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The Kehrleins

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The Kehrleins

A scarcely noticed figure in the history of the College.

Oliver du Fresne Kehrlein, 1907



This material has been lifted from the late John Oliver Simon in his blog (29 Jan 2011) telling the story of his family; from Herbert Asbury, *The Barbary Coast* (1933); from college yearbooks and many bits and clippings on the Internet. There are some confusions and even contradictions in the accounts due largely because the names “Emil”, “Valentine” and “Katherine” are repeated one generation after another. The Kehrleins, through those generations, remained handsome, even dashing, and very, very active.

Emil Valentine Kehrlein, Sr



Emil, 1879

The Family Kehrlein is woven into the history of San Francisco in remarkable ways. A note suggests that there was a Valentine Kehrlein who died in 1883 in California. One record has that he had been born in 1814. The family came from Prappach, Lower Franconia. His wife may have been Wilhelmina Jerling. There was a Joseph Carl, born in 1846. But there is some obscurity in the records. Presumably, another son was Valentine Kehrlein (1856-1919), an active figure in SF dealings and who had at least one sibling, a brother, Emil.

As a young fellow, this Emil was described (probably not by a friend) as rotund and unkempt, and worked for a time helping to sell and distribute various “snake oils”. On the other hand, Valentine was indentured in the jewelry trade. He then made and lost three fortunes, spoke three languages fluently, and recovered sufficiently from his scapes in San Francisco that President Wilson appointed him as an emissary to the World Court. However, he never lost touch with his street smarts; accosted in his eighties by an obnoxious drunk, he slugged the offender and laid him out. One of his accomplishments was the founding of the Dolphin Club. The Kehrlein brothers with another German, the brewer John Wieland, and his brothers were drawn to the chilly bay water and set up this long-lasting aquatic gang. Valentine served as first president, 1877-1878.



An involvement in clubs and sports stayed in the family's blood. Unfortunately, the Kehrleins were expelled from the Dolphins by 1900 after the little scandal described below. They were not so easily discouraged and went on to set up the Triton Rowing Club. A club portrait shows Val and Joe Kehrlein along with Mrs V and Mrs B Kehrlein.



Valentine, about 1880

Emil, the son of Emil, Sr, was born in the City in 1880. There was another son, Oliver, as will be seen.

A great grandson, John Simon, claims Katherine O'Brady Kehrlein, Emil's wife, was sneered at as an "actress" by the other side of family. The line between the theatre and prostitution was extremely fine in San Francisco's roaring eighties; it does appear that Kitty O'Brady trod the boards as a young woman. Later, when Oliver Kehrlein owned the latest in popular entertainment, a movie theatre, his mother would score the coming attractions at night after the theatre closed, and then coach the organist who was to accompany the silent films. In one good close-up photo of her, Kitty stands between her two tall sons Emil Junior and Oliver, each of them wearing a dark stetson. Her red hair is up in ringlets, and her beauty is that of an Irish fighter who will take absolutely no guff. After taking Oliver's wife, Frances on an extravagant, hideous shopping spree in New York City in 1926, Grandmother Kehrlein only contacted her once more, with a telegram a few years later threatening to sue her for five thousand dollars, but nothing came of it. She did her exercises and kept her figure and died in the state hospital at Oxnard at the age of eighty-eight.

This account runs up against another claiming that the mother of Oliver and Emil was Katherine du Fresne. Perhaps "O'Brady" was a joke name...or "du Fresne" was. Or was this Irish Katherine a second wife or perhaps the wife of Valentine?

Some of the following is taken from J O Simon, great-grandson of Emil.

The story of the "entertainment" business in the City is worth a look. In the summer of 1899, Emil and Valentine Kehrlein, set up a company known as the Twinkling Star Corporation, which opened a most remarkable establishment at 733 Pacific Street, in the heart of San Francisco's Barbary Coast. They named their place of business the Hotel Nymphia. This was readily labeled the "Municipal Crib", because Mayor Schmitz and his cronies were frequently found there. Handsome Gene Schmitz and Boss Abe Ruef were later interdicted by the Grand Jury under B P Oliver for graft and corruption.

