

THE LIFE AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF
MYLES P. O'CONNOR

An Essay
Presented to
the California Pioneers
of Santa Clara

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface *****	p. 1
Myles O'Conner (Portrait) *****	p. 2
Amanda O'Connor (Portrait) *****	p. 3
The Early Years *****	p. 4
Life in Grass Valley *****	p. 5
Politics *****	p. 7
Interests *****	p. 8
O'Connor Mansion (Illustration) *****	p. 9
Life in San Jose *****	p. 10
M.P. the Benefactor *****	p. 11
O'Connor Sanitarium *****	p. 12
O'Connor Sanitarium (Illustration) *****	p. 13
A Pioneer's Demise *****	p. 14
Endnotes *****	p. 15
Bibliography *****	p. 16

PREFACE

Myles P. O'Connor was an Irish immigrant who lived the American dream; still he did not let such opulence go to his head and contributed generously to San Jose. When one talks about Myles O'Connor's contributions the one that most readily comes to mind is O'Connor Hospital. However, this is but one in the vast collection of contributions, which even includes his own home on Second and Reed Streets. His generosity will have long surpassed his life and will continue to do so as long as his many contributions throughout the Santa Clara Valley still remain standing.

Myles P. O'Connor's careers consisted of lawyer, miner, judge, politician, and art collector, to name a few. Amazingly, he was successful and brilliant in all of his professions, a feat not easily accomplished by many. By being so versatile, he can easily be called a Renaissance Man.



Myles O'Connor was born in Ireland in 1823 and came to the United States at age 15.



Mrs. Amanda O'Connor, a widow at the time of her marriage to Myles, urged him to

THE EARLY YEARS

Myles Poore O'Connor was born in Abbeyleix, County Leix, Ireland, a small town approximately fifty miles west of Dublin, on May 8, 1823. Myles O'Connor had three brothers, Matthew, Jerome, and James. During his life he was never one to stay in the same place for a long time. In fact, only two years after he was born, he and his family moved to England. Here they lived in a number of industrial cities, including Manchester and Bolton.

In 1838, when Myles O'Connor was just fourteen his family moved once again, this time to America. They arrived in New York where the family lived for three years. Next, O'Connor and his family moved to St. Louis, where he became interested in Law.

Myles O'Connor studied law in St. Louis in 1846 upon the encouragement of his older brother Matthew. Myles's brother Matthew also financed his education at the University of St. Louis. During his years of study at the University of St. Louis, Myles O'Connor became very interested in naturalization. As a result, Myles P. O'Connor became a citizen of the United States of America on July 27, 1844. Two years later, in 1846, he graduated from the University of St. Louis with honors. Myles P. O'Connor was accepted to the Bar at age twenty-three.

LIFE IN GRASS VALLEY

When gold was struck in 1848, many people flocked to California, including Myles O'Connor. In 1849, believing the gold rush would open up new legal opportunities in the west, Myles P. O'Connor drove a mule team across the Plains.

However, upon arrival to Sacramento he found that there was little need for legal business; thus, he turned toward mining. Unfortunately, his mining success in Sacramento was not much of an improvement over his legal success there. It was only when gold-quartz was accidentally discovered that he moved to Grass Valley, California. Here, Myles O'Connor made a home, and soon after word got out about his legal background. He began to practice law again but for only part time.

Grass Valley was also the site where Myles P. O'Connor met his future wife Amanda Butler Young. Amanda had been widowed at a young age, and Myles O'Connor was drawn to Amanda Young for her graciousness, beauty and independence. Amanda Butler eloped with her previous husband when she was only sixteen, therefore driving a wedge between her and her parents. She still remained close to her brother John Butler, however, so when she lost her husband and two-year-old son to lightning in Ohio, she moved to Grass Valley to be closer to her brother. On December 7 1859, ten years after he had began his trek, he married Amanda Butler Young, thus beginning a forty-seven year union.

