

the reactor

By Paul Azevedo



It is Jan. 4, 1905. An elderly widow, Honora Sharp, lies ill in her room in the Savoy Hotel on Octavia street in San Francisco, not far from the present location of Saint Mary's Cathedral.

She thinks of her late husband, George. He had made a great deal of money in San Francisco real estate, and left her comfortably well off.

SHE HAS no children, nor brothers, sisters, nieces or nephews. There are some first cousins in Quebec but no relatives in California.

Her lawyer is R. H. Lloyd. He is there to make out her will. He has brought legal foolscap, an old-fashioned pen, an inkwell.

He begins to write in a flowery old-fashioned style. She tells him that she wants to leave her money for a memorial to her late husband.

It was his money, and she wants to do something with it to honor his memory.

SHE HAD enjoyed Golden Gate Park so much. She thought of the pleasure it had given her over the years. And her husband had made money on land values when Golden Gate Park had opened.

She told her lawyer of her dream. Her fortune would build a memorial gate at the entrance to the park. It would be George's memorial.

But, her lawyer explained, the laws of inheritance would not permit her to do this. She could not legally leave so large a part of her fortune to a charity, such as the memorial gate.

She had already made generous donations in the will to the Salvation Army and the King's Daughter's home for incurables. Later, a codicil would add the SPCA.

WHILE TWO persons, a Mrs. Margaret Tojetti and a Charles Gildea, were to receive \$25,000 and \$5,000 respectively, charitable gifts could account for only one-third of the will.

She and her lawyer worked out a way to get around the law. The Sharps had had friends at the top of San Francisco society. Two such friends, Adolph Spreckels and Lloyd himself, were park commissioners.

Both were wealthy, and each knew what she wanted done. So it was agreed. Spreckels and Lloyd were to be left \$200,000, with no strings attached.

Samuel Murphy, president of the First National Bank of San Francisco, was to be her executor.

HE HAD given her financial advice over the years. She trusted all three men completely.

The will was written so that her dream was spelled out, even explaining why she did not leave the money in trust for the park gate.

"I have no close relatives," it said, "nor any to whom I desire to give any part of my estate."

She died Feb. 8, 1905. Her first cousins — the O'Donnells, who were children of her father's brothers; the Gallaghers, and Ann Gillespie and Giles Blake, all first cousins on her mother's side, all presumably from Quebec — did indeed fight her will.

THE LEGAL battle went on for years. The file, which would eventually be stored in the archives of San Francisco, would stand 15 inches high.

It would be filled with legal papers, claims, counter-claims. One of her friends, Gildea, would assign his claim to a bank, perhaps despairing of getting the use of her gift before he himself died.

For some reason I don't yet know, Honora Sharp's gate at the entrance to the Panhandle would never be built.

INSTEAD, part of the property left by her husband — San Pedro ranch on the San Mateo coast — would be given to the City of San Francisco to be used as parklands. The park commissioners would accept the property in 1917, together with a large sum of money for upkeep.

John McLaren would praise its beauty.

Eventually, it would become a golf course. A community would grow up nearby, and be called Sharp Park. Eventually, the name would supplant names like Brighton Beach and Salada Beach, subdivisions of summer cottages which were sold to San Franciscans who planned to visit their homes via the Ocean Shore Railroad.

She left \$301,000. Today, the various parts of real estate holdings left by her would be worth several million dollars.

HER LAST request was that she be buried in her plot in Holy Cross Cemetery, in what is now the town of Colma.

She is there now. She and her husband, George, with another person, Mrs. Mary Brennan, rest in a simple vault.

On the outside is her husband's name, George F. Sharp. Inside are shown only her name, her husband's, and Mrs. Brennan's. There is no other information to mar its simplicity.

The tomb faces directly southwest. Four miles in that direction is Pacifica City Hall, and a community which honors her name. The golf course which stands in place of the memorial gate she dreamed of lies slightly to the south.

When anyone asks who Sharp Park is named for, Honora Sharp is always the one mentioned. Her husband George, whose name she wished to preserve and honor, has only a tomb and some musty records stored in a dismal warehouse in a decaying area near the San Francisco waterfront.

Next week: a bit of Victorian-era scandal.



The Sharp Crypt