At the time in wild San Francisco, all the nabobs, the railroad and mining barons, were self-made men. John Oliver Simon sets out the details: Jim Flood was a street-kid from Hell's Kitchen who

became a San Francisco bartender, and used information he overheard from miners in their cups to stake a claim called the Comstock Lode; Collis Huntington ran a hardware and mining-supply store in Sacramento at the same time that Will Adams was selling groceries there; Leland Stanford was a lawyer of rather lesser distinction than Mayor Henry Perrin Coon; Bill Sharon was a jackass prospector who made his fortune by the cold-blooded betrayal of his sponsor; Billy Ralston, whose first job was a clerk on a Mississippi River steamboat, perhaps the same boat on which Adams piloted, while the mate taking soundings from the river bottom cried out Mark Twain! The men were not alone in the Far West. Writing in 1876, B E Lloyd snootily commented that in eastern cities “the prostitutes tried to imitate in manner and dress the fashionable, respectable ladies, but in San Francisco the rule was reversed — the latter copying after the former.” A number of ladies of the night successfully crossed the line and married into respectable society. In this crowd of characters were the Kehrlein brothers, although not as memorable.

The Nymphia

The Barbary Coast was the wild west in its truest form, and was home to many houses of ill repute. The biggest and baddest was the Hotel Nymphia, started by Casey Affleck's *doppelganger* and pleasure entrepreneur Emil Kehrlein. We can't even make this stuff up: The Nymphia, a three-story building with about a hundred and fifty cubicles on each floor, was erected in 1899. The intention of the owners was to name the place the Hotel Nymphomania and to stock it with women suffering from that condition. When the police refused to permit that name, the owners compromised, calling it the Nymphia. The sex worker was charged five dollars for the use of the space, was obliged to remain naked at all times. She was required to supply her favors to any and all comers, regardless of color or creed. The place was first raided by police in 1900 and after several legal battles, finally closed down in 1903. It was the largest and most notorious brothel on the West Coast. (from Herbert Asbury, *The Barbary Coast*, 1933).

The Hotel Nymphia had three hundred cubicles and the Kehrleins at one time had plans to add five hundred more. An original feature in the operation of the Nymphia was a long, narrow window cut in each door, with a shade which could automatically be raised by dropping a dime in the slot, so that those who preferred to watch could view the activity in any cell at any time. Unfortunately, the mechanism could easily be jimmied using a cheap slug, and regretfully had to be abandoned.

The downfall of the Nymphia was the result of a crusade conducted by the Reverend Terence Caraher, pastor of St Francis of Assisi Church and chairman of the Committee on Morals of the North Beach Promotion Association. “This so-called Nymphia,” fulminated Father Caraher, “breeds degradation, vice, sin and the rotting of the soul.” A grand vice-squad raid came just eleven days into the twentieth century. Acting Police Chief W J Biggy was pleased to pose for the *Call's* cover artist in the act of smashing open the Nymphia's front door with a timber axe.

Emil and Valentine Kehrlein and their syndicate partners, Sam Blumenberg and a Mr Frey, were found guilty of maintaining a nuisance and operating an illegal resort, and sentenced to six months in prison, which was reduced on appeal to a fine of \$250 each. The Nymphia was back in operation as soon as the fines were paid, although a series of arrests and harassments kept the establishment under siege. For a time uniformed police were posted at the front door, with orders to take the name of each customer who entered the building. "Judging from the lists of names these policemen turned in to their superior officers," Asbury writes dryly, "no one except John Smith ever visited the Nymphia."

Of course, the San Francisco political establishment was up to its ears in the activities on the Barbary Coast. It was inconveniently discovered, and trumpeted by the anti-administration *Call*, that one of the Chinatown gambling dens which was simultaneously raided around the corner from the Nymphia was owned by the family of current Mayor James Duval Phelan (1897-1902). Meanwhile, an in-law of the Kehrleins, the former Mayor Coon, had a son-in-law, Dr W F McNutt, serving as police commissioner—the papers were asking embarrassing questions about his silence and/or complicity in the goings-on.

