

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

February 18, 1957

A Letter from Gen. Grant

The Bohemian Club in San Francisco graciously loaned their most cherished and interesting item to the Book Club of California for presentation in the club's "Treasures of California Collections", the selection for the 1956 series of Keepsakes for the members. The treasure was a communication from Gen. Grant to Gen. Halleck. John Herzog, the Bohemian Club librarian, made the selection and wrote the text for the folder.

The letter presented to the Bohemian Club by G. W. Granniss, was written by U. S. Grant from La Grange, Wis., Nov. 26, 1862, to Gen. Halleck in California. It is of course written in long-hand on a single sheet and the copy, reproduced by photography contained in the Keepsake is yellow with age and the ink has turned brown, otherwise it is perfectly preserved.

Grant wrote: "Having come across a pair of unmentionables in a deserted rebel home entirely unsuited in dimensions for any member of this army and thinking that so much material should not be lost in these times when the raw material from which they are manufactured is in such demand; I naturally cast around to think who of my acquaintances they might be of service to.

"I can think of no one but Col. Thom of your staff. They are therefore to him respectfully donated with such remarks in the presentation as you may choose, to make.

"Very respectfully, your obt svt. U. S. Grant."

This touch of humor came out of the gun-smoke, the mire, the heartache, and the miseries so linked with the Civil War, comments John Herzog in the text which accompanies the letter. The short note gives readers a glimpse at a little-known side of the man.

Grant had known Gen. Halleck only slightly in his early army days and had not known him at all at West Point or during the Mexican War. It was only after Halleck had outlined the Western Campaign in 1862, which he directed in person, and after he became general-in-chief of the Armies of the United States, that a correspondence passed between the two men.

It is of interest to Californians that the two men were here at the same time. Halleck was on the Pacific Coast

during the Mexican War. In 1847 and 1849 he was secretary of state for California, under the military governments of Mason and Riley. His headquarters in Monterey were in the small stone and adobe building south of the Larkin House on Calle Principal. He was a member of the Constitutional Convention here in 1849 and a member of the group which drew up the constitution of the state. After seeing service as inspector and engineer of lighthouses and as an engineer on the Board of Fortifications on the coast, Halleck resigned from the service and established a home in San Francisco. Here he engaged in the practice of law. During the years from 1850 to 1861 he was director-general of the Almaden Quicksilver Mines.

Grant was in San Francisco in 1852 but there is no known record that he met Halleck in that year or upon his return two years later. So, this letter comes as a surprise. "There is a kindly smile and there is also a glimpse of a grim side of the terrible war as manifested by 'so much material should not be lost in those times when the raw material from which they are manufactured is in such demand.'"

Halleck built the Old Montgomery Block on San Francisco, long the headquarters of the City's Bohemian set. Visitors will find it at the corner of Washington street, a little below where Montgomery lifts toward Telegraph Hill. Edwal Jones in his book "The Ark of Empire" tells a fascinating story of Halleck, his successes and failures, and of the social life of early San Francisco.