

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

July 4, 1958

Historical Pilgrimage

Edgar M. Kahn, a member of the board of directors of the California Historical Society and an associate on the Editorial Advisory Committee of that society, visited Monterey over the weekend to make tentative arrangements for a pilgrimage of society members to the Peninsula the latter part of November. Kahn has also been chairman of the membership committee, public relations, and many other groups active in the interests of California history.

Mr. Kahn is the author of "Cable Car Days In San Francisco" published first in November 1940, by the Stanford University Press, with subsequent editions until July 1948, when the centennial edition was issued. There have been ten editions in all of this volume dealing with the complete history of the cable car.

As an introduction Carl I. Wheat wrote "It is fitting that the story of the cable cars be written and that it be written by a San Franciscan, one whose family background and business association has bound him closely to these hills and to the now quaint cars so inseparably a part of the landscape of San Francisco. . . . "Cable Car Days" - the very phrase recalls tall hats and crinolines, the Comstock excitements and the coming of the Pacific railroad, the nabobs of Nob Hill headed by the "Big Four" and their satellites, Kearney and his mob and their war cry, "The Chinese must go!" Those days have passed long years ago; but still the little cars go clanging up and down the hills of San Francisco, living relics of an earlier and braver day in the city that still sits upon its hills, serene, indifferent of fate."

We wonder how many folks know who invented the cable car? We remember a number of years ago one of the questions asked of persons taking the examination to become curators of the historical monuments in California was: "Who was the inventor of the cable car?" According to our informant very few of the applicants knew the answer. The mechanical genius was Andrew Smith Hallidie, who devoted nearly a half century of his life to San Francisco's progress. Mr. Kahn has devoted a chapter in "Cable Car Days" to this man who made a bit of San Francisco history by his invention of these quaint and remarkable cars which climb the hills of San Francisco for the great enjoyment of natives and visitors alike.

Hallidie was born in London in 1836. His real name was Andrew Smith, but he adopted the name Hallidie in honor of his godfather and uncle Sir Andrew Hallidie, who had been physician to King William IV and to Queen Victoria. His father, who had some interest in the Fremont estate in Mariposa County, decided to take him to California. He quickly became a mining prospector, then in 1856. using one of his father's inventions, he began the manufacture of metal rope in San Francisco. In 1867 Hallidie took out his first patent covering the invention of a suspension bridge. In 1871 he had plans ready for the underground cables. At his own expense, Kahn writes, Hallidie had a survey made for a line up California street between Kearney and Powell, a distance of 1,386 feet. Hallidie himself pledged \$20,000, all he had, his friends, \$40,000, and an additional sum of \$30,000 was secured by a ten-year loan at 10 per cent interest, with a mortgage on the property of the lenders on Nob Hill, as a security. Service commenced on Feb. 1. 1878, from Market and Geary, then westward to Presidio Avenue.

The name of Hallidie is perpetuated in the Hallidie building, on Sutter street between Montgomery and Kearney streets. Here a plaque has been placed bearing this inscription: Hallidie Building, named in honor of Andrew Smith Hallidie, born in London. England. March 16, 1836, died in San Francisco, April 24. 1900 - creator of the cable car railway - twice member of the board of freeholders, chosen to frame a charter for the city-regent of the University of California from the first meeting of the board, June 9, 1868, to the day of his death - during his last 28 years a devoted chairman of its finance committee, builder, citizen, regent, a man of integrity."

Several years ago, another plaque was placed in San Francisco in memory of Hallidie. About 50 feet from Clay and Kearney streets, where the world's first cable car rumbled up Nob Hill, Aug. 1, 1878: the city paid tribute to its inventor. Taking part in the ceremony in Portsmouth Plaza, a plaque was dedicated by Rev. Harry C. Meserve, pastor of the Unitarian church to which Hallidie belonged; Clay Miller, former chamber of commerce president, and Louis Sutter, president of the park and recreation. who represented the mayor. The idea of this honor was conceived by Edgar M. Kahn - who also headed a fund-raising campaign for the memorial.