

1866

1929



THROUGH THE YEARS TO A
GREATER
O'CONNOR MOFFATT & CO.



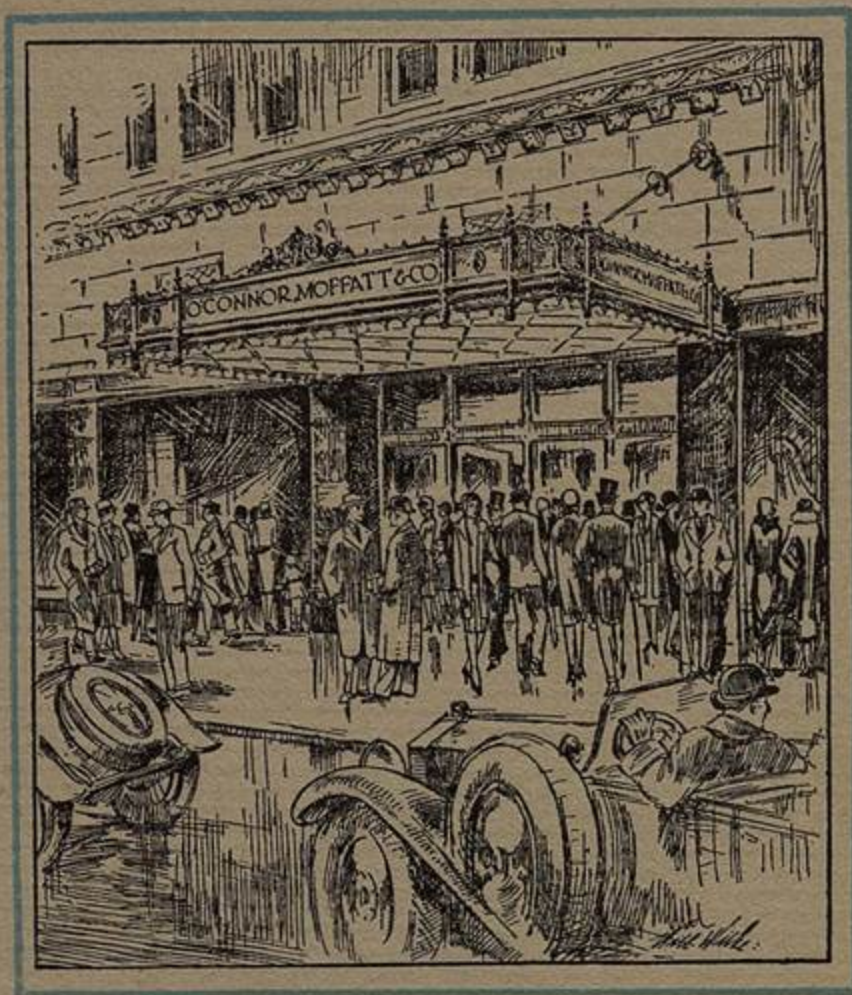
*I*t has been our endeavor in this little book to connect the history of O'Connor, Moffatt & Company in a logical way with the progress of a great city. Also, to set forth in pictures the scope of an institution that is now entering upon a new era, thanks to the support and encouragement accorded it through the years by a loyal, warm-hearted clientele. In our new store at Stockton and O'Farrell streets it will be our constant aim to preserve the confidence of old friends, and to win new friends by deserving them.

RICHARD W. COSTELLO
President.

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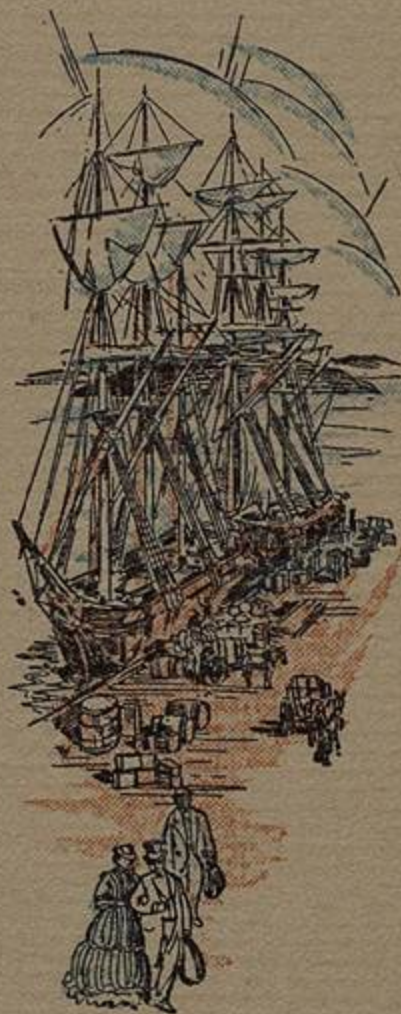


