

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **Clearing the Road**

Today the male descendants of the pioneers who arrived in California before 1850 may become members of the Society of California Pioneers. Before this privilege was extended, membership was limited to those who have arrived before January 1, 1850. The society now owns their own building on McAllister street in San Francisco which they share with the California Historical Society and where visitors are welcome to enjoy the museum of California historical items.

On Friday we wrote of the presentation of a flag to the pioneers by the pioneer women on Sept. 9, 1853, during a celebration of Admission Day in San Francisco. Miss Elizabeth Branham of San Jose, then 15 years of age made the presentation speech.

"In future years it will be an honor to your children to boast descent from the Pioneers of California," she declared in her address. "Such is your proud distinction, Mr. President (Samuel Brannan), and gentlemen of the association. We, whose sex forbade our further participation in the toils which led to its accomplishments, then being your companions, desire to testify our sympathy and approbation by the presentation of this flag. It is the emblem of our country, which some of you once fancied to wave a last adieu to you, as you sought this, then foreign, shore. We can conceive of no more appropriate testimonial, believing none are more worthy to receive it and able to guard it than the Pioneers of California."

Mrs. F. Grayson-Crane, a pioneer of '49 and the one who appears to have been the leading spirit behind the presentation of the American flag to the Pioneers, had preserved a copy of the oration delivered by the Hon. William Van Voorhies on the important occasion of Admission Day in 1853, which we reprint in the Diary today:

"Few in number but strong in the characteristic energy of our people, the early American population of California exerted an influence upon the destiny of the people amongst whom they had taken up their abode, which in the brief period of a few years ripened into dominion. Says one of the oldest and truest friends of California, 'The first emigrants came not to seek the rich

treasures which glitter upon the hills. They came to clear the road to civilization.' And they have done it. Their mission has been gloriously performed. The tree which they planted and watched over has taken deep root; the rich fruit it produces is the fruit of civilization, and the world plucks it eagerly from the bending branches, and 'eateth thereof.' Honor then, to the daring spirits who preceded the star of empire on its westward way; Honor to the men and women of '43, '45 and '46, who cleared the path across the trackless deserts and through dangerous mountain passes for succeeding generations to follow! Honor to the California Pioneers!"

There were not more than 70 or 80 persons standing on Montgomery street in San Francisco August 23, 1950, when a plaque was placed on the site where Mellus and Howard warehouse had been in 1850, to witness and take part in the dedication of a memorial to the California Pioneers.

The plaque was fastened to the imitation marble trim of the Bank of Canton. It had been concealed behind two striped canvas curtains. Edward D. Keil, president of the Society of California Pioneers, reminded the audience that the first meeting of the society had taken place in what is now Chinatown. It was very fitting, he said, that things had turned out that way, for while the gold rush founders were arriving from the Atlantic shore, another group of pioneers the Chinese, were coming to California from across the Pacific.

Joseph Knowland, who was chairman of the California Centennial Commission, praised the society for "perpetuating the memory of those early days."

K.L. Kwong, the president of the Bank of Canton on which the plaque was placed, served refreshments inside the bank at the conclusion of the dedication program. In his speech of acceptance of the custodianship of the plaque, Mr. Kwong admitted his pride in the honor bestowed upon his organization and upon the people of the Chinese community.