The Hotel Nymphia finally closed its doors in 1903. After that Emil operated the *Marsicano*, another club, "a resort of singular depravity," according to Asbury, which stayed open until July 1905. The whole district burned down in the earthquake and fire of April 18, 1906, and nobody seriously tried to count how many prostitutes — or how many Chinese for that matter — lost their lives in the disaster, but brothels began reopening in tents and shacks along Pacific Street within a few weeks of the blaze. As the newspaper mentioned, Emil, never at rest, gave a party for the Army at Fort Mason in 1907.

Emil, the father, had run the Kehrlein Opera House in 1895. He and his restless sons, Emil Valentine and Oliver du Fresne, were partners in a series of purchases of theatres. By 1909, the partners were dealing in real estate as well as theatres. One of their enterprises was Ocean Shore Realty. At the time, the two Emils were living in Belvedere while Oliver was in Menlo Park. Emil, Sr died in 1919. Business must have been very good. In 1913, Emil, Jr had married Mary Osburn (1893-1966). By 1932, the couple were listed as residents of Fresno.

There is a mention of their Kinema Theatre chain in 1916, including a place in Fresno. In 1923, the brothers bought Franklin Amusement. A misunderstanding resulted in a complete mess and the Kehrleins sued the sellers, and vice versa. The cases went on until at least 1928.

In 1943, Emil, Jr and his wife landed in Las Vegas and managed the Nevada Hilton for two years. He died in 1960 and was buried in Culver City.

Oliver du Fresne Kehrlein

He was the second son of Emil Valentine, Sr and Katherine du Fresne. Oliver was born in the City, 1 April 1882; his older brother, Emil V, Jr had been born in 1880.

Money from the Nymphia and the Marsicana paid for Oliver's and Emil's exclusive education at prep schools in Europe where they were shielded from details of the family business. The *Ecole Monge* and *Lycée Carnot* in Paris are listed in the Columbia yearbook's entry for Emil. Oliver was said to have gone to Switzerland but instead probably stayed with his brother. The boys then returned to the Bay Area. In 1902, Oliver was off to Stanford where his brother was already located. Emil had gone into Economics at the Farm, while Oliver ambitiously took on engineering. They both were members of *Phi Delta Theta*. But soon enough Emil left Palo Alto and enrolled at Columbia University.

"Beau Brummel."

EMIL VALENTINE KEHRLEIN, JR., New York City.
 Φ Δ Θ; Μ Π; Class Football Team (1, 2); Class Baseball Team (1, 2); Class Track Team (1, 2); Class Fencing Team (1, 2); Junior Foils (1); Varsity Fencing Squad (2); Varsity Track Team (2); Soph Show; Varsity Show, Cast (2); Class President (2); Cane Spree Committee (1); Junior Ball Committee; Kings Crown (2, 3); Sophomore Vice-President (2), Member-at-Large, Crown Council (3); Newman Club (1, 2, 3); College Vice-President (3); Société Française (1, 2, 3); Executive Committee (2); Vice-President (3); French Play (1); Philharmonic Society (1); Political Club, Member-at-Large, Executive Committee (3); Fencing Club (1, 2, 3); President (3); Christian Association (2, 3); Track Association (1, 2, 3); Rowing Club (1, 2, 3); Student Marshal, Sesqui-centennial Celebration (2); Secretary, Student Board of Representatives (2).



The dashing Emil was a handsome and irresistible force at Columbia. He got involved in no end of activities, many times in positions of leadership. He served on the council of King's Crown and then was vice-president, was on stage every year, including "The Khan of Kathan in 1906. He got on the Sophomore Smoker and the Junior Ball Committees. He showed up as a toastmaster. He went on the found the Players Club and served as first president. During the twenties this group produced shows by Hart, Rodgers and Hammerstein. Athletic Emil did broad-jump on the track and came in second three times in a row. After finishing at Stanford, brother Oliver joined Emil in New York. He and Emil were both on the fencing team for Columbia in 1908 and both participated in the Newman Club, Emil as vice-president. Emil left Columbia at the end of his junior year. A group photo of the Columbia fencing team is dated 1907, so he probably was still in school until the spring when he got married. Oliver certainly channeled the fury and shame of all that was forever unspoken into the point of his épée, as he went unbeaten, defeating all the finest collegiate fencers on the East Coast.