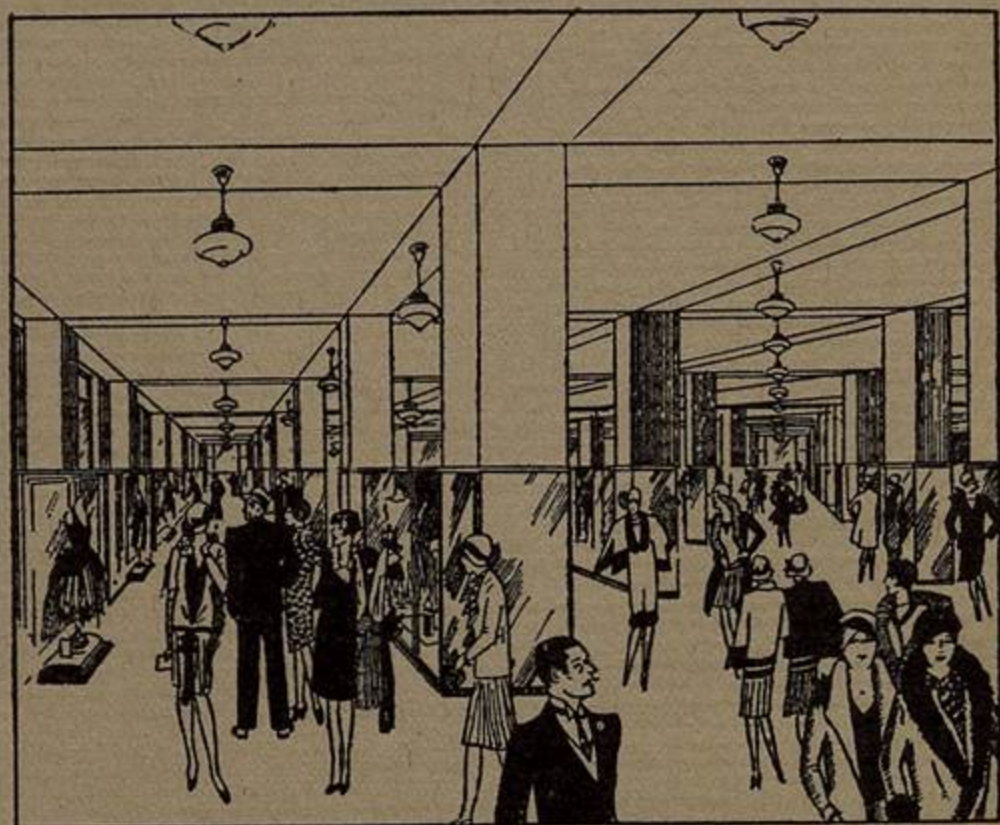


Through the Years

1866-1929

THE beginning of a business seems always its most interesting period. And it is indeed true in San Francisco that the beginning of every business was fraught with a measure of romance. The young men who came here in the youth of the city, gathering from the ends of the earth, had little capital save courage, integrity, and a cheerful attitude toward hard work. They had, in other words, the most important capital of all, and with it they built a great community





Queen Fashion reigns over our Ready to Wear Shops, a spacious floor displaying a complete line of women's outer apparel

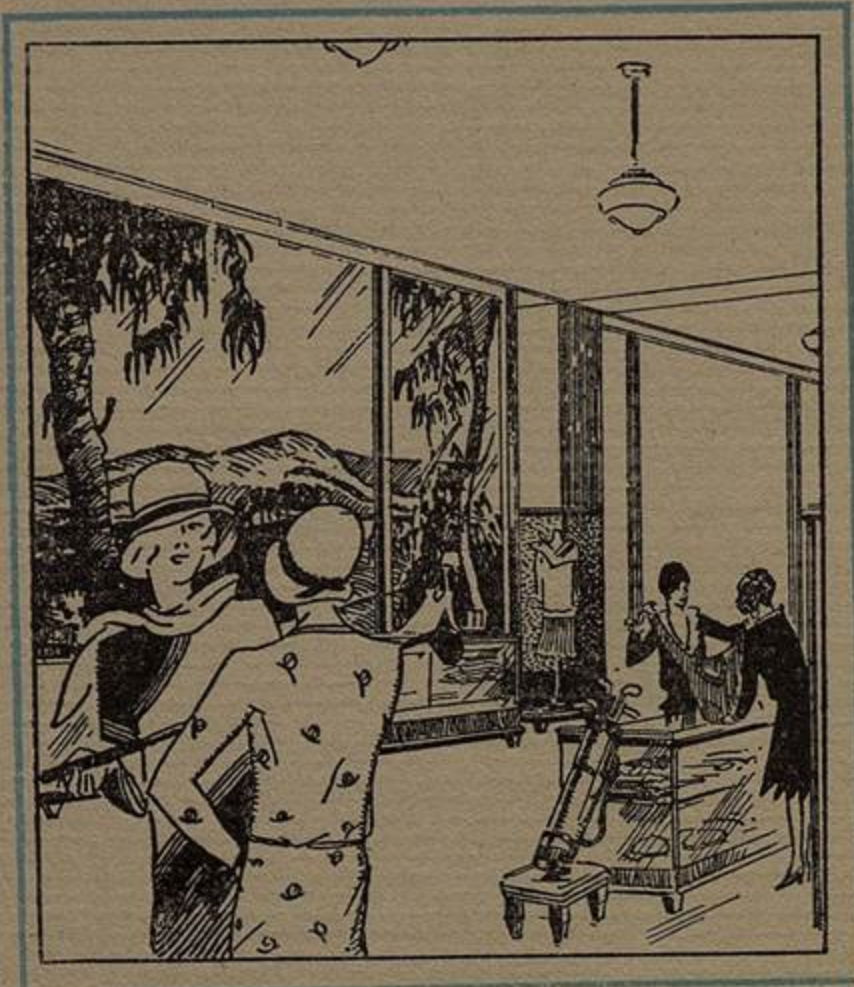
—the fortunes they builded for themselves are of secondary interest.

