

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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The Old Names Were the Best

Today we have chosen to leave the history of the Monterey Peninsula and even California and visit a neighboring state and city Nevada and Virginia City. A few months ago the Territorial Enterprise, Nevada's first newspaper, was reactivated, under the management of Lucius Beebe and Charles Clegg. This famous Nevada paper was first published in 1858; there Samuel Clemens began his writing career and adopted his pen name Mark Twain.

In the latest edition of the Enterprise we learn from the editorial page that there is a movement on foot to restore Placerville's original name of Hangtown. The editor writes "Once in awhile wishful thinking results in concrete realization, and all admirers of the old times and old ways in this part of the world will lend their support to Swift Berry, a notable California antiquary, who is fighting to restore Placerville's original name of Hangtown. Already the dreary and meaningless name of Schilling has been changed to the community's first name: Whiskeytown. Rough and Ready has been brought back to life in Nevada County and hereabouts, people have never really gotten used to the new-fangled name of Genoa for Mormon Station. The old names had meaning and character and were, in a large majority of cases supplanted by names of Victorian origin."

The editor mentions further examples of name-changing: Bedbug in California was refined to Freezout and Freezout in turn gave way to Lone after the local literati discovered Bulwer Lytton. These places served the pioneers who founded them and only the morbid sophistication that followed on the heels of what we will agree to call civilization substituted bogus gentility for inherent realism.

Considering the above quotations from the Nevada Enterprise, we have the following suggestions: Wouldn't it be an honor to the founders and pioneers of Monterey to change back to some of the old names here? Pacific street, a name which any town in California could use, was once Calle Estrada; Tyler was Calle de Castro and Washington was christened "Calle de Montenegro"; Van Buren was Spence street – all named for prominent men who assisted in making the

history of Monterey and California even before the Gold Rush days in the west.

Samuel Clemens came to the Enterprise from Aurora to replace a reporter who had gone back to "the states." His first articles signed Mark Twain appeared in 1863 and some years later, after he had achieved a degree of celebrity, the humorist explained its source and origin. It had been the byline of a Mississippi River ship's news correspondent for the New Orleans Picayune in Clemens' river days and Clemens had appropriated it for his own use upon the death of the original owner.

The original offices of the Territorial Enterprise are open to the public as a museum. Here in the composing room and press room are visible the water-powered one-sheet press, the type cases, proofing machine, paper cutters and the imposing stone together with Mark Twain's desk. A bronze plaque, the gift of the Press Club of the University of Nevada, adorns the façade of the historic building, a structure partially gutted by the great fire of 1875 but reoccupied by the staff a few days after the flames had been extinguished.

A note from Noel Sullivan thanks the Diary for mentioning his aunt, Mary Sullivan Spence, in recognition of her authorship of the poem dedicated to the Serra Cross at the Landing Place near the Presidio gate. He also mentions the fact that his father was Francis John Sullivan, and that his grandfather was John Sullivan one of the pioneers who crossed the plains by covered wagon, reaching California in 1846, three years before the discovery of gold. Incidentally, his goal in taking this adventurous trek, as a boy of 16 years was in no way concerned with material ambitions or an aspiration for financial security, but after arriving in Canada with his parents from Ireland, he heard of the Franciscan Missions in California. Under the impression that they still flourished here at that time, he set out to find "God's Country" where he could live and worship in freedom.

Sullivan died at the age of fifty-two years, in 1882. He was the father of eleven children. Mrs. Spence, the oldest daughter, the second child of his second marriage was the author of the poem we published. Her brother was Father Robert E. Kenna, S.J., a figure beloved in California until the time of his death in 1912. Mrs. Spence's daughter, Mrs. Howard Wood is still living in California.