*Oliver
with Columbia Fencing Team,
1907 (middle row, left end)*



Daddy's money had bought Oliver the first automobile ever owned by a Stanford undergraduate. He graduated in 1905 with a degree in engineering (one source says it was physiology), and went on to study medicine at Columbia, where he met an obstetric surgeon named A Palmer Dudley and his lovely step-daughter. At some point after the San Francisco earthquake and fire, he dropped out of med school and came home to work as a structural engineer (according to Lady Teazle) or a contractor (according to his daughter), profiting from the rebuilding boom. In 1907 Emil was listed as vice-president of Kehrlein-Swinerton Construction. But in 1905, it is clear that he and his brother were at E Kehrlein Real Estate Co. As we have seen they were busy boys.

“The Kehrlein boys, Oliver and his brother Emil, were a rather recent addition to polite San Francisco society. According to Lady Teazle, it was hostess Inez Shorb White who ‘discovered’ the Kehrlein lads and decided ‘that two such handsome chaps could not be spared from smart set gatherings.’”

As John Oliver Simon, the grandson, relates: “We take up the backstory of my grandparents’ wedding day, celebrated at “Umadilla” in Menlo Park on 20 May 1907. Oliver Kehrlein, proud and happy on his wedding day, grinning boyishly as he piles into a buggy with his lovely bride Frances Cassandra Coon” (1886-1965), granddaughter of Henry P Coon, eleventh mayor of San Francisco (1863-1867). The newlyweds drove away into the future. They honeymooned at Lake Tahoe, where they were greeted by an unseasonable summer snowstorm. By the next day, it had mostly melted, and they were sunburned, with peeling noses. Perched on a rock outcrop, Oliver caught a silver trout, and the honeymooners went hiking on trails ascending toward the dramatic profile of snow-capped Mount Tallac.

And Simon continues: “There was a disagreeable incident on the couple’s return to Menlo Park. When they arrived home they left their trunks in the railroad station overnight and the next morning these were found rifled, with the bridal trousseau strewn across the floor, and lace, silks, and jewelry missing. The sheriff promptly apprehended three suspicious characters named Schroder, O’Connor and Gehr in a creek-bottom hobo encampment. Schroder claimed to be deaf and dumb, but witnesses had heard him talking before the trio was arrested. “Meanwhile,” Lady Teazle sighed, “the finery of Mrs. Kehrlein’s trousseau has disappeared, and there is a cloud on the face of the honeymoon.”

Frances Coon's mother was Cassandra Hills Adams (1862-1947), later Coon and then Dudley. Frances, step-daughter of a surgeon, had been noted by Oliver while he was at Columbia studying medicine. In turn, her grandmother had been Cassandra Hills (1836-1918), who married Mr Adams. The Adams family included Ansel (1902-1984), who was born in the Fillmore.

The history of the Hotel Nymphia, and the protean and multiracial vigor of the underworld scene of which it was the iceberg's tip, certainly explain Frances Coon's later-expressed ambivalence about the "vulgarity" of the family into which she was marrying. Years later, her son Karl Kehrlein assured his sister Frances that his grandfather Emil was always elegant and dignified, a real gentleman, who never personally took any cash from the hands of the working women.

The couple's children included:

Frances Cassandra (1908-1991), later Simon and then Adler;
Oliver du Fresne, Jr (1909-1993);
Charles 'Karl' Coon Kehrlein (1910-1998), who married Elizabeth Johnson;
Jeanne Marie (1915-1931);
Therese Madeleine (1921-1971), later Piontek and then Zeiss; and
Peter Kostka (1927-2013).

Frances, Therese and Peter appear in 1940 Census residing in San Francisco.

The marriage of Therese and J T Piontek was performed by her brother, Father Oliver. Many grandchildren appeared in time; the oldest girl had John Oliver Simon (1942-2018), who became a poet and revered fixture at Berkeley. Another grandson, Thomas Arthur Kehrlein (1951-2007) moved in with and was raised by Oliver and Frances. He was a cousin of Ansel Adams and later married "Sam" Jernigan.

