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THE ROBERT STEVENS AND MICHAEL O'CONNELL FAMILIES

By
Marilyn Biagini

Editor's Note: We have here the story, as the author tells us, of two pioneer San Andreas families who contributed in their own ways to the life of their town.

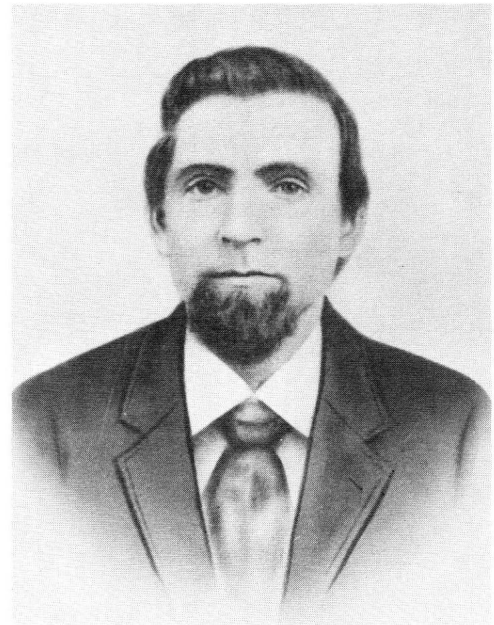


These families were typical of so many pioneers in each Calaveras community, and were a vital part of that community in helping to shape our county's heritage.

We also learn in this article the story of the handsome Queen Anne house on lower St. Charles Street (Highway 49) that stood empty and forlorn for some thirty-five years after Mrs. "Sidy" Snyder moved away. The Snyder house was recently renovated for a bed-and-breakfast establishment, and is now called the "Robin's Nest."

Mrs. Biagini, the author, who lives in San Francisco, says she would appreciate hearing from any readers who knew members of the O'Connell family and who might provide her with anecdotes about them for her family scrapbook.

Robert Stevens, my great-great-grandfather, was born in 1823 in County Cavan, Ireland. He married Mary Jane Flum, who was some five years younger, while still living in Ireland. We don't know when or how the Stevens immigrated to the United States, but we find them living in San Francisco when their daughter, Mary Jane, was born in 1854. Robert was a



Michael O'Connell
1834 - 1897

(Left)
Mary Jane "Jennie" Stevens
1854 - 1915

stonemason by trade, and during the time he was in the San Francisco area he helped build San Quentin Prison. Sometime before 1860 the family moved to San Andreas. Life was not easy for Robert and his wife. They had a total of thirteen children, but my great-grandmother, Mary Jane (called "Jennie" by her family and friends), was the only one to live past early childhood. The Stevens house on St. Charles Street is still standing. It is presently occupied by the Stark Realty. Jennie attended school in San Andreas until she was sixteen years of age, at which time she married Michael O'Connell.

Robert Stevens worked as a ranch overseer part of the time that he lived in San Andreas. During his later years, he was a night watchman. He died very suddenly while on the job, in 1877. His wife, Mary Jane, lived in their home in San Andreas until her death in 1908. Her great-granddaughter, Rowena Snyder Tufts, told me that she can remember Mary Jane sitting in a rocking chair on the front porch of her home, telling stories to the children of the family. She was a devout Catholic and never missed Sunday Mass at St. Andrews Church as long as her health allowed.

Mary Jane and Robert Stevens are buried in the Catholic cemetery at San Andreas.

Michael O'Connell, who married Jennie Stevens and who was my great-grandfather, was born in County Cork, Ireland, in 1834. He immigrated to the United States when he was only nineteen years old. He worked for a while as a mate on a schooner sailing between New York and Norfolk. During this time, he became acquainted with Ira H. Reed (who would later become a Calaveras County judge), and the two of them decided to head for the "golden opportunities" awaiting them in California. They boarded the steamship "John L. Stephens" in New York, and traveling by way of the Isthmus of Panama, arrived in San Francisco in July, 1855. They immediately headed for the gold country and staked a claim at Fourth Crossing. There they built a cabin and began placer mining. In 1862 Michael was elected Road Overseer and this ended his partnership with Ira Reed in the mining business. After that, "Mike," as he was generally known, worked as a clerk at Arnold Friedberger's general store on Main Street in San Andreas. He also ran unsuccessfully at one time on the Democratic



Jennie O'Connell with her five youngest children in front of their house (the former Stevens home) on St. Charles Street about 1895. Standing (l to r): Norma Cassinelli (a neighbor), Jennie, and Ella. In middle row, Frances and Winnie, and Pete and Dugan in front.



