

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Early Monterey Library

The second public library to be founded in California also was situated in Monterey and was the State Library. In its earliest days it was neither a lending nor public library but for use of legislators and executives. It grew into our present great state library at Sacramento after the capital was taken away from Monterey.

The Monterey Weekly Herald of September, 1874 said that officers of the Monterey Library in 1853 were Milton Little, President; J. R. Knapp, vice president; W.S. Johnson, treasurer; D.R. Ashley, secretary. The article also stated that the library was neglected and locked in El Cuartel: the editor wanted the library revived.

Filed for record Nov. 14, 1857, at 10 a.m., and recorded in Book "A" of miscellaneous records, pages 2 and 3, was the certification of the election of officers and the incorporation of the Monterey Library. James H. Gleason was the recorder of the county on that date, 129 years ago.

The document, written in longhand on lined paper, reads: "Monterey, November 13, 1857.

"We the judges of an election held this day by the members of the Monterey Library, to elect officers and trustees of that society, do hereby certify that at such an election the following persons, shareholders in the corporation, were duly elected officers and trustees of said library for ensuing year, to wit, James Gleason as president, David H. Spence Jr, as treasurer and D.R. Ashley as secretary and librarian.

"The name under which said society shall be known and under which said trustees shall act, be called and known, is the 'Monterey Library' which is a literary and scientific institution, is incorporated under the laws of the State of California and is located in the City of Monterey."

"Signed: William Curtis, D.L. Spence, and James A. Gleason, judges of the election."

Our readers will notice that at that date of the filing of these papers, Monterey was the seat of Monterey County. The document was No. 2 in the files, the Presbyterian Church incorporation being No. 1.

There are a few bits of additional data available between that date and the forming of the Monterey Library Association on Jan. 17, 1901. I have found references in several of the early issues of the Monterey Cypress prior to 1900 to the fact that the supervisors had granted sums of money for the support of the library which was then housed in a room in El Cuartel, an adobe two stories in height, built by the Mexican government in the early 1840's. It stood on Munras where a gas station is now located. It is city owned property.

Robert Louis Stevenson refers to the library in El Cuartel in his writings, of Monterey, at the time of his residence. He states that he looked in the library in the old building, but found it closed and no one on duty. Later the books and equipment were moved to the school building, on the present site of the headquarters of the Monterey school system on Pacific street.

On Jan. 17, 1901, a group of women who called themselves the Monterey Ladies' Circulating Book Club, held an annual meeting and voted to keep the 16 books they had on hand and form a library association. The minutes of the early group are now stored in a safe place at the new library, the dedication of which was held on Sunday, June 8, 1952.