

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Panama Canal

A painting, entitled "The American Fleet in the Strait of Magellan during its World Cruise, 1907," painted by Henry Reuter Dahl, is featured on the front page of No. 5 of the 1965 Keepsake Series of the Book Club of California. The entire series of twelve folders gives the history of the building of the Panama Canal.

The text of the folder was written by Rear Admiral Ernest M. Eller, (USN ret). He is director of naval history on the staff of the Chief of Naval Operations and has been the promoter and editor of many important publications in the field of American naval history. The painting spoken of above is in the museum of the U.S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland, and is reproduced through the courtesy of the U.S. Navy.

"The long passage around South America, dramatically pointed up by this painting, drove home the need for speedy completion of the Panama Canal," wrote Admiral Eller. "This cruise made the public conscious of the need for a shorter route across Central America more than anything since the goldrush that sparked California's explosive growth."

It was President Teddy Roosevelt who launched "The Great White Fleet" around the world in 1906. The cruise made clear to nations everywhere that the United States had come of age. Some men even began to understand that this broad land of freedom between the seas stood on the threshold of its destiny of world leadership.

Most important, an increasing number at home began to comprehend that the United States had to become stronger at sea to exercise this leadership, for by the highways of the sea free nations live united — or die divided, because they cannot control them. If we today lose this understanding, we will certainly and miserably fail in the role given us today as world leader of freedom, continued Admiral Eller.

When Vice President Theodore Roosevelt succeeded to the presidency in 1901, the movement for the construction of an Isthmian canal began and prolonged negotiations took place, all of which is past history of the greatest value. When the time came for serious construction to start, President Roosevelt, in 1905, appointed as chief engineer of the commission, one of

the greatest railroad construction engineers that our country has ever produced, John F. Stevens, according to historical facts written by Miles P. Duval Jr., for number six folder.

He was later succeeded by Colonel George W. W. Goethals, of the Engineer Corp of the Army. The illustration in the folder is a mural painting by William Andrew Machay in the Roosevelt Memorial Hall, American Museum of Natural History, New York, and is reproduced by the kind permission of the American Museum of Natural History.

"Joseph Pennell and Panama Canal" is the title of the seventh in the series. Pennell was a great artist. His subjects generally were the "Wonder of Work." The work of man at work and progress. The miracles of modern technology taking place under his eyes inspired him to his most durable productions.

"Work today is the greatest thing in the world, and the artist who best records it will be best remembered; work has always been an inspiration to artists, from the time when we were told to earn our bread by the sweat of our brow," Pennell wrote in the introduction to his picture book, on "The Wonder of Work", (London, 1916).

He was therefore prepared when he discovered that the most gigantic human enterprise of his time was in the making on the Isthmus of Panama, far distant from all the centers of urban and industrial civilization. At last, the New York Century Magazine and the Illustrated London News agreed to print some of his drawings which Pennell would make on the spot. The drawings appeared first in September 1912.

The result of Pennell's trip to Panama was his series of 28 folio lithographs one of which is in the Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Arts at the California Palace of the Legion of Honor in San Francisco.

Another Pennell drawing appears on the cover of the number eight folder entitled "The Cut - Looking Toward Culebra", the most spectacular section of the Canal, the great cut at Culebra through the Continental Divide. John Haskell Kemble is the editor of this edition, the lithograph in the original is in the Library of Congress.