Oliver and Frances were quite well-connected. For example, in 1919 the Secretary of the Navy invited them to the launching of the USS California. They, along with Emil and his wife, were listed in the *Social Register* in 1916, in 1919 and again in 1932. For a time, before moving to San Rafael, the pair lived at 431 Wildwood in Piedmont.

After settling down, Oliver was heavily into real estate, particularly in the East Bay. After 1925, he must have become acquainted with the College and its intended move out of downtown. The campus was on Broadway, at the foot of Piedmont, once an open area away from the city in 1889, but now crowded in on all sides by the burgeoning town. Property in San Leandro was bought by the Brothers, in a valley in the hills at the end of Dutton, east of Foothill and just south of the Dunsmuir House. In a property switch, this rather attractive site was traded for several hundred acres in remote Moraga. Real estate men, B P Oliver, Oliver Kehrlein and James Irvine were all involved in the East Bay dealings. College graduate, Mr Oliver, died in 1945. James Irvine II died in 1947. He had bought the Moraga Ranch in 1912, which later formed the Moraga Land Company. Equally intriguing, it is mentioned that Kehrlein worked with Coach Norman "Red" Strader on football at SMC, then located at the Oakland campus.

Like grandfather, father and brother, the remarkable Mr Kehrlein was tirelessly active in many activities. He was appointed Exalted Ruler of the Elks, President of the Lions Club, a member of the Athens Athletic Club, Faithful Navigator with the Fourth Degree Knights of Columbus. Most extraordinarily, we find him on the board of directors of the Astronomical Society of the Pacific. Very likely stemming from his work on the properties of the College, he was named a formal Benefactor by the Christian Brothers of California on 27 February 1928.

Oliver was very involved with conservation. The Sierra Club had been founded in San Francisco by 1892, by John Muir, William Keith and associates to protect, in particular, the Sierra Nevada wilderness. In 1940, Oliver joined and began the program for overnighing in the Sierra, then wrote two books, *Base Camps*, on how to organize these operations. He served on the board for twenty years, 1938-1958. Even today, one of the annual awards, given out by the Sierra Club, next to the *Muir* and *Ansel Adams* awards, is the *Oliver Kehrlein* for outstanding service. All the while he gained a reputation of being a first-class climber. Kehrlein Minaret in the Ritter Range is named for him. On the not too solemn side, he helped reestablish *E Clampus Vitus*, a curious club working to preserve natural and historical sites in Northern California. He founded the West Point Club. He wrote *Every American A Farmer* as a guide to domestic agriculture. He was editor of the "Garden Page" and the Winter Sports sections of the *Examiner* (1937-1943). And it was not just armchair occupations: in the 1930s Oliver Kehrlein skied the "longest and continuously steepest ski run in the world," down Avalanche Gulch. And there is no end: he hosted several shows on KLX and KPO (now KNBR) for some years.

He died 24 April 1967 in San Rafael and was buried at Saint Joseph Cemetery in San Pablo. Frances had died in 1965. His daughter Frances served as librarian at Lone Mountain into her seventies and died in 1991.

Oliver du Fresne Kehrlein, Jr

Somehow this rambunctious family with German, Irish and French lines remained Catholic. The son Oliver, Jr was born 24 May 1909. He attended the University of San Francisco and while there was called to join the Society of Jesus. Along the line he offered to be a chaplain in the U S Army.

In 1952, Major Kehrlein (0975104) was sent off to Korea to minister to the 224th Infantry Regiment. The base was shelled while the chaplain was setting up for mass. He was badly wounded. As a result it was the Purple Heart and the Bronze Star. Later, in Yokohama, probably recuperating, he served the 160th Infantry. His dedicated ministry was marked by two Commendations, including a First Oak Leaf Cluster, and promotion to Lieutenant Colonel. He died in retirement at the Jesuit House in Los Gatos on 13 June 1993.

Lady Teazle

A figure in Sheridan's *School for Scandal*, this troublesome lady dabbled in "scandal". A writer named Josephine Bartlett wrote a regular column "Social Chat" for the *S F Chronicle* under the apt by-line Lady Teazle. She took to the rather handsome Kehrlein brothers after their stint at college and shone her light on them—they were as a result noted by the nabobs in the City.