In 1867, Myles O'Connor along with Edward Coleman and John

Coleman became partners in the Idaho Mine, later called the Idaho-Maryland Mine, in Nevada County. This decision to invest in the Idaho Mine proved to be very profitable, eventually. However, in the first two years, the business was very slow. In 1865, the partners reorganized operations, but results were not much. Then in May of 1866, the partners closed the mine down for sixteen months. Finally, in 1867, the mine became incorporated and that is when the business boomed. Consequently, O'Connor found himself with quite a sum of money in only a few short years. The profits made from his years in mining are responsible for much of his wealth. In fact, from 1868-1877, receipts from the Idaho Mine came to \$4,589,255.¹

POLITICS

In 1859 with a profitable sum of money under his belt, Myles O'Connor at the age of thirty-six decided to try his hand in politics. Myles O'Connor ran for a seat in the California State Assembly representing Grass Valley. Although, he was the only Democrat in a Republican County he won what was considered an easy win. His term last one year between 1859-1860 and during this term, Myles O'Connor introduced a bill which later became a law, as of 1860, establishing the boundaries of San Francisco and San Francisco county.

Myles P. O'Connor then began a seventeen year career as a public servant in Sacramento. Starting with his appointment to the Justice of the Peace in 1860, and voters re-elected him to this position nine more times. Judge Myles O'Connor then gave up his law practice in 1869 to run for the twenty-first session of Senate, 1874-1875. During his term in the Senate, Judge Myles P. O'Connor, introduced eleven bills and served on thirteen committees

INTERESTS

While in the Senate Judge and Amanda O'Connor would periodically take trips to Europe. Here Amanda would frequent stores of many European cities. The two would often pick up artifacts to contribute to their art collection while in Europe. Upon one visit which was quoted as one of Myles O'Connor's favorite European trips, Judge Myles O'Connor went back to Ireland to retrace his steps as a child. Here he visited Abbeyleigh, the town he was born in.

Besides taking trips to Europe, Myles and his wife, Amanda, enjoyed art collecting as a past time. Their art collection included oil paintings, water colors, engravings, etchings, sculptures in Carrara marble, mosaics, and bronze pieces.² Soon they found their art collection had become too big to keep so Myles and Amanda made a healthy donation to the city of San Jose consisting of 425 pieces of art and an estimated value of over \$250,000.³ Unfortunately for the city, they did not have a sufficient site to house the art and had to decline the offer from the O'Connors. The O'Connors, who had held a friendship with Sister Julia McGroarty, the provincial superior of all the Sisters of Notre Dame, donated the collection to her upon hearing she was opening up a division in Washington D.C. which resulted in the O'Connor Art Gallery at Trinity College in Washington D.C.

O'Connor Mansion



Located at Second and Reed Streets

LIFE IN SAN JOSE

One might think Amanda is the one to thank ultimately for all the contributions made. Upon visiting Mrs. Barney Murphey in San Jose for three weeks, Amanda O'Connor fell in love with this city. It was her suggestion that she and Myles move here. On November 1, 1879, the O'Connors arrived in San Jose with about two million dollars in their name. After living in San Jose in the Auzerais House on Santa Clara Street for only a few months, the O'Connor's were scared off by an unusually wet winter, hence, making the two move to San Francisco, Los Angeles, and then eventually, Baltimore. Myles and Amanda O'Connor lived in Baltimore from 1880-1884. Here, Amanda O'Connor converted to Catholicism as well. Finally, in the summer of 1884, Judge Myles P. O'Connor and Amanda O'Connor moved back to San Jose.

The O'Connors later took up residence in a luxurious Victorian style home built in 1884. This house located on Second and Reed Streets, cost \$40,000 when most homes sold for \$2,000-\$3,000.⁴ Their house was the base for philanthropic works and European trips, which soon became a philanthropic work of its own. In 1893, the O'Connors donated the house to the Sisters of Notre Dame to use as an orphanage. This Victorian home still stands hidden behind a facade of stucco walls which makes up Notre Dame High School.

M.P. THE BENEFACTOR AND HIS CONTRIBUTIONS

It is difficult to travel anywhere in the Santa Clara Valley and be out of sight of some edifice that does not owe its existence or development to O'Connor .
..

