

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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50 Years of Teaching

Fifty years ago this autumn Miss Jessie Wood came to Monterey, the old Spanish capital of California, to teach school in the only public school which existed here in 1905. In April 1909 this young school teacher became the bride of the late Charles Kiernan, a prominent citizen, one of the first men to become interested in the fish canneries, and later the city's superintendent of streets.

Mrs. Kiernan, in all those 50 years, has never lost her interest in the schools of the Peninsula, or in the young people of the community. She was born in Castroville where her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Townsend Woods then lived. They later moved to San Jose where she attended and graduated from the San Jose State Normal school in 1899. Her life diploma is signed by the Hon. Henry T. Gage, governor of California, and by Dr. H.C. Brown, president of the board of the Normal, and a practicing physician in San Jose.

Mrs. Kiernan began her teaching career in Sigsbee, then transferred to the little school at Playto in the Santa Lucia Mountains in 1901, where she had a dozen pupils of all sizes and ages. That was the year of the great drought and as she walked the two miles to school, she saw the pitiful condition of all living things, the cattle, the trees and the lack of grass on the hillsides. The leaves on the trees were eaten off as high as the cattle could stretch their necks to get a bit of green, she remembers.

Among Mrs. Kiernan's happy memories are her experiences and association at the Graves School near Salinas and of Monterey County, where she taught in 1904.

When she applied to teach in Monterey where she had often visited with her parents and stayed in the Casper Hotel, now Mission Inn, Arthur Metz was a member of the school board. He remarked to her when she was "hired to teach": "I hope I will never be sorry." Knowing Mrs. Kiernan as we do, we are sure that Mr. Metz has never regretted his choice of at least one of the teachers 50 years ago—that of Miss Jessie Wood. Later when Charles Kiernan wished to marry this popular teacher it was to the late Shelley Pickles that he went to have her released from her contract that she might accompany him on a combined business trip and

honeymoon. Needless to say the request was granted with regret, even though the district lost an excellent teacher.

The first home of Mrs. Kiernan was in the Merritt Adobe on Pacific street with the Kilpatrick family. She remembers the beauty of the view from that historic home in those days and she recalls how the pounding of waves upon the beach would be the last sound she could remember before sleep came to her.

The grammar school in Monterey was on Pacific street where the offices of the school department are at present, the former site of the Walter Colton School. It was a huge two-story wooden building in which the attic was the high school. Mrs. Kiernan taught there. One of her pupils in the first grade was Judge Monty Hellam, who still treasures a picture of the class, according to his former teacher. Miss Eva Riecks, now in the school department at Burbank in Southern California; Mildred Dolley Millington of Monterey, and Helen Otis Kelsey of Pacific Grove, were among other pupils in that class that Mrs. Kiernan could recall at the moment.

After 25 years as a home-maker Mrs. Kiernan returned to her profession and for 15 years was a member of the faculty of the Bay View School in New Monterey. Following her second retirement she was persuaded to guide the educational life of a small group of very young people in the Carmel Martin home library on Martin street, where she taught Dickie Dormody, the son of the late Dr. Hugh Dormody; Mast Wolfson, son of Dr. and Mrs. Mast Wolfson; Peggy Doud, daughter of the James Douds of Carmel, and Rufus Hayden.

At this date Mrs. Kiernan is now in her third retirement, enjoying life in her comfortable home at 543 Monroe St., in Monterey. She came out of her retirement a few years ago to be "Duena" for the 1952 Merienda, which celebrated Monterey's 182nd birthday, sponsored by the Monterey History and Art Assn.