

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

April 15, 1960

Pioneer Minister

A plaque commemorating the centennial of the arrival in California of the famous minister, Thomas Starr King, will be placed beside his sarcophagus at the First Unitarian Church in San Francisco, Sunday, April 24, at 11 a.m. The plaque is sponsored by the First Unitarian Society of San Francisco, the California State Parks Commission, and the California Historical Society.

Thomas Starr King served as minister of the church from his arrival in California in 1860 until his death four years later. Miss Starr King Warner, great-granddaughter of Thomas Starr King, will unveil the plaque. She will be assisted by four great-great-grandchildren of Starr King.

It will be remembered that, despite his comparatively short residence in San Francisco, King is one of the only two Californians whose image appears in the Congressional Hall of Statuary in Washington, D.C. Father Junipero Serra, founder of California missions, is the other.

The fascinating pioneer's great granddaughter, Mrs. Margery Davis Warner of San Francisco, recently answered the question as to how and why King came west in the first place.

"In 1859 while rector of the Hollis Street Church (Unitarian) in Boston," wrote Mrs. Warner, "he received the 'call' to San Francisco, but because of poor health he declined the offer. They asked him again the following year and he felt that he could not refuse this challenge.

"With his wife Julia and his daughter Edith, he traveled from New York by way of the Isthmus of Panama and on the Pacific Coast embarked on the Sonora for the voyage to San Francisco, where he landed in April, 1860."

Mrs. Warner also reports: "There is in the Starr King School of Religion library a notebook laboriously copied by one of the former Julia Wiggin's sister from the original notebook kept by Mrs. King of the voyage. It is most interesting reading and I am certain anyone interested in California would enjoy a visit to this library in Berkeley, as they also have a few mementoes of Mr. King and his family - such as a little leather trunk used on the trip, and so forth."

It was the eloquent oratory of King that tipped the scales as the state vacillated between becoming an independent Pacific republic, seceding, or espousing the Union cause. Relieved of his Unitarian minister's duties, he toured California molding public opinion with his genial and "silver tongue."

King reveled in the loveliness of the California countryside and was among the first white men to explore the Yosemite Valley, a tough place to reach in his era. A peak there, Mount Starr King, was named for him.

In addition to his honor in the Congressional Hall of Statuary in Washington, a statue of King is in Golden Gate park.

The clergyman's daughter, Edith, married Horace Davis who was lured to California by the Gold Rush. But after a time he became a store owner, a lumber supervisor on the waterfront and a purser for a steamship company. Later he took over a mill established by a man to whom he had loaned money. Later he established the Golden Gate Flour Mill, which became the Sperry Flour Company.

Davis' library became the Mercantile Library Assn. He spent a couple of years in Congress and was one of the original trustees of Stanford University. In 1888 he was elected president of the University of California, but he resigned in less than two years.