Bryan O'Connor and George Moffatt whose names are perpetuated in the department store of O'Connor, Moffatt & Co., reared a structure that became an integral part of San Francisco. They sowed the seeds of life in their business, and it grew—is still growing—with city growth, giving and receiving benefits as that mutual growth expands.

The young man Bryan O'Connor arrived in San Francisco from Australia in 1864. George Moffatt, with whom he had formed a strong friendship in Melbourne, followed him two years later to find a retail dry goods business substantially established.

When Bryan O'Connor debarked at the waterfront he entered a fascinat-





*We have expanded the Sports Wear Shop to meet the
vogue of modes and loveliness
out of doors*

ing city of opportunity. San Francisco presented a picture full of color against a background of faraway Civil War. Alone among States of the Union, California maintained the gold standard throughout the struggle, even in defiance of the Secretary of the Treasury, Salmon P. Chase. This fact contributed mightily to the prosperity of San Francisco. Another important reason for that prosperity was the city's healthy growth. The town that had started in a cluster of shacks curving from Clark's to Rincon Point was visibly expanding. Disputed land titles which had stopped progress to the west and south, were now cleared, and as population flowed across the barrier of lower Market street and conquered the sand dunes beyond Powell, retail business of





In the Fur Shop fashion is ever changing, but quality is held always to the highest level

various kinds inevitably followed.

Nevertheless, Bryan O'Connor found Montgomery street still holding its prestige as the principal thoroughfare of commerce and diversion, while the smart shops lined Sacramento, Clay and Washington streets to the immediate east and west of Montgomery. Amazing shops these were for a city of isolation like San Francisco, and of an elegance not to be visualized by those who think of the mushroom metropolis as a wild and woolly town. It was nothing of the sort.

Exuberant it was, free-handed, far from staid, and politically lax, but its social life was ruled by firm conventions and the dictates of fashion, its pulpit orators were brilliant and influential, and culture flourished ac-

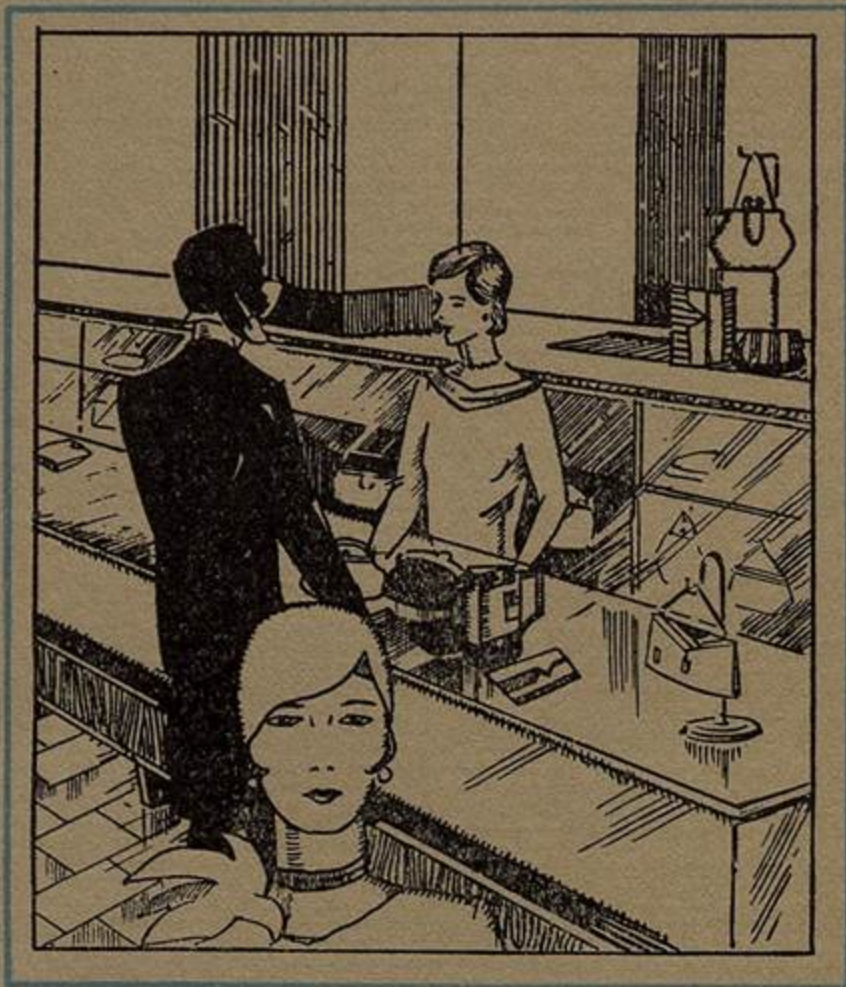




The last daintiness of Parisian vogue is expressed in the exquisite models displayed in the Millinery Salon

