

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Landmarks Are Living History

"Historical landmarks help to give identity to a community. In our present age of mass production, everything is too much alike. Automobiles, tract houses, service stations, supermarkets, mailboxes, billboards are all visual rubber stamps that make one community little different from the next. Historical landmarks are one-of-a-kind oases of individual expression in a desert of sameness. They can help to make one community a little different from its neighboring communities. Pride in these relics of local history can stimulate pride in one's community."

The above paragraph is quoted from News and Views, the monthly publication of the Division of Beaches and Parks of the State of California, and what remarks could be truer?

Historical landmarks remind us of our past. The lessons of history often give us a better understanding of the present and a better insight into what the future holds.

We can admire the energy and initiative of our forebears as they tamed a land of enormous scale and unlimited resources.

We can share their appreciation of the beautiful natural setting in which they found themselves.

Historical landmarks are a source of stimulation and an impetus for better design. We can take inspiration from the craftsmanship, pride and dignity that was put into structures of other years.

Historical landmarks add to our culture, education, and enjoyment by keeping history alive and visual. Photos and written records are not enough. We need tangible reminders. Historical landmarks can be living museums. Nowhere can we capture the feeling of past eras so well as when we see an authentic structure of past times.

These facts are so true when Vaughan Shoemaker, the well-known and appreciated cartoonist who owns and occupies a home in Carmel for a portion of each year, writes of the threatened elimination of the patriotic illustrations showing Uncle Sam with a beard, the farmer with a goatee, and other symbols we have known these many years. How soon will it be before the American Eagle also will be declared not modern enough for present-day cartooning? We hope that Mr.

Shoemaker will continue to fight this good fight and retain these related symbols of our national history.

The governor's mansion in Sacramento will no doubt remain for centuries as a historical reminder of California.

Not so fortunate are the people of Santa Clara or California - that county's famed Portal House was lost. It was built in the 1860's for Louis Portal, a Frenchman who had come to San Francisco during the Gold Rush and prospered as the operator of one of the city's first French laundries. At traded to the fertile Santa Clara Valley, Portal bought 400 rich farm acres in the Cupertino area and settled down to the life of a country squire.

From the "captain's walk" atop this handsome mansion, its owner could gaze out upon his domain and assure himself that the workers in the fields were well employed. His house was admired for almost 100 years for its interpretation in wood of Renaissance architectural elegance. The varied patterns of its siding, the intricate detail of its trim, and its impressive scale were a monument to Victorian carpentry.

News and Views editors continue: "The Portal House could have been an impressive reminder of an era when grand houses were an expression of the individuality of the owner and craftsmanship of the builder. Fashioned with infinite care and attention to detail, it was razed quickly and ignominiously one day in 1958 by a subdivider's bulldozer. What might have been a significant landmark typical of an important era in our country's history is now lost in the anonymity of a tract housing development."

We, in Monterey, have a few of these houses of the same era as described in the Portal House. There are two on Van Buren street, at the corner of Jefferson street, and another belonging to Mrs. Alma Fleischer at 410 Monroe St., as well as others of like period. Photographs of the exterior and interior of the Fleischer home are now in the Library of Congress in Washington, D. C.