

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Preservation For Use

Dr. V. Audrey Neasham has written a reference point in time in "Old Sacramento," published by the Sacramento Historic Landmarks Commission in cooperation with the redevelopment agency of the City of Sacramento.

Dr. Neasham, well known in Monterey, is now historical consultant for Sacramento's Historical Landmarks Commission.

Dr. Neasham writes in his introduction:

"Sacramento, capital of California since 1854, is historically outstanding among the cities of Western America, for here where one of our foremost metropolitan centers is developing, the remnants of the original are still in place. No other city on the Pacific Coast can claim so many buildings and sites reaching back to the Gold Rush.

"These sites and buildings, on the east bank of the river which bears its name, were major contributors to a saga of migration unequalled until then in world history."

Old Sacramento, as visualized by those planning its preservation, restoration and reconstruction, lies largely in the section bounded by the Sacramento River on the west, Capital Avenue on the south, the westerly right-of-way of Interstate Route 5 and its approach on the north.

When Sutter arrived in 1839, Spanish and Mexican expeditions had accumulated much knowledge of the Sacramento Valley, supplemented by fur-hunting activities of the first United States expedition under Jedediah Smith in 1827-28 and the Hudson Bay Company during the late 1820s and the 1830s.

Captain W.H. Warner, employed by John A. Sutter Jr. in December, 1848, to lay out a new city at the embarcadero, is acknowledged thus as the founder of the City of Sacramento.

An illustration from a December, 1846, drawing of George V. Cooper shows prominent structures including the Round Tent (connected with the Eagle Theater and Taylor & Co.), the Mansion House (occupying the site of Sam Brannan's store), Elephant House, Fremont House and the General Jackson Hotel.

The City Hotel, constructed by John S. Fowler, was the most important hostelry in 1849 and the scene of numerous social gatherings and town meetings. The Round Table was a leading gambling spot when games of chance entailing thousands of dollars in gold were not uncommon.

By the 1950s people began to recognize the importance of Old Sacramento. Writes Dr. Neasham:

"Steps were taken to urge its preservation. Studies during 1958-1964 by the State Division of Beaches and Parks, aided by a \$15,000 grant from the Legislature, advocated several buildings as museums, as well as for park and commercial purposes.

"The Sacramento Historic Landmarks Commission and Sacramento County Historical Society chose the preservation of Old Sacramento as major planks. The city council passed ordinances preventing alteration of exterior architectural features of historic structures.

"The Redevelopment Agency of the City of Sacramento, with funds from the city, State Division of Highways and Federal Urban Renewal Administration in 1963 instituted a \$100,000 planning study for its preservation and development.

"In 1965 the U.S. Department of the Interior with the National Park Service designated Old Sacramento as a national historic landmark district. During the same year an Old Sacramento state historical park was proposed to the Legislature in order to preserve a portion of Sutter's embarcadero, including an 1849 scene on Front Street between 'I' and 'J'.

"Meanwhile, courageous individuals, believing in Old Sacramento's future, established old-style businesses in the area. Among these were Newton Cope's Firehouse Restaurant, Casandra's Antique Shop and the Barrios Art Gallery on Second Street.

"Another was the rehabilitation by James H. Bequette of the Cavert Building on Front Street, next to the old Stanford Warehouse, as a real estate office and studios and shops for interior decorators and artists. A non-profit corporation, the Embarcadero Improvement Association, has been formed of present property owners and others to encourage the restoration and use of Old Sacramento as an historical and tourist attraction. Also, Old Sacramento, Inc. has been set up to encourage development of the area. It is preservation for use.

“Old Sacramento’s influence is bound to be exerted on future generations. ‘Preservation for use’ shall be its guideline. No dead museum piece will this be, but a living, pulsating element of modern life to be enjoyed by the living. To integrate the old with the new shall be its challenge.

“Preserved, with an economic as well as a cultural reason for being, it will have nationwide importance. As a model and guide in historical restoration, interpretation and use, its influence will be exerted throughout the land, thus enabling us to better understand a part of that which made America great.”