According to the most exacting standards of the Atlantic Coast and the Old World. Let it be recalled that this was the intellectual San Francisco of Bret Harte, Starr King and Henry George. It was also a San Francisco of smart routs and balls, of glittering theatre and opera nights, of dinner and supper parties planned by Parisian chefs and presided over by hostesses who had learned hospitality in New York, Philadelphia and Boston, in Baltimore, Charleston and New Orleans. Carriages with fine horses carried merrymakers to the ocean beach, to the Sunday bullfights at Mission Dolores, to the race track beyond Hunters Point, and to breakfasts of quail-on-toast and champagne at the Crystal Springs Hotel in a San Mateo region covered today by the waters of





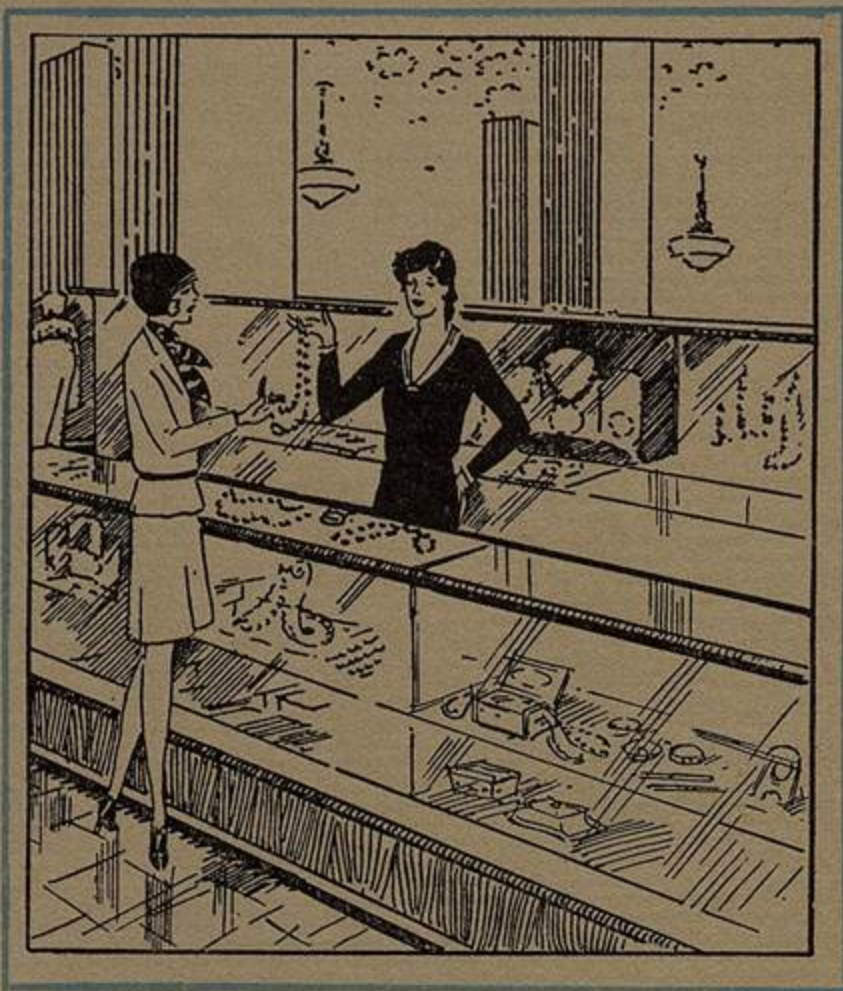
To the Leather Goods Department the finest makers at home and abroad send their irresistible novelties

a great reservoir. Quadrilles delighted the hearts of lovely belles and eager beaux, charades were still acted, bezique was the card game of tone.

From this formal and ceremonious society manners quite the reverse of "western" spread to humbler (though no less cultivated) circles. Many of the humbler, indeed, brought excellent manners and fine traditions with them to San Francisco. Always cosmopolitan, the city of the Sixties was more strikingly permeated than at any later day by the suave influences of London and Dublin, of Paris, Munich and Vienna, of Rio, Valparaiso and the City of Mexico.

As with manners, so it was with dress. A city of sophistication is always a city of smart and correct costume, and the men and women of San





*To meet fashion's insistent demand we have enlarged
our Costume Jewelry Department of domestic
and imported lines*

Francisco, from the very beginning, have enjoyed a special distinction for taste and elegance in clothes. The fact was noted in the Fifties and Sixties by distinguished travelers from abroad, and drew amazed comment from actors, opera singers and lecturers who came West expecting to suffer a throng of Mother Hubbards and Red Shirts. Instead they found the conventional crinoline, French bonnets, slippers and gloves, gorgeous fans, costly mantillas, ribbons of the latest mode, jewelry as correct as in European drawing-rooms.

The men of San Francisco, too, were meticulous dressers. With rough and ready Australian impressions fresh in mind, Bryan O'Connor was pleasantly surprised at the formal black coats, close-fitting trousers, immaculate lin-



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Every shade imaginable for sports, evening and street wear gives a rainbow radiance to the Hosiery Department

en and custom-made boots, to say nothing of curled hair and luxuriant whiskers, that gave an evening assemblage of gentlemen in San Francisco a distinctly metropolitan air.

Such was the San Francisco wherein Bryan O'Connor, and shortly afterwards George Moffatt, determined to find happiness and fortune. At this time the gold of California's Northern and Southern mines was beginning to pale a little before the inpouring silver of Washoe and the Comstock, but there was many a fortune still to be dug out of the earth along the flashing scimitar that cut its swath from Sonora to Grass Valley. O'Connor and Moffatt, however, had been trained to mercantile pursuits, and very wisely they sought success in the sphere of life they knew. There were



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O'CONNOR MOFFATT & CO.



