

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

March 7, 1950

Poem on a Door

On Friday of last week there appeared in this column a story on the life of Daniel O'Connell. Now we find that the original of the poem which now appears on the Berthold Monument in Colton Hall Park, was written in lead pencil on a panel at the side of the front door of Mrs. J.W. Finch at 410 Monroe street in Monterey. Mr. O'Connell had rented the home for a short time during one of his visits to Monterey and presumably had had the inspiration as he thrilled at the view over Monterey and the blue bay beyond.

Fearing that the words of the poem as they came to him, might escape him, he wrote them down on the first available space he found. Then came Charles Rollo Peters to visit his Bohemian friend and rewrote the words on the opposite side of the door. When Mrs. Finch came back to her home she did not exactly appreciate having her woodwork thus decorated and she ordered a painter to repaint the doorway and so probably the first draft of the poem, "In the Mantel of Old Tradition," was destroyed.

Mrs. Finch on whose doorway the poem was written, was the daughter of John O'Neill who took the part of Mr. Fury in the "Lion Son of '76," about which we also wrote last week when we told the story of Lizzy Bingham, the pioneer actress. Mr. O'Neill also came to Monterey in 1847 with Co. F third Regiment. Miss Ellen Louise O'Neill married J.W. Finch and their daughter is Mrs. Ama J. Fleisher, who still resides in the family home on Monroe Street.

On April 14th, 1870, the *Monterey Republican* a newspaper of that era, reported: "Mr. James Finch is erecting a frame house in the westerly portion of town. There being four mechanics employed on the house, it will soon be completed." This home is one of the most attractive in Old Monterey. It is located on Monroe Street on the south side of Franklin, and is quite colonial in appearance, two-storied, painted yellow with white trim and green shutters.

Mr. O'Neill was a member of the first Ayuntamiento or Common Council, of that City of Monterey in 1850, the first official records of which were dated January 2 of that year. It was also Mr. O'Neill who was appointed by the Ayuntamiento to proceed to San Jose to urge the

Legislature of the State of California to return the Capital to Monterey, to offer Colton Hall as a meeting place free of charge for a term of five years, and also to urge the speedy passage of an act to incorporate the City of Monterey.

It might also be of interest to lovers of history to know that Mrs. O'Connell, the wife of Daniel O'Connell, poet and Bohemian, was Miss Anita Ashley, the daughter of Delos R. Ashley, district attorney of Monterey County in 1852. He was also state assemblyman, in the fifth and sixth sessions, and state senator in the seventh and eighth sessions, and served as state treasurer, 1862 and 1863. The Ashley home was on the lot where now stands the charming white frame house of Cape Cod architecture on the corner of Franklin and Larkin streets. It was a log cabin at the rear of the lot when Mr. and Mrs. Corby purchased the property and built the house which now is owned by Mr. and Mrs. Harold L Bussey. Some of the material and logs from the Ashley home were used in its construction. Instead of being of adobe bricks the Ashley home was built of logs. Mr. Corby was a brick mason, and according to Miss Edith Cox, who owned the Cape Cod house for many years, the fireplaces he built there are without a doubt the best in Monterey.

In the *Republican*, printed on June 9, 1870, the editor had this to say: "Our townspeople, many of them, have left undisturbed most of the Centennial street decorations. They may prove useful for the next anniversary, 100 years hence."

Another item of interest: "The store of Don Francisco Palacio de Miranda on the corner of Pearl and Washington, was destroyed by fire. Palacio was formerly governor of Baja California under Mexican rule and during the Mexican war with the United States, took sides with us. Seeking refuge by passage to this place on the Lexington with Captain Bailey. The old gentleman is about 82 years old and with no one to aid him the disaster we learn renders him insolvent."

On June 9, there appears this follow-up story: "The lot on which the ruins of the store of Don Francisco Palacio, which was recently destroyed by fire, was sold at public auction on Monday to Don Bernardino Vasquez for \$685.00."

On June 18, 1871, the *Republican* printed: "For several days past workmen have been engaged removing the ruins of the Palacio adobe which was destroyed by fire

over a year ago and as soon as the lot is cleared, a two-story frame building will be erected by Bernardino Vasquez. This will be quite an improvement to Monterey and will add much to the good appearance of that portion of our town.”