that date.

We shall write Mr. Simmons in Arcata and send him a copy of this column, which may explain away the misinformation on the historic marker.