

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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My Friend ... the Rose

If there is one thing on this earth that would teach us how to grow old gracefully it is the old roses. They remind us that simplicity and beauty go hand in hand. When we made a pilgrimage last week to the Mother Lode country and saw all the old roses growing in abundance all over these old towns and out in the country where once there had been a home, and again when we visited the rose garden at El Estero, we were reminded of the history that these beautiful old vines have lived through.

No flower in history has been so intimately linked with human affairs as the rose: its story is the record of a flower that has left its influence on the lives, the customs, even the destinies of nations. In war and peace, in joy and sorrow, in king's castles and cotters' homes, in religion, art and music, that influence appears in song and story, and though the nations that knew her have long passed away, the rose, which has seen a hundred generations come and go, remains unchanged in character though improved in form. For more than twenty-five hundred years the rose has ruled uninterruptedly as queen of flowers.

When we go back to recorded history we find that the rose was an intimate part of life even before those records were set down. It seems to be the oldest known cultivated flower; in all ages, wherever there have been gardens there have been roses. Myths surround its origin, among them the story by Botticelli which tells us that the rose sprang from the ground to greet Venus as she arose from the sea. It grew in the gardens of Babylon 1200 years before the Christian era. It is mentioned frequently in the Old testament of the Bible.

There was found in an Egyptian tomb in the year 1888, the remains of a garland of roses that had been laid there in the year 2 A.D. Specimens were examined by British authorities and were finally identified as *Rosa Sancta*, for centuries known as the "Rose of the Tombs".

In the course of an adventurous visit to the abandoned "Ghost towns" of the mining regions of the California Sierras, where life had been gay two generations or more ago, there was continually seen the surviving growth of the gardens that had once been the pride of these miners of the gold rush days. There were also, in

addition to the roses, old apple, pear and plum trees; there were grape vines with huge trunks nearly a foot thick. They were the one most animate evidence of the old home life.

In looking over Francis E. Lester's book "My Friend the Rose", he writes often of "Harrison's Yellow", describing it as "the most vigorous of 1830, the new yellow rose of the gold rush days". He also lists the Gallica roses, the Hermosa and Sweetbriar, as growing in the Mother Lode.

It has been repeated again and again by descendants of the covered wagon pioneers, that when the time came for the departing family to take its leave from home to search for California gold, the woman of the house took a small can, planted in it a root sprout of the "new yellow rose", cared for it during the months of perilous travel overland and planted it when the new home was established. But it was a small pink rose that we saw most often which was probably the "Old Blush" – it grew in great clumps from Sonora to Sonoma and was a mass of bloom.

A rose garden has recently been planted at "Lachryma Montis" the General Vallejo Home at Sonoma, now a State Monument. The planting was done last Spring in memory of the General and his family and is now in the height of the blooming season. There are also many old roses around this home as well as at the other old adobes in Sonoma. Surrounding the plaza there are many charming examples of early California adobe architecture with but one disturbing ultra-modern building to spoil the otherwise satisfying picture of the early days of the state.