M.P. O'Connor contributed greatly to the Santa Clara Valley. Among the beneficiaries are the Catholic University of America, to whom Myles O'Connor endowed the Chair on Cannon Law, as well as a handful of cities and churches.

Among the cities, Santa Clara received the O'Connor Hall at the University of Santa Clara, Solidarity Hall, and the memorial gate at Santa Clara Mission Cemetery. He also contributed to the Los Gatos Novitiate and St. Patrick's Seminary in Menlo Park, which was later destroyed in the 1906 earthquake.

As for churches, the construction and site for the Convent of the Holy Family Church were two of O'Connor's contributions. In addition, he endowed St. Mary's Church and many artifacts for St. Joseph's Church.

O'CONNOR SANITARIUM

The most renowned contribution of M.P. O'Connor is by far the O'Connor Hospital. In 1887, Myles O'Connor first envisioned the idea of a home for the aged and sick. The Sanitarium, as it was called rather than a hospital due to bad connotations related to that particular word, was erected in 1889 on the South San Carlos Street between Race Street and Meridian Avenue.

The architect of the Sanitarium was Theodore Lenzen who designed it to be made of brick with sandstone fencing. Theodore Lenzen was a Prussian-born architect whose works include drawing up the plans for St. Ignatius College, now the University of San Francisco, City Hall, Market Street Plaza, the Vendome Hotel, Frederick's Brewery on The Alameda, and lastly was recommended for the construction of Santa Clara University. For Theodore Lenzen, 1889 was a busy year because in that year alone, City Hall, the Vendome Hotel, and O'Connor Sanitarium opened.

The expense was estimated at \$308,000.⁶ The site for the Sanitarium was measured at approximately 8.395 acres.⁷ After donating their house on Second and Reed Streets, the O'Connors moved to a house adjacent to the hospital in order to be closer to the Sanitarium.

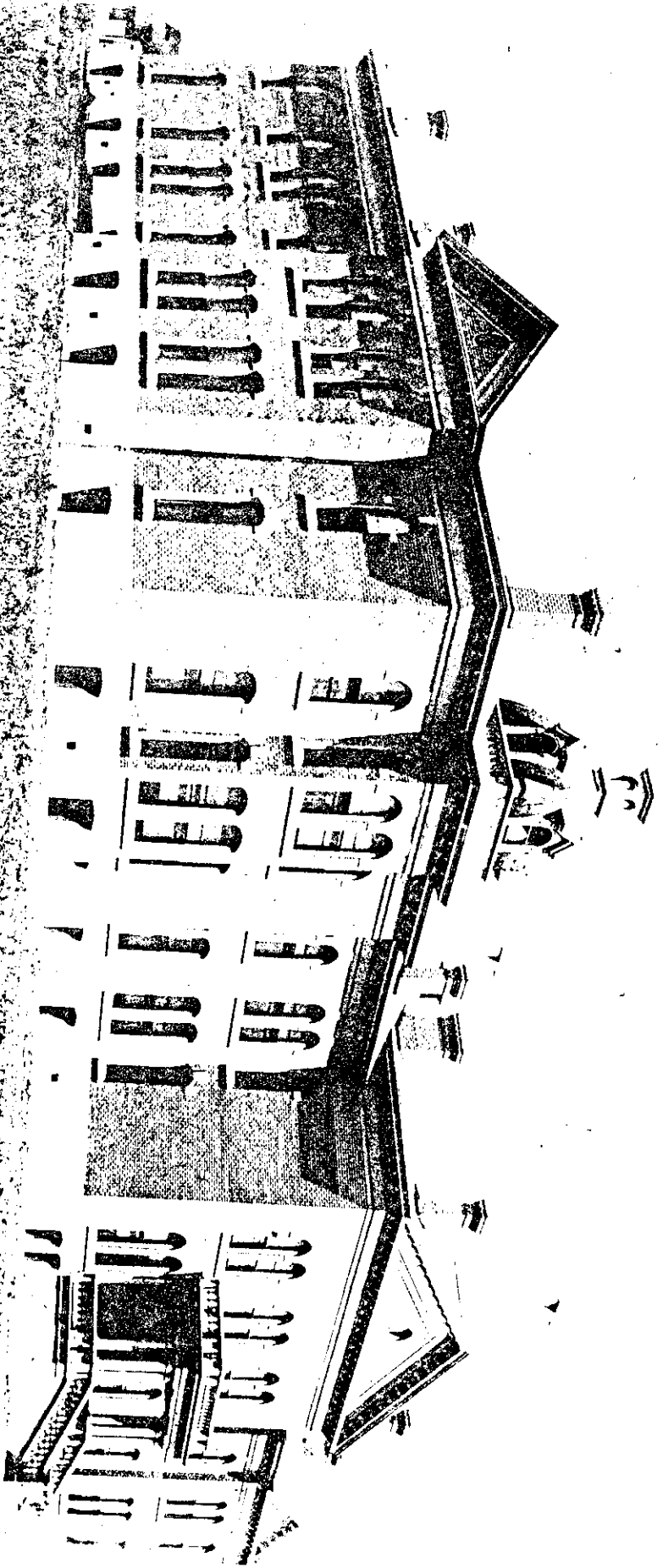
On March 19, 1889, the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul were put in charge of running the Sanitarium. Its original purpose was to treat the aged and the sick. In the first thirty years, O'Connor Sanitarium treated over 7000 patients⁸ and in 1920 alone, treated 2,577 patients.⁹