Distinction breathes its atmosphere of sophistication throughout our Shoe Salon for women of exacting taste

many like them in that vivid young metropolis—men who ignored the mines completely, preferring the hazards and rewards of business. Such men rarely regretted their decision, and Bryan O'Connor was destined to be conspicuous among these. He was to become one of the great retail merchants of the Pacific Coast.

Studying the city of his choice, Bryan O'Connor noticed population trending southward across that thoroughfare of magnificent but undeveloped potentialities, Market street. He saw the rich, the socially prominent families building mansions on Rincon Hill, while humble tradesmen and wage-earners followed their carriage wheels to stores and dwellings along Fremont, First and Second streets. Second street was a direct approach





*In the Corset Shop expert corsetieres study your figure
with superb skill and
unerring insight*

to fashionable Rincon Hill. The Second-street Cut—called by Charles Warren Stoddard “the most unkindest cut of all”—had not yet disfigured beyond repair that pleasant eminence. Along Second street retail business was beginning to flow in a modest stream of profitable possibilities. Here, where stores were small and rents low, Bryan O'Connor made his first independent venture. He did well. Before long he had a partner, one John C. Talbot, and two stores—an extraordinary venture for that time. The first store was at 130 Second street, a little later at Second and Mission; the other at 9 Kearny street, an admirable location to serve the expanding trade of the north side.

With the advent of George Moffatt in 1866, John C. Talbot retired, and





Exquisite French intimate garments in the Lingerie Shop capture the dainty mode of the moment

shortly thereafter the store on Second street was closed, the youthful partners deciding judiciously to concentrate their business on Kearny street which was obviously gaining by rapid strides in mercantile importance.

Discreet and careful, forming their judgments by observation of the life about them and by personal contact with their customers, O'Connor and Moffatt enjoyed a success from the start. The "carriage trade" equally with the patronage of wage-earners came to them, and remained. Year by year the business prospered and increased.

In 1871 James and Thomas Keane joined the firm, and the store was moved to 107 Kearny street under the name of Keane, O'Connor & Co. This arrangement lasted until 1878, when



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O'CONNOR MOFFATT & CO.



Our reputation for silks is firmly established, and in the Silk Department of the new store every whim of fashion is anticipated



Linens! Always an outstanding department with us, in the new store it is destined to excel the reputation built throughout 62 years



A Mother's Paradise—our department of Infants' and Children's Wear, dedicated to the loveliness of childhood

the Keanes severed their connection. Then the firm became definitely and finally O'Connor, Moffatt & Co., the "company" being John Costello of New York. With this change, new premises were taken at 121 Post street, the site just abandoned in this year of grace 1929 for the corner of O'Farrell and Stockton.

The San Francisco life of the Seventies differed a great deal from that of the preceding decade. This was the era of the great millionaires whose names are inseparably connected with the exploitation of the Comstock and the building of the Central Pacific Railroad. Flood and Mackay, Fair and O'Brien; Huntington and Crocker, Stanford and Hopkins—the incredible fortunes of these two quartets brought a new glamor to the city.





*The special needs of your youngster are carefully studied
and pleasantly met in
the Boys' Shop*

They were not alone, however, in their Midas-like notoriety. Other millionaires were emerging from the mines and the stock market to create banks and industrial enterprises in San Francisco, and to dazzle two continents with their munificence. The Palace Hotel and Nob Hill became known around the world. The Bohemian Club was in its heyday. Golden Gate Park was gloriously in the making. And an "amateur emigrant" by the name of Robert Louis Stevenson was devouring the Barbary Coast with the insatiable eyes of a storyteller.

Life retained its simple dignity and beauty in families untouched by sudden wealth, but the public emphasis was shifted to conspicuous spending. It was an era when money came