The story, as revealed in the society pages, was that, although born in San Francisco, the Kehrleins had been educated in Europe before studying at Stanford and Columbia. Their mother, another columnist mused, was reputedly extremely wealthy, but for some reason had never gone about in society. Lady Teazle explained that the Kehrleins were descended from European nobility, being grand-nephews of the recently, and conveniently, deceased Sir Raymond Cresonpais of London, England. There is precious little—well, no—evidence any of this.

Br L Raphael, FSC
Saint Mary's College

from John Oliver Simon's Blog

January 29, 2011

The line between polite society and the netherworld of vulgar trade and immodest vice was historically thinner in San Francisco than on the staid and conventional East Coast. As the old ditty has it:

*The miners came in Forty-nine,
The whores in Fifty-one.
And when they got together,
They made the Native Son.*

All the nabobs, the railroad and mining barons, were self-made men. Jim Flood was a street-kid from Hell's Kitchen who became a San Francisco bartender, and used information he overheard from miners in their cups to stake a claim called the Comstock Lode. Collis Huntington ran a hardware and mining-supply store in Sacramento at the same time that Will Adams was selling groceries there. Leland Stanford was a lawyer of rather lesser distinction than Henry Perrin Coon. Bill Sharon was a jackass prospector who made his fortune by the cold-blooded betrayal of his sponsor, Billy Ralston, whose first job was a clerk on a Mississippi River steamboat, perhaps the same boat on which Adams piloted, while the mate taking soundings from the river bottom cried out Mark Twain!

Writing in 1876, B.E. Lloyd snootily commented that in eastern cities "the prostitutes tried to imitate in manner and dress the fashionable, respectable ladies, but in San Francisco the rule was reversed — the latter copying after the former." A number of ladies of the night successfully crossed the line and married into respectable society. Maud Heyman, a Stockton Street madam, married Charley Fair, the alcoholic son of Senator Jim Fair — so unsuitable! — and polite society was rather relieved when shortly after the ceremony bride and groom were both killed in an accident involving one of those new-fangled horseless carriages.

In 1884, William Sharon, by then a Senator from Nevada, was successfully sued for half his estate by a beautiful blonde call-girl, Sarah Althea Hill, whom he kept on a retainer of \$1,000 a month (\$19,786 in 2005 dollars) in a suite in the Palace Hotel just a few doors down from the room where Henry Perrin Coon drew his last breath. Popular fascination with the trial was only whetted as it became apparent that Miss Hill's strategy was managed by an elderly but vigorous African-American civil rights activist, entrepreneur and Voudon priestess named Mary Ellen Pleasant.

Mary Ellen "Mammy" Pleasant

Pleasant, born a slave in Virginia around 1814, worked with Harriet Tubman on the Underground Railroad and helped John Brown organize his raid on Harper's Ferry. She came to Gold Rush California because of its atmosphere of relative tolerance which allowed her to live openly with her white husband, made her fortune in the restaurant business, and together with her long-term associate Thomas Bell, helped establish the Bank of California. In 1868, anticipating Rosa Parks by nearly a century, she successfully sued two trolley companies whose conductors had refused to allow her to ride. By the time of the Sharon-Hill trial she was said to be worth thirty million dollars (over half a billion in today's money).

Mary Ellen Pleasant apparently operated a so-called boarding house for attractive young women whom she groomed to associate with the rich and powerful. The Sharon trial presented the press with a luscious opportunity to smear her sinister influence, labeling her as "Mammy" Pleasant and playing up the Voodoo and madam aspects of her resume. People who crossed her did seem to die of mysterious causes from time to time but Pleasant was never charged with any crime. Senator Sharon passed away in December 1885, and Sarah Althea Hill promptly married her lawyer of record, Judge David S. Terry, the very same Confederate sympathizer who shot and killed Senator Broderick in the Lake Merced duel which Police Commissioner Coon found himself powerless to prevent in 1859.