The O'Connor Sanitarium superior, Sister Raphael Jones, from 1894-1898 set up the O'Connor School of Nursing in February of 1898. This was one of the first institutions of its kind in Northern California and something that was nonexistent in Southern California. It was also the first Catholic Nursing School in California. In 1910, twenty-six students enrolled in the O'Connor School of Nursing including two men, Louis and Aloysius McQuade.¹⁰ In 1910, the nursing school was also renamed the O'Connor Sanitarium Training School.

When the O'Connor Sanitarium Training School first opened all that was required was a grammar school education and the course was not very long. By 1906, however, the course was increased to three years. Later, in 1922, the course was then cut back down to only twenty-eight months. Finally in 1942, the school added eight months of senior training to the course. By October 14, 1908, the O'Connor Sanitarium Training School had four purposes in regards to their students: 1) providing financial help for graduates 2) advancing standard of profession 3) improving the O'Connor program; and finally, 4) promoting good fellowship.¹¹

In 1955 the Sanitarium was torn down to make room for the Sears Roebuck department store; however, this two was torn down during the 1980's. As for the Sanitarium, it was relocated to its current location on Forest Ave. and is now known as O'Connor Hospital.

O'CONNOR SANITARIUM



A PIONEER'S DEMISE

Judge Myles Poore O'Connor was blind for the last seven years of his life. In 1909, at the age of eighty-six, Judge O'Connor died in the very hospital he had built thus ending his childless yet happy marriage of forty-seven years with his wife Amanda. She died seventeen years later on April 11, 1926, at the age of ninety. Myles P. O'Connor was a member of the Society of California Pioneers.

Notes

1. Daniel D. Hruby, Mines to Medicine (San Jose, California: O'Connor Hospital, 1965), p. 30.
2. Frances Fox, "O'Connor: The Man Behind the Hospital," San Jose Mercury News (San Jose: May 30, 1976).
3. Ibid.
4. Joanne Grant, "O'Connor's Legacy," San Jose Mercury News (San Jose: December 4, 1990).
5. Fox, Op. Cit.
6. Donald O. DeMers, Jr. and Ann M. Whitesell, Santa Clara Valley: Images of the Past, (San Jose: San Jose Historical Museum, 1985), p. 35.
7. Hruby, Op. Cit., p. 65
8. Eugene T. Sawyer, History of Santa Clara County, California (San Francisco: Harpor and Row, 1922), p. 255.
9. Thomas F. Prendergast, Forgotten Pioneers: Irish Leaders in Early California (San Francisco: Trade Press Room, 1942), p. 259.
10. Hruby, Op. Cit., p. 115
11. Ibid.

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