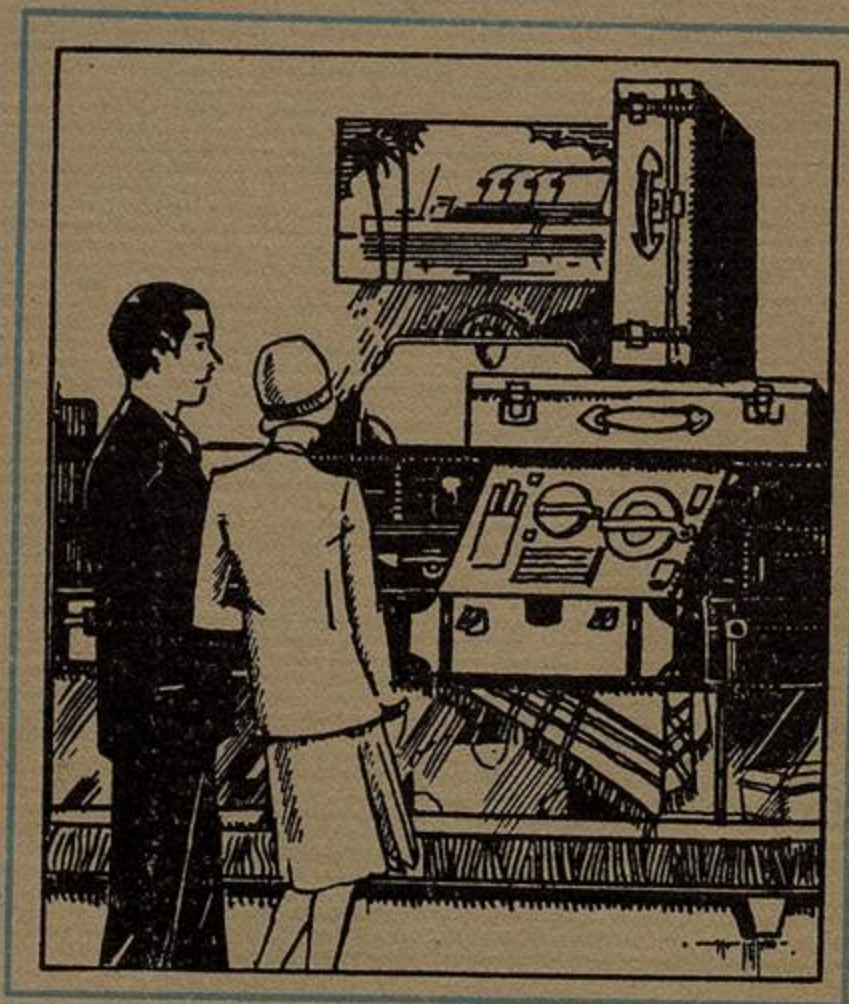


In the Men's Shop the most careful dresser will find haberdashery, coats and hats that meet the demands of the prevailing mode

swiftly to unaccustomed hands, and, too often, departed just as swiftly, leaving bitterness behind. Men lived hectic days and nights while fortune smiled, buying at too high a price the ready-made toys of gaiety and flaunting them in the faces of the poor. No wonder Dennis Kearney gained a hearing and filled the Sand Lot with discontent.

Obviously, in such a decade merchants who looked carefully to their affairs would prosper. Though many merchants caught the contagion of extravagance and dissipation, many other merchants did not. Some San Francisco firms of apparent strength disappeared from the scene during these fevered years, never to return. Others solidified their position, widened the base of their activities, and



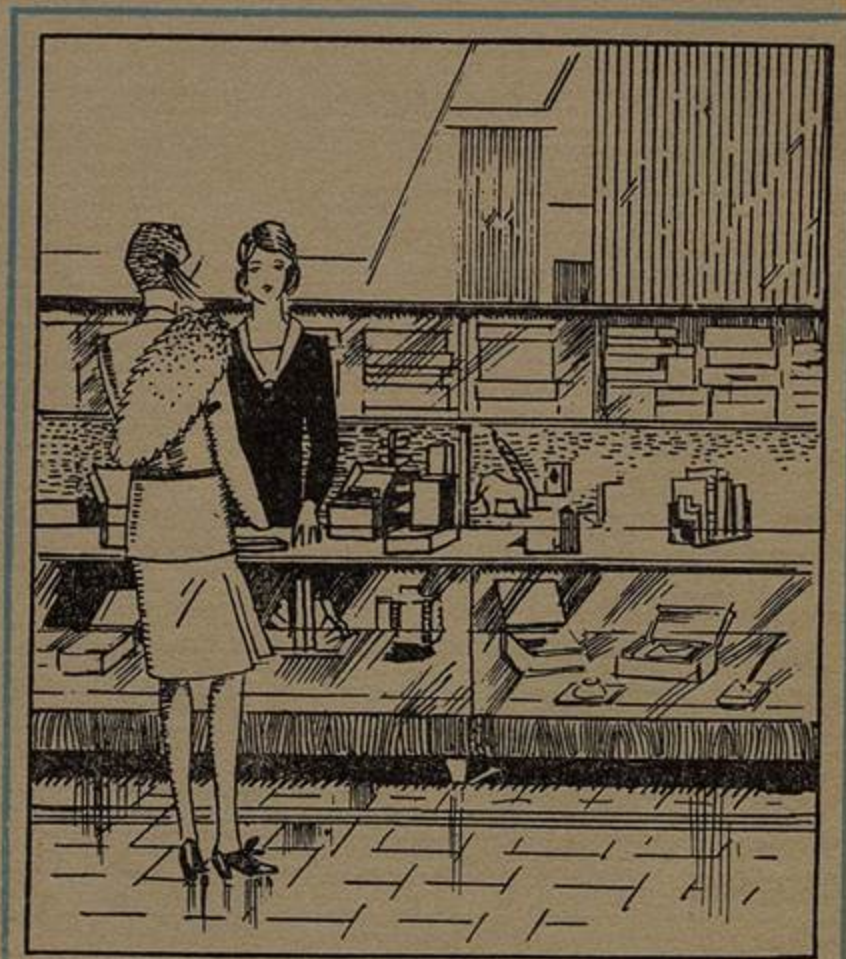


*Imported and domestic trunks and bags for overland
journey or foreign tour intrigue
interest in the Luggage Shop*

emerged into what may be called "modern San Francisco" with unassailable credit and impregnable good will.

