

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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L. A. Tries To Save Adobe

We seldom pick up a newspaper, a magazine, or read a letter these days that we do not discover that there are other places, in addition to Monterey, where the citizens or individuals are working their hearts out to save a cherished historical monument or a bit of local, beautiful scenery. Such a thing is now happening in Southern California where an effort has been going on to save the Miguel Leonis adobe in Calabasas, a landmark for about 100 years.

At last the movement seems to be gaining momentum which could make it a success. These historical preservation projects must be of widespread support from ordinary citizens or they fail and one landmark after another disappears.

The incident which precipitated the present movement to save the Southern California adobe was a proposal to raze it and turn the site into a parking lot for a shopping center. Trying to be helpful the Los Angeles City Planning Commission has delayed until the end of May any action on rezoning the five-acre tract for commercial purposes, in order that sufficient funds may be raised to match the offering price for the land and the adobe.

Mayor Yorty of Los Angeles has joined in the preservation move through Dr. Julian Nava of Valley State College; the mayor's chairman of the committee to preserve the history of Los Angeles. Busy for a long time have been historical group leaders such as Mrs. Preston H. Akerman of Glendale, head of the historical societies of Los Angeles County.

We hope they succeed. This Leonis Adobe property, once the domain of the colorful Miguel Leonis, called "King of Calabasas" and "The Big Basque," would make a beautiful park and museum site, as proposed by the sponsors of the campaign to save it.

Another old adobe in Monterey has changed ownership and, we hope, is saved for posterity. The Merritt Adobe, on Pacific street between Franklin and Jackson streets, has been sold to Mr. and Mrs. John Truesdale of The Highlands.

The nice old adobe was built, according to reports, by Don Ignacio Vallejo. He arrived in San Diego from Mexico in 1774, having enlisted in Mexico for the army

service in California. He was discharged at the expiration of his term, but re-enlisted again in 1781. For 10 years he was in the service in Monterey. History says that he was removed from the position on complaint of Monterey citizens, and returned to San Jose from whence he came. Bancroft, in his "Pastoral," calls him a "just man." Vallejo was born at Hacienda de las Canadas, Guadalajara, Mexico. His full name was Ignacio Vicente Ferrer. His father, Geronimo Vallejo, had been sent by the Spanish government as an official to Mexico. Ignacio enlisted at Compostela; arrived at San Diego with Ortega in September 1774. He died in 1831 at Monterey, at the age of 83.

In 1818, he was mentioned in connection with the Bouchard affair at Monterey. He was subsequently employed on certain public works in Monterey. He was the father of 13 children, one of his daughters married Capt. J. B. R. Cooper.

Josiah Merritt, who purchased the adobe from Vallejo, arrived in Monterey in January, 1850. The next year he took an active part in organizing Monterey County, of which he was at one time elected Judge, serving until 1854. Shortly after his arrival, Merritt married Juana Castro, eldest daughter of Simson Castro, judge of the first instance under Mexican rule. They had five children.

After retiring from the judgeship of the county, Judge Merritt resumed the practice of law, in which, and other numerous enterprises, he continued to be engaged until his death in 1869.

The Merritt adobe was built in the 1860's on Pacific street between Franklin and Jackson streets. It is a well-preserved two-story adobe with balcony, standing, back from the street with a formal garden in the front.

At one time, the Merritt House was owned by the late A. M. Allen, also former owner of Point Lobos State Park.