Jennie O'Connell in front of her daughter Sidy's house in 1911.

ticket for County Clerk against J.A. "Jube" Foster.

Jennie Stevens, in the meantime, had blossomed into a young woman and captured Mike O'Connell's heart. His bachelor days ended in 1870 when he married Jennie. Their ten children were all born and raised in San Andreas except for Michael Andrew, who was born at Sheep Ranch:

- Mary Jane "Mayme" (1871-1949)
- John Edward "Jack" (1874-1913)
- Elizabeth Agnes "Sid" or "Sidy" (Snyder) (1876-1955)
- William Robert "Will" (1878-1949)
- Michael Andrew (1879-1957)
- Ellen Annette "Ella" (Stewart) (1883-1964)
- Frances Irene (Lahey) (1887-1952)
(my grandmother)
- Winefred Louise "Winnie" or "Mrs. B." (Bornhauser) (1889-1956)
- Daniel Augustine Parnell "Doc" or "Dugan" (1890-1936)
- Bernard Washington Gladstone "Pete" (1892-1958)

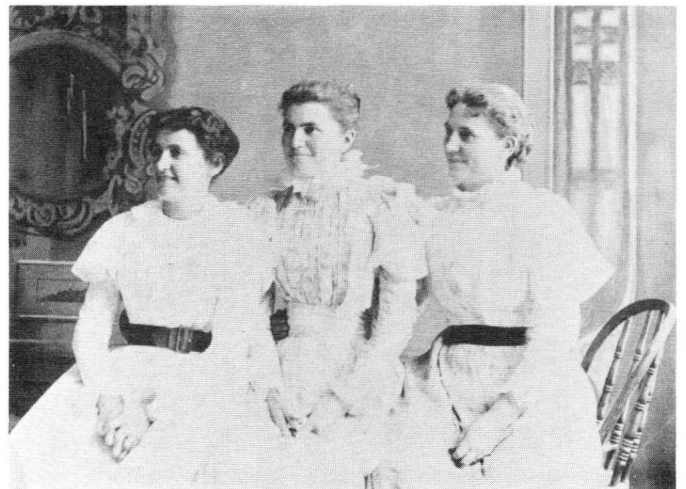
Michael O'Connell went into partnership in a general store with Arnold Friedberger in Sheep Ranch. At

a later time he had store of his own, for a short while, in San Andreas. In his later years he engaged in mining at the "Boomerang," a placer mine which he owned next to the Chris Anderson (Squarehead) mine several miles south of town in Yaki Gulch. The O'Connells lived in the Stevens house on St. Charles Street. For the last four years of his life, Mike was in poor health and was unable to work his mine. He died in San Andreas in 1897.

After Michael's death, Jennie stayed in San Andreas for awhile, but then she and her six youngest children moved to Sutter Creek. By 1906 the family had moved to San Francisco, except for Ella, who was married and living in Los Angeles by that time. Whenever it was possible, Jennie visited San Andreas, and she always stayed in the front bedroom of her daughter Sidy Snyder's house. That was the room reserved for the "guest of honor." Jennie lived in the South of Market district of San Francisco, in a building of "Romeo-style" flats, on McCoppin Street, until her death on March 16, 1915. She was buried beside her husband in the Catholic cemetery in San Andreas.

Michael and Jennie O'Connell's four eldest children, Mayme, Jack, Sid and Will, remained in San Andreas after their mother moved to Sutter Creek.