O'Connor, Moffatt & Co. was one of these. Its beginnings had been small but sound; its growth had been straight and true; by the end of the Seventies it was rated among the strong retail establishments of the West. Watchful representatives in New York and abroad kept its buying directly in the path of fashion and poured merchandise of irresistible appeal into its shelves and show cases. How fashions had changed since Bryan O'Connor had his first glimpse of San Francisco! One item only need be cited: the crinoline was gone forever, and the bustle was launched upon its preposterous career. It is easy





Everything for the equipment and adornment of miladi's desk is provided in the attractive Stationery Department

to fancy that Bryan O'Connor and his associates, witnesses of a change so revolutionary, wondered what new vagaries of women's dress the future could possibly divulge!

By the year 1880 there was no merchandising establishment in San Francisco better known or more highly respected than O'Connor, Moffatt & Co. Its business maintained a progressive advance that was orderly, sure and profitable. Its success involved no secret—a fundamental fact accounted for it: sound merchandising methods in the selling of dependable goods at reasonable prices. On its books were found the names of the strongest and most prominent families, not only in San Francisco but throughout California.

Financial affairs were in the hands





Our Furniture Department—a distinct innovation, occupying practically a whole floor. Our Model Rooms will exert their influence for lovelier homes

of George Moffatt, and most capably indeed did he conduct them. Bryan O'Connor managed the store. He knew about every item of merchandise that came to and left the shelves. He was a tireless worker, of seemingly inexhaustible energy—unhappily, he was to die at the early age of forty-seven from an ailment that came of too intense concentration on business.

In 1883 the Post-street premises had to be enlarged to twice their original size. Fire made its first dreadful visitation this year, and it was three months before the store reopened. George Moffatt retired from the firm in 1887, and in the same year Bryan O'Connor died in his prime. He had struck deep roots into the life of his adopted city, and he was sincerely mourned. The influence of his char-



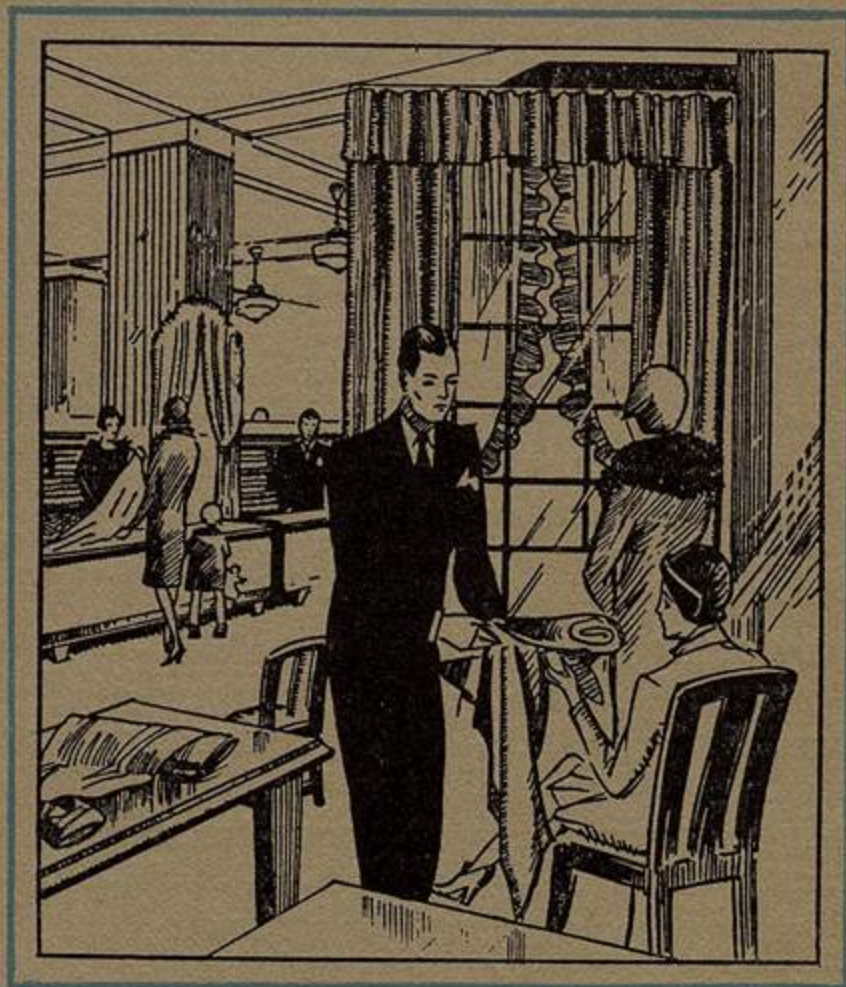


Domestic and Oriental rugs in the forefront of good taste and beauty, on display in a new Rug Department

acter lives in the business today—his ideals survive and flourish. Moreover, he had stamped his impress upon the merchandising methods of San Francisco and the West, and the fortune that came to him was only a small part of his reward. Of such men as Bryan O'Connor the West was made.

