

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **The Navy School Gardens**

It is interesting to look upon the park which surrounds the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School, and which was originally planted by the Del Monte Hotel for the pleasure and edification of its guests. The specimen trees, shrubs and flowers were mostly alien, assimilated by our native vegetation, and increasing the natural beauty and richness of the country. Symbolic they are, for upward of 50 countries have sent their quota.

"There are stories in trees," wrote Alexander Eddie in his booklet, "Trees and Plants in the Grounds of Hotel Del Monte." When Kipling spoke of "palm and pine" his evident purpose was to encompass climactic extremes. "At the garden, the seeds of a pine had fallen into the axils of a palm's leaves, had sprouted and two-foot pine trees were growing upon the trunk of a palm. Extremes meet here," wrote Eddie.

The monkey-puzzle tree is to be seen in its four species, viz: *araucaria Imbricata*, *a. Bidwillia*, *A. Braziliiana* and *A. Excelsa*. The two former are toward the Roman Plunge and the two latter are on the former site of the cactus garden.

The Acacia family, natives of Australia, are to be found in 14 species in the garden. Known as wattle in Australia, and mimosa in the French flower markets, they are an ornamental and useful tribe.

The Santa Lucia fir is the most beautiful conifer known.

The trees in the park were, at the time Mr. Eddie wrote his booklet, very young, but their progenitors of the Santa Lucia mountains are glorious to behold.

Very rare, their cathedral-like spires rise to 75 or 100 feet, and the branches sweep downward with their dark green needles whose silver glistens in the sunshine like tinsel.

"The oldest living thing in the world is a *taxodium*," writes Mr. Eddie, "estimated at 6,000 years of age. The *taxodia* are close relatives of the sequoia. Specimens of this tree are to be seen near the lake."

The native Monterey cypress (*Cupressus macrocarpa*) take their place in the park toward the ocean but are to be seen in all their glory on the shore within the Seventeen Mile Drive. There adversity has brought out characters of rare beauty. Similarly, the Gowans cypress

(*Cupressus Goveniana*) must be seen in its native stand, also within the Seventeen-Mile Drive, to learn its Japanese character. Adult trees four feet high to 20 feet high are fully grown, bravely producing cones on branches of golden green. In the park, Gowan's is just another cypress tree. "Like some people they lose their character in prosperity," is the thought of the late Alexander Eddie.

There is another native tree in the Naval School park — the Monterey pine (*Pinus Radiata*), prolific in reproduction perhaps because its life span is only about 80 to 130 years. It passes through a compact, lustrous green and shapely youth, to gangling adolescence, then finally to broadly rounded heads of maturity, relieving the skyline in a most pleasant fashion.

The noblest tree in all the world is the sequoia, and both species are to be found in the park: the redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*) and the California Big Tree (*Sequoia gigantea*). The name came from an Indian chief of the Cherokee tribe, "yclept Sequoia," famed as the inventor of the tribe's alphabet. Seven million years ago the sequoia thrived on various continents and now it is driven to its last stand upon a narrow band on the Pacific slope. Like nature's animal giants, the dinosaur and the plesiosaur, now extinct, the tree giants seem to be doomed, through freeways and woodcutters.