Mayme O'Connell was a very "classy" lady with a marvelous wit, who was well-known and loved throughout the county. She began working as the operator at the San Andreas telephone exchange in 1904, and was the agency manager for many years before she retired in 1938. She was also society editor for the *Calaveras Prospect & Citizen* for over forty years.



Mayme O'Connell (center) with two friends.



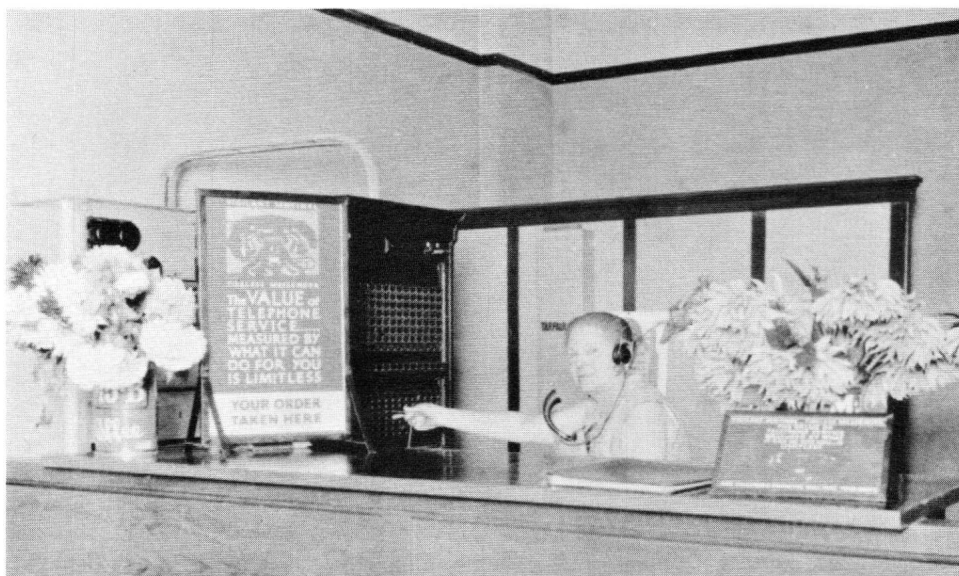
Jack O'Connell (left) taking out a stage for a local run.

Mayme's hobby was furniture-making. Harry McElhaney, a blind undertaker, had a workshop behind the Gardella Mortuary. He taught the art of making furniture to many of the women in town. Mayme made several cabinets and tables, and her sister Sid's garden was decorated with pieces of her handiwork. Mayme also liked to take trips in her automobile. She enjoyed her retirement years until she suffered a stroke about a year before her death on March 6, 1949.

During his earlier years, Jack O'Connell drove a

stage in Sutter Creek, and also one from San Andreas to Valley Springs. He married Myrtle Trask of Amador City, and they had three children — Bernice (1897), Norine (1899), and John "Jackie" (1908). In 1901, Jack and his brother Will went into partnership in O'Connell Brothers Stables, taking over the former Washburn Livery Stable on Main Street across the road from the Metropolitan Hotel. Jack was known as an honest and personable businessman. His health began to fail in late 1912, and he went to San Francisco for medical treatment. This was not successful and he died at thirty-nine years of age on March 30th, 1913. Shortly thereafter his widow and children moved to South San Francisco. Bernice and Norine had attended school in San Andreas, but Jackie was only six years old when they moved.

Elizabeth "Sidy" O'Connell married John Snyder, the District Attorney of Calaveras County, on December 11th, 1895. The ceremony was performed in her parents' home; her sister Mayme was the bridesmaid, and the groom's brother, Charles P. Snyder, was the best man. They honeymooned in San Francisco and returned to their newly-constructed home on St. Charles Street. Their daughter Rowena was born in 1897 in the front bedroom of their home. All was going well for them until the typhoid epidemic of 1899, which claimed the life of John Snyder. After his death, Sidy's sister Mayme moved in with her and Rowena. Rowena graduated from Calaveras High School in 1915, and then went to Heald Business College in San Francisco. After that she worked as a stenographer and bookkeeper. She married Warren Tufts, and they



Mayme O'Connell at the switchboard in 1925. She continued as manager and operator for another thirteen years.

have been long-time residents of Bremerton, Washington.

