

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **The Statue Standing In the Park**

For the benefit of those folk who are "Night Owlers" and radio fans and lie awake at the time when others are under the covers and enjoying good sleep, we are planning to give you some information about Thomas Starr King, one of the two great men of early California whose images appear in the Congressional Hall of Statuary in Washington, D. C. Father Junipero Serra, founder of California Missions, is the other.

It seems that one night recently when the "Night Owlers" were on the air, a call was received from an interested participant about the identity of King and why he had been chosen to deserve such an honor from the State of California. Immediately others joined in the conversation by telephone, expressing various 'opinions without any actual correct information, but we wager that after the program there were many who did some serious research work either during the night or the following day.

One gentleman even hurriedly consulted the encyclopedia or some other close by reference book, looking up the name of King and came back with an answer naming James King of William and giving that pre-Civil War pioneer of San Francisco as the man whose full length statue stands in the Congressional Hall in Washington. That gentleman was killed long before Thomas Starr King came to be the minister of the First Unitarian Church of San Francisco, by County Commissioner James P. Casey.

Decent and law abiding men were willing to risk life and limb to establish a slave-free state for the Union – but they now had no leader. Historians have said that David Broderick could have led the fight to save California for the Union, but he also was dead, killed by a ball from the pistol of David S. S. Terry, disappointed candidate for the State Supreme Court.

For the sixth time in its first nine years the Unitarian Church was without a minister. The congregation invited the Rev. Starr King of the Hollis Street church in Boston to become the pastor and he accepted the invitation and became the savior of California for the Union, but it cost him his own life. He was just 35 years old when he arrived. It is written that he looked anything but prepossessing - small, pale and delicate.

"But when men heard his voice they were swept away; and Starr King barnstormed up and down the coast in face of corrupt frontier politicians and quick-trigger gamblers, to say nothing of the physical strains of travel by horseback, and he molded public opinion and set it afire."

King was also largely responsible for raising nearly \$1.5 million in the state of a nationwide total of \$4.8 million for the United States Sanitary Commission, forerunner of the American Red Cross. An ardent nature lover, King was among the first white men to explore Yosemite Valley, a tough place to reach in his era. A peak there - Mt. Starr King - was named for him.

His statue stands in Golden Gate Park. Last April 24th, the 100th anniversary of Starr King's arrival in San Francisco, the California Historical Society in conjunction with the First Unitarian Church, placed a State Monument plaque on the Rev. Mr. King's sarcophagus, which is in front of the church at Geary and Franklin streets in San Francisco. He died of diphtheria on March 4th, 1864, less than two months after his new church was formally dedicated, King's first church was located at what is now 133 Geary Street, and there is (or was) a plaque in the lobby of that building stating that that was the site of the First Unitarian Church. The body of Starr King was buried in the lawn in front of the Sunday School and later moved to the church at the corner of Geary and Franklin streets.