

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

February 14, 1968

Gifted Daniel O'Connell

In the Mantle of Old Tradition,

In the rime of a vanquished day,

The shrouded and silent city

Sits by her crescent bay.

The ruined fort on the hilltop,

Where never a bunting streams,

Looks down, a cannon-less fortress

On the solemn city of dreams.

The above is the first two verses of the poem that appears on the monument in the center of the walk up to Colton Hall from Pacific street. It was written about Monterey by Daniel O'Connell many years ago when Monterey had a much more leisure atmosphere than it has today.

Daniel O'Connell was born in Ireland. He came from a distinguished family, his father being a noted lawyer, and his granduncle the famous patriot and statesman, Daniel O'Connell, known to history as the "Irish liberator."

He came to San Francisco in 1870, took up journalism and by his talent and versatile pen, soon attracted favorable comment. He was known as a journalist, dramatist, novelist, and gifted poet, one of the many brilliant men and women of that era who in prose and verse pictured the glamor of the Golden State.

O'Connell loved the state and in particular Monterey, where the scenes of several of his poems were laid.

In 1874 Daniel O'Connell married a Monterey girl, Miss Anita Asheley, and after that many of his vacations were spent in and about the old capital.

He was a man of fine presence, gentle, sunny, lovable nature, and a melodious voice, a fund of keen Irish humor and as one writer describes him, "he had many friends and no enemies."

During his lifetime, a volume of his poems was published under the title of "Lyrics." After his death in 1899 another book of his poems collected by his daughter and edited by Ina Coolbrith, the poet laureate of California, was published in 1900 by Robinsons, with title, "Songs from Bohemia."

O'Connell, with his interesting family, made his home in Sausalito. In 1899 while on a visit to Monterey, he contracted a severe cold from which he never recovered, and he passed away on February 23, 1899.

Quoting from the Annuals of the San Francisco Bohemian Club, a tribute written by Clay M. Greene is of interest: "Dan had been one of the originators and organizers of the club, gave it its name, and during all the years of his membership had been perhaps the most gifted of all its contributors to entertainment."

During the first half of the scholastic year of 1868 there appeared at Santa Clara College a young man of athletic build and clad in the uniform of a midshipman in the British Navy, according to the recordings in the Bohemian Club history. He had recently resigned from the British Navy to become a teacher at the Jesuit University. His stay there was brief, however, for he was sent to fill a minor professorship in Greek at St. Ignatius College in San Francisco, and soon afterward became a reporter on a paper in that city.

Daniel O'Connell wrote a libretto of the opera "Bluff King Hal," for which Humphrey J. Stewart composed the music, and which, after a production by the Bohemian club with an amateur cast, enjoyed a run at the Old Tivoli theater. He was considered a notoriously "good mixer."

After his death, his friends caused his memory to be commemorated by such monuments as he himself might have chosen. On one of the terraced drives high above the bay in Sausalito his friends erected an enduring stone resting place that bears his name; afterwards, a tree was dedicated to him in Bohemian Grove, and later under the inspiration of artist Charles Rollo Peters, two such dedications were held in and near Monterey.

Close upon the passing of Daniel O'Connell, Peters, "the master painter of the night" as he was appropriately called because, of his glorious nocturnes, sent out invitations to several Bohemians and other friends to assemble at his residence for the purpose of dedicating a tree to the memory of the gone, but not forgotten Bohemian. A large oak was so dedicated with appropriate ceremonies and that oak is still standing in the property of Peters Gate which later was owned by Mrs. Jane Todd.

A few days after this event an invitation was received by the same group and others to attend a dedication of a

redwood tree, followed by a barbecue by the Messrs. Dick Ross and Bradley Sargent, which was solemnized in a canyon on their San Francisquita Rancho, almost at the limit of the growth of Sequoias Semper virens in California.

D. W. Delmas, one of the most prominent lawyers of that day, gave the ovation in dedicating the tree; there were brief speeches by Clay M. Greene, who was the brother of Harry Greene of Monterey; and Charles Rollo Peters, father of Rollo Peters who made his home here until his death. Among others attending were Charles Dickman, Francis McComas, both noted artists; Dr. Shields, George Sterling, Willis Polk, noted architect; Frank Powers of Carmel and Charles Warren Stoddard.

Over the mantel in the home in which Mrs. Spencer Hoyt now lives and which was the studio home of Charles Rollo Peters, Daniel O'Connell once wrote with a red-hot fire poker the following: "Don't worry," the philosophy of Daniel O'Connell. He was the father of Mrs. Geraldine Bruckman of Pacific Grove and the late Mrs. Mabel Moran of Monterey.