

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Historical Merit Award

The American Assn. for State and Local History has presented the award of merit to the Monterey History and Art Assn. for arousing civic consciousness, "for retaining the spirit and color of Old Monterey and for preserving and marking existing adobe structures.

The presentation was voted at the annual meeting of the association in San Francisco on Sept. 1, 1961, the first meeting to be held in the West of this national organization, the headquarters of which are in Madison, Wis. Historical societies from all over the United States are members.

Emerging from the isolation of dry textbooks and musty research files, history is finding warm acceptance as a stimulating activity for hundreds of Americans, so the historians believe.

"Newly converted history buffs all over the United States are being bombarded with history through newspaper stories, magazine articles, books, published journals, television shows, movies, exhibits, displays, pageants, and numerous other ways - and, they are thoroughly enjoying it.

"In fact, the local historic society - large or small, and of any type - has enjoyed an unprecedented popularity as a source of expression as well as knowledge for the history buffs. They are finding that history is not just Plymouth Rock and Independence Hall, but also in their own small communities." These two paragraphs are quoted from the Christian Science Monitor of Jan. 1, 1901.

Historians advance several reasons for the growing popularity of history: People may simply want to know something of the economic, political, and social background of the area in which they grew up. In some cases, they may have had forebears who were prominent in the community.

Others may wish to establish the relation between their own community and the state and nation, while still others may dig into history through a sense of pride in the nation's past accomplishments. It may be a need of a mobile, rootless public to find a connection with and an appreciation for its heritage.

"Particularly since World War II, people have begun to search history to discover why the United States has mounted suddenly to such a pinnacle of responsibility," according to Clifford L. Lord, dean of School of General Studies at Columbia University.

Another historian may think of history as interesting and informative. By entertaining it is not meant to be amusing or laughable, but too many people are afraid of the word history.

In its work with the local historical societies throughout the United States and Canada, the American Assn. for State and Local History has been one of the most influential organizations in the country in establishing popular interest in history.

"Can you help us stop condemnation proceedings against one of our town's most historic houses? Will you speak at our regional conference on manuscript cataloging? Could you tell us how to start a historical museum? What salaries do historians receive?"

These and many other questions pour into association headquarters by the dozens. The Monterey History and Art Assn. can verify this statement.

History News, the monthly publication of the American Assn. for State and Local History, keeps members informed of the activities throughout the field, acting as a clearing house for new ideas and current trends. This is the first publication in the country devoted entirely to interests and activities of historical agencies. Frederick L. Rath Jr., vice director of the New York State Historical Assn., is the president. The Monterey History and Art Assn. is a member.