Sidy's house was always a gathering place for all the relatives from San Francisco when they visited San Andreas. Two generations of the family have had fond childhood memories of the wonderful times spent at "Aunt Sidy's house." The swing, the well, the outhouse, sleeping in the cellar with the dirt floor (because it was the coolest place in the house during the summer), and just running around in the wide-open spaces were all memorable experiences for "city" children.

Sid and Mayme lived in the house on St. Charles Street until Mayme's death in 1949. By that time, Sid was going blind and could no longer manage living in the house by herself, so she went to live with her youngest sister, Winnie Bornhauser, in San Francisco. She liked that arrangement because they would bring her up to visit her beloved San Andreas whenever possible. After Winnie had a stroke, Sid went up to Bremerton, Washington, to live with Rowena and her family. She died there on May 18, 1955, and was brought back down to San Andreas to be buried beside her husband, John Snyder, in the Masonic Cemetery.

During his early years, "Will" (or "Bill") O'Connell was in the livery stable business with his brother Jack. He had a wonderful "Irish wit" which made him popular throughout the county. In 1914, he married



A picnic at Sidy's about 1933. Frances and Arthur Lahey, and Winnie and Fred Bornhauser.

Columbina "Bina" Costa, whose family were pioneers in Calaveritas. The ceremony was performed at St. Joseph's Church in San Francisco, and Will's mother (Jennie O'Connell) hosted a wedding supper at her home, just a few blocks from the church. After their honeymoon in the Bay area, Bill and Bina returned to live in the O'Connell home on St. Charles Street in San Andreas. They both had a wide circle of friends

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San Andreas fashions — 1912. Sidy Snyder and her daughter Rowena (sitting left), and Mayme O'Connell (standing at right), with their friends, the Luddys.

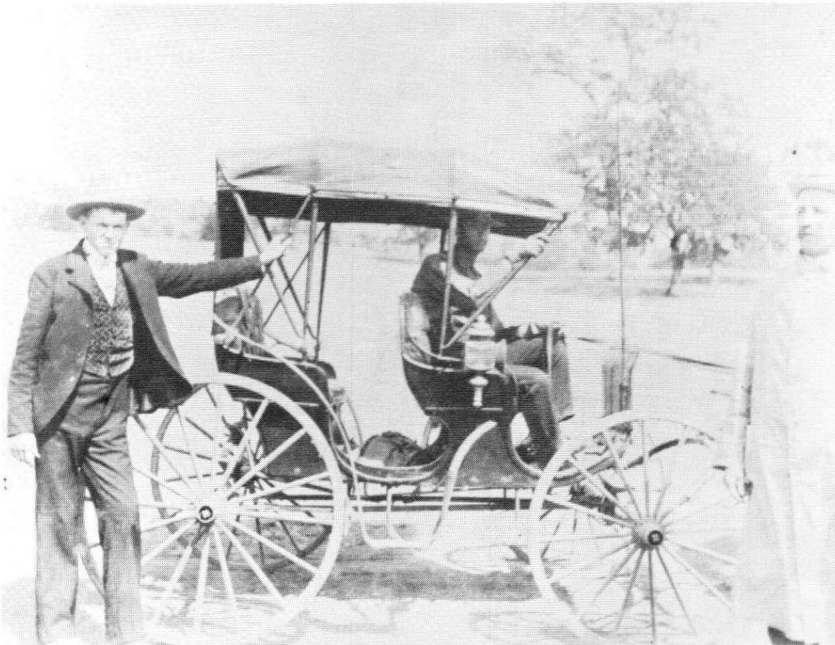




Will O'Connell and Columбина Costa on their wedding day — 1914.



