

The Forgotten Landscape Engineer of Pebble Beach

The fifth in a series of articles on the history of Del Monte Forest by Neal Hotelling

As head of Del Monte Properties Company for half a century, S.F.B. Morse rightly is credited with creating a park-like atmosphere we can call home in Del Monte Forest. But if you ever wondered who Morse credits with helping to birth his vision, the man is Mark Daniels (1881-1952). “In studying the development of the Monterey Peninsula, with the very helpful assistance given me by Mark Daniels, the idea of the greenbelt unfolded just by applying common sense to the situation... an engineer with imagination and foresight, Mark Daniels and I studied the entire Del Monte Forest and evolved a plan of development which we have followed in a general way ever since that time. Unfortunately, the report made by Mark Daniels was destroyed in the great fire of 1924. I would give a great deal to have it now.” [- unpublished memoirs]

Mark Daniels, from all reports, was a remarkable man. Born in Michigan, his family moved to Oakland and he graduated from UC Berkeley in 1905 with a degree in civil engineering. His skills were in high demand less than a year later when he proved his talent helping to rebuild San Francisco after the devastating earthquake of 1906. Later he worked in the engineering department of the Southern Pacific Railroad. Following a horrible train crash in Honda, California, he invented a switch that signaled danger by displaying a semaphore on the switch stand whenever a split occurred between the main line and the rails.

Daniels spent the summer of 1908 at Big Meadows in Plumas County near Fresno where he directed the work on an extensive water system in his father's placer mines. Later he was briefly assistant city engineer at Potlach, Idaho before returning to Berkeley and setting up an office in San Francisco. In 1911 he was retained to design projects for Spring Valley Water Company and the Thousand Oaks tract in the Berkeley Hills for the Newell-Murdoch Company. One of the first homes at Thousand Oaks was the home Daniels designed for himself. In September 1912, Newell-Murdoch announced plans for another



Mark Daniels, of California, General Superintendent and Landscape Engineer of National Parks, an office recently created for him by the Secretary of the Interior. Mr. Daniels will get into greater and more and definite ideas upon what he terms "the inexhaustible commercial resources of scenery."

Daniels designed development—Haddon Hills—on the east shore of Lake Merritt, that was renamed Lakemont in 1920. Newell-Murdoch also used Daniels to develop Forest Hill, on the hills on the western edge of San Francisco once owned by Adolph Sutro.

Sunset writer Edwin Emmet Curtis queried Daniels in 1914 on his success. “I have succeeded where others have failed because I have demonstrated the commercial value

of Art... Value is created by design, and demand by desirability, which is the thing to work for. Practical idealism, as opposed to idealistic impracticability, is the key note of the new school of Art whose followers keep pace with the progress of the world.”

On April 8, 1914 Daniels was sworn into service in the U.S. Department of the Interior as landscape engineer for Yosemite National Park and laid out a plan for development of roads, bridges and facilities that earned great acclaim. In May, 1914, Daniels was appointed Assistant Secretary of the Interior and in June 1914, the general superintendent of all national parks. Returning to San Francisco for a June 20, 1914 meeting of the Tourists' Association of Central California, Daniels reported, “Within the next two or three years the Department of the Interior hopes to popularize the parks to an extent that will keep at home at least \$200,000,000 a year of the \$560,000,000 now being spent abroad. Obviously that will mean an enormous saving to the country.” While brief, his time with the Department of the Interior was influential.

Following the 1915 Pan-Pacific Exhibition, H.M. de Young proposed retaining several elements as part of the city's beautification. Daniels wrote an article of support in the San Francisco Chronicle emphasizing that deYoung's proposal should “be considered only as the fulcrum about which the movement for building a great and encircling artery connecting with the points and parks along our shore, with one scheme, might turn.” San Francisco did so and retained Daniels as a consulting engineer in the Marina area.

Samuel F. B. Morse, a resident in the Burlingame Hills and the new manager of the Pacific Improvement Company in 1915, enticed Daniels in early 1916 to assist him with developing the company's holdings on the Monterey Peninsula. His initial project was the western portion of Pacific Grove. Daniels designed a new concept for the company owned acreage between downtown and the lighthouse. Rather than tight squared off lots and blocks, streets were designed "to conform with the contour of the land... The main streets converge to a civic center which is intersected by the 17-Mile Drive. An esplanade 200 feet wide runs from the civic center to the ocean front, a distance of 600 feet." The odd shaped, staggered lots are known today as the Beach Tract.

Morse encouraged Daniels to make a home at Monterey as early as 1918, finally getting him under a consulting agreement with Del Monte Properties Company in August of 1920. The Oakland Tribune of September 19, 1920, reported that Morse hired Daniels "to make Pebble Beach more attractive and advise on the clearing of property and the subdivision plans that are now underway."

Morse provided Daniels with a lot at the southern intersection of Crespi and 17-Mile Drive and Daniels designed and built a home there. His work at Pebble Beach was diverse and included engineering the extension of the back tee on the 18th hole of Pebble Beach Golf Links, as well as designing the complex road system with green belts through the largely marsh land that today comprises the Monterey Peninsula Country Club area. His genius was adapting roadways and lots to the existing landscape, a skill that was put to good use in profitably and artfully preserving the hilly terrain of the Monterey Peninsula. His philosophy was embraced by the company's other engineers, especially Charles Olmsted, who remained with Morse for many years.

Always looking for the next great opportunity, Daniels left Monterey in 1924 for southern California and began work on the development at Riviera and soon took charge of 15,000 acres that became Pacific Palisades and later estates at Annandale and the Bel-Air Bay Country Club. From 1936-1940 he served as publisher of California Arts and Architecture. Eventually he returned to the San Francisco area where on January, 14, 1952 he died, but not before making a lasting and positive impact on the landscape of California, including Del Monte Forest.



In this earliest known concept drawing of the Country Club area, illustrator Virgil Nahl interprets the engineering plans created by Mark Daniels. In a 1925 caption, Morse called attention "to the ingenuity evidenced in the laying out of roads." Reflecting back after nearly eight decades, we should note there were clear modifications from this plan, especially in the course layouts, the size of and location of the bathing pavilion, and the rerouting of 17-Mile Drive. - Photo Courtesy of the Pebble Beach Company Lagorio Archives