Sharon Althea Hill Terry

When U.S. Supreme Court Justice Stephen Field, working the California circuit as Supreme Court justices routinely did in those days, reversed the Sharon verdict, denying Sarah any claim to the late Senator's estate, and specifically stating that the wealthy and powerful must be allowed a greater claim to veracity than the poor and destitute, as "property and position are in themselves some certain guaranty of truth in their possessor," the Terry couple created a scene in the courtroom, accusing the judge of having been bought by Sharon's son-in-law. Fisticuffs ensued, Sarah was relieved of a revolver and her husband of a bowie knife, and the Terrys were sentenced to six months in county jail for contempt. The next time their path crossed with that of Stephen Field, at a railroad depot in the Central Valley in 1889, Judge Terry hit Judge Field upside the head and was promptly shot dead by his bodyguard, a former jackass prospector turned U.S. Marshal named Dave Neagle. After Neagle was exonerated by a split decision of the U.S. Supreme Court, which found that he had been acting in the line of duty to protect Justice Field, Sarah Terry, who had always been at best a piece of work, entirely lost her frail hold on sanity and was committed to a mental asylum, where she remained until her death forty-five years later. Mary Ellen Pleasant, still a wealthy woman, lived to the age of eighty-nine; after her death, her ghost was said to haunt her gothic mansion at 1661 Octavia between Sutter and Bush until it was torn down in 1927.

The history of the Hotel Nymphia, and the protean and multiracial vigor of the underworld scene

of which it was the iceberg's tip, certainly explain Frances Coon's later-expressed ambivalence about the "vulgarity" of the family into which she was marrying. Years later, her son Karl Kehrlein assured his sister Frances that his grandfather Emil was always elegant and dignified, a real gentleman, who never personally took any cash from the hands of the working women. Emil's father Valentin Kehrlein came from Prappach, Lower Franconia. As a young man, Emil was indentured in the jewelry trade. He made and lost three fortunes, spoke three languages fluently, and recovered sufficiently from his scapes in San Francisco that President Wilson appointed him as an emissary to the World Court. However, Emil never lost touch with his street smarts; accosted in his eighties by an obnoxious drunk, he slugged the offender and laid him out.

The Adams side of my family still refers disdainfully to Emil's wife Katherine "Kitty" O'Brady Kehrlein as an "actress." The line between the theatre and prostitution was extremely fine in San Francisco's roaring eighties; it does appear that Kitty O'Brady trod the boards as a young woman. Later, when Oliver Kehrlein owned the latest in popular entertainment, a movie theatre, his mother would score the coming attractions at night after the theatre closed, and then coach the organist who was to accompany the silent films. In our one good close-up photo of her, Kitty stands between her two tall sons Emil Junior and Oliver, each of them wearing a dark stetson. Her red hair is up in ringlets, and her beauty is that of an Irish fighter who will take absolutely no guff. After taking Frances Kehrlein on an extravagant, hideous shopping spree in New York City in 1926, Grandmother Kehrlein only contacted her once more, with a telegram a few years later threatening to sue her for five thousand dollars, but nothing came of it. She did her exercises and kept her figure and died in the state hospital at Oxnard at the age of eighty-eight.

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The newlyweds climbed into a buggy and drove away into the future. They honeymooned at Lake Tahoe, where they were greeted by an unseasonable summer snowstorm. By the next day, it had mostly melted, and they were sunburned, with peeling noses. Perched on a rock outcrop, Oliver caught a silver trout, and the honeymooners went hiking on trails ascending toward the dramatic profile of snow-capped Mount Tallac. We will not presume to enter the bedroom where they conceived their first-born, a daughter who would be named Frances Cassandra, the last of four Cassandras in a row.

There was a disagreeable incident on the couple's return to Menlo Park. When they arrived home they left their trunks in the railroad station overnight and the next morning these were found rifled, with the bridal trousseau strewn across the floor, and lace, silks, and jewelry missing. The sheriff promptly apprehended three suspicious characters named Schroder, O'Connor and Gehr in a creek bottom hobo encampment. Schroder claimed to be deaf and dumb, but witnesses had heard him talking before the trio was arrested. "Meanwhile," Lady Teazle sighed, "the finery of Mrs. Kehrlein's trousseau has disappeared, and there is a cloud on the face of the honeymoon."