Michael O'Connell and his wife Jessie Hammack (from Amador City). Mike was an engineer. They lived in San Francisco and later in Oakland.



Will rents out one of his best carriages to a customer.



Will O'Connell masquerading as a Chinaman at the 1938 Jumping Frog Jubilee.



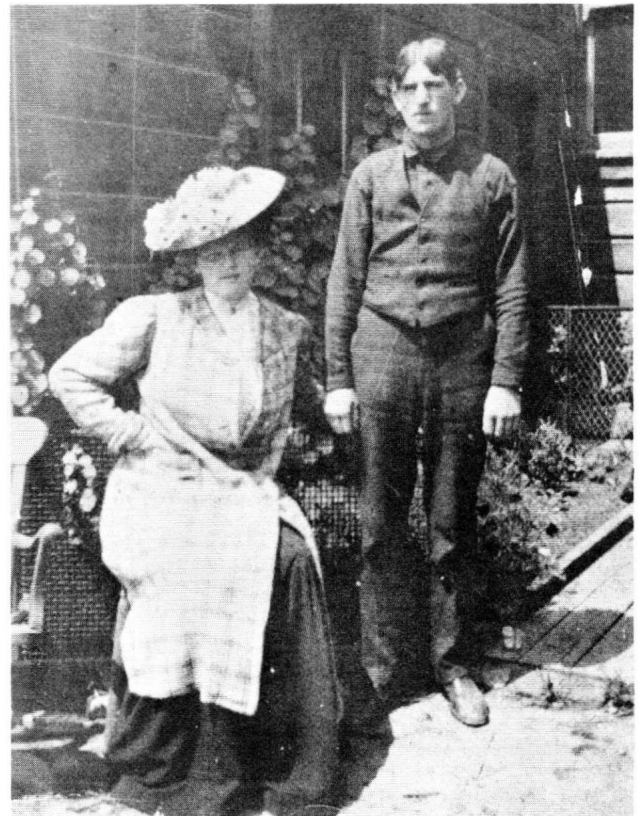
Bernard "Pete" O'Connell in 1912. He married Catherine Farrell and they resided in San Francisco.



Daniel "Doc" O'Connell (left) with a friend. He married Anastasia McGillaway and they lived in San Francisco.



Ella with her husband, Robert Stewart, and daughter Maxine. They made their home in Stockton.



Frances and her husband, Arthur Lahey. They resided in San Francisco.

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The Calaveras County Historical Society, a non-profit corporation, meets on the fourth Thursday of each month at the Grange Hall in San Andreas — except for dinner meetings which are held each quarter at different places in the county.

The Society's office is open on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 8:30 to 5:00. The telephone number is (209) 754-1058. Visitors are welcome.

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throughout the county, who gave a grand party to honor the bride and groom at the Metropolitan Hotel.

Bill and Bina lived near Bellota for a while when he was foreman at the McGurk ranch. He was later employed at the cement plant near San Andreas. Bill was Justice of the Peace in San Andreas for more than twenty years. Bina had furniture-making lessons from Harry McElhaney. Her niece, Louise Greenlaw, still has one of the tables and a rocking chair that Bina made, as well as a cabinet which is in the Costa Store in Calaveritas. The O'Connells lived in the old family home until Bill's death in 1949. Bina lived until 1961.

Mike and Jennie O'Connell's six youngest children did not live their adult lives in Calaveras County, although they all felt strong ties to the place of their birth and childhood, and loved to visit San Andreas.



Winnie O'Connell is at the far right. Mayme in back at left, with Rowena Snyder. Mary Carroll, a friend, in front. Winnie married Fred Bornhauser and they became San Francisco residents.

Their pictures are included here with those of other members of the family.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would also like to gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Lorraine Kennedy at the Calaveras County Museum & Archives; also special thanks to my cousin, Rowena Snyder Tufts, and my aunt, Ilene Hazlehurst, who were my sources for photographs and memories, and to Louise Greenlaw for sharing her Aunt Bina's photographs and mementos with me.

IN MEMORIAM

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