It is needless to dwell upon the catastrophe of April, 1906, when San Francisco was refined like gold in the furnace. The premises of O'Connor, Moffatt & Company were totally destroyed. Three months later the business was flourishing again in a temporary structure at the northwestern corner of Pine street and Van Ness avenue. Three years later the firm returned to its old location on Post street where a new building provided enlarged quarters designed to antici-





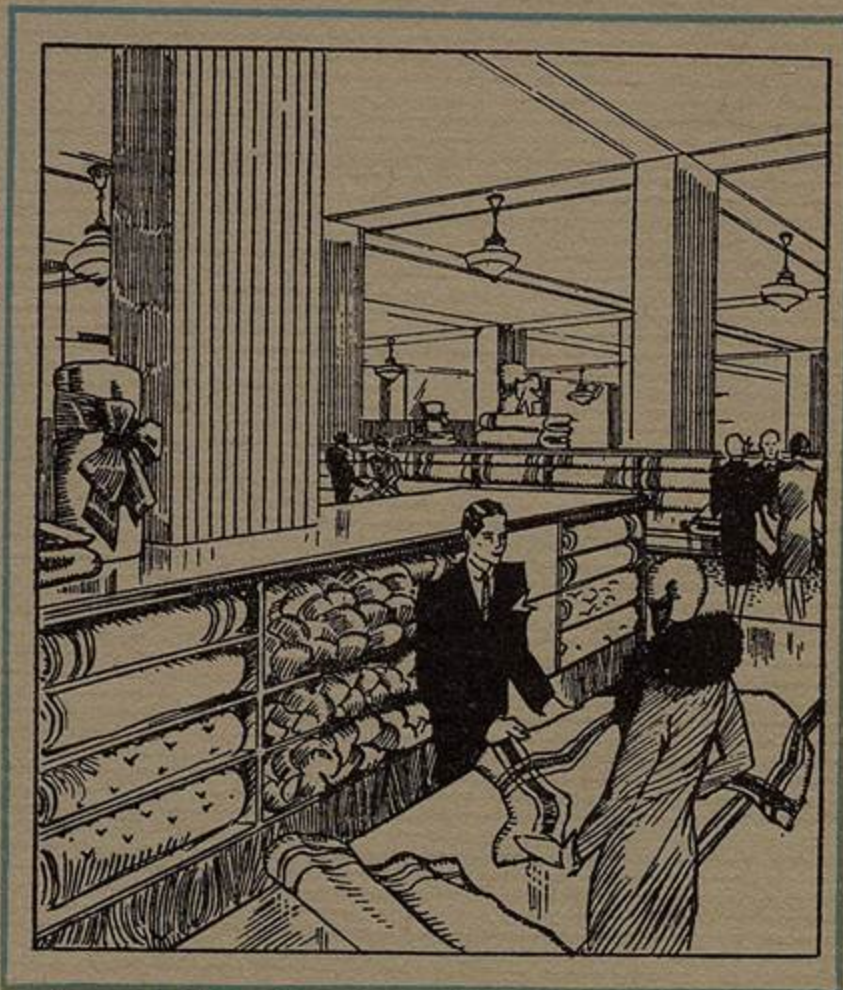
Imported damasks and cretonnes are but two attractions in a Drapery Department allied with the interior decorating salon

pate inevitable growth. But growth exceeded anticipation, and further enlargement became necessary, so the department store swung, as it were, upon a new axis and marched through opened walls to a second outlet on Kearny street. At the end of this era in O'Connor, Moffatt & Company's history—February 1929—the store occupied six large floors on Post street and nine on Kearny.

Meanwhile many changes had been taking place in the topography of San Francisco. Currents of movement changed with the changes in residential emphasis; wholesale and financial houses elbowed their way westward, pushing retail business before them.

At the beginning of the 80's, O'Connor, Moffatt & Company had





*In our Bedding Department the range of appeal is from
boudoir daintiness to the
most solid comfort*

“pioneered” on Post street. It was freely predicted that disaster would follow. Critics pointed to the Dasha-way Stables, a blacksmith shop, and numerous rooming houses, as undesirable neighbors that would repel shoppers and ruin even so solid a business as that of O’Connor, Moffatt & Company. As a matter of fact, O’Connor, Moffatt & Company developed Post into one of the shopping streets deemed worthy of mention with the finest in the world. Where this company “pioneered” other merchants found it advisable to follow.

And so, with the mobile life of San Francisco shifting to new focal points, the firm sensed the desirability of a new location as early as 1923. The problem was studied quietly yet steadily from several vantage points:





Bridge prizes, pottery, objects of art—these are among the offerings in our Lamp and Gift Shop

shoppers' convenience, city growth, both actual and potential, and merchandising trends.

O'Connor, Moffatt & Company had become a great department store with offices of its own in New York, and special representatives in London, Berlin, Chemnitz, Vienna, Florence, Brussels, Lyons and Belfast. Such an institution must not forget that basically its success depends upon suiting the convenience as well as the taste of its patrons. The entire structure of retail business is no stronger than the foundation laid and consolidated upon the good-will of the customer. Cordial relations over a long period of years with a great army of customers expedited the decision that O'Connor, Moffatt & Company should move westward to a home specially





Upon our Beauty Salon we have lavished all esthetic care, for we propose to make it the best of its kind

designed to meet every requirement of beauty and utility.

No sooner was that decision reached than the creation of the new O'Connor, Moffatt & Company began, and the new department store at the northwestern corner of Stockton and O'Farrell streets is the result.

The new building, a structure of eight stories occupying a lot with a frontage of 188.5 feet on O'Farrell, and of 137.5 feet on Stockton, was designed of sufficient strength to carry two additional stories. It is the work of the eminent architect, Lewis P. Hobart. Frederick Whitton was Manager of Construction. