

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

February 13, 1968

Memories of Old Monterey

The nicest thing happened to Casa Soberanes and to me a few days ago when Mrs. Alma Fleisher sent her daughter-in-law, Mrs. Vincent Enea, bringing two gifts, Victorian flower and shell arrangements under large glass globes. These Victorian pieces had been made many years ago by Mrs. Fleisher's mother.

With tiny shells she had picked up on the Monterey beach one was arranged into a bouquet, and the other was fashioned of small pieces of cloth cut from a pattern, made into the blossom desired and then dipped in wax and shaped into the flower.

The patterns for all these flowers accompanied the gifts, as also did instruments and the designs. The value of the two gifts was appraised far beyond what the donor and the receiver had expected. The two treasured antiques will remain in Casa Soberanes, I hope, for many years. The late Mrs. J. M. Finch was the mother of Mrs. Fleisher.

Mrs. Finch's life in Monterey will be featured in this story and explains several events of her lifetime in Old Monterey. For instance, the story of the life here of Daniel O'Connell who was the author of "In the Mantle of Old Tradition," which now appears on the Bertold Monument in the Colton Hall Plaza.

Now we find that the original poem was first written in lead pencil on a panel at the side of the front door of Mrs. J. W. Finch's home at 410 Monroe St. in Monterey. Mr. O'Connell had rented the home for a short time during one of his visits to Monterey and presumably had had the inspiration, as he thrilled at the view over Monterey and the blue bay beyond.

Fearing that the words of the poem as they came to him might escape him, he wrote them down on the first available space he found. Then Charles Rollo Peters came to visit and rewrote the words on the opposite panel side of the door. When Mrs. Finch came back to her home, she did not exactly appreciate having her woodwork thus decorated and she immediately ordered a painter to repaint the doorway and so probably the first draft of the poem, "In the Mantle of Old Tradition," was destroyed.

The late Mrs. J. W. Finch, on whose doorway the poem was written, was the daughter of John O'Neill who took

the part of Mr. Fury in "The Lion Son of 76," Mr. O'Neill also came to Monterey in 1847 with Co. F, Third Regiment. Miss Ellen Louise O'Neill married J. W. Finch and their daughter is Mrs. Alma J. Fleisher, who still owns the family home on Monroe street.

On April 14, 1870, the Monterey Republican, a newspaper of that era, reported "Mr. Finch is erecting a frame house in the westerly portion of town, there being four mechanics employed on the house. It will soon be completed."

This home is still one of the most attractive in old Monterey. It is located on Monroe street on the south side of Franklin, and is quite colonial in appearance, two-storied, painted yellow, white trim and green shutters.

Mr. O'Neill was a member of the first Ayuntamiento, or Common Council, of the City of Monterey in 1850. The first official records were dated January 2, that year. It was also Mr. O'Neill who was appointed by the Ayuntamiento to proceed to San Jose to urge the Legislature of the State of California to return the capital to Monterey, to offer Colton Hall as a meeting places free of charge for a term of five years, and also to urge the speedy passage of an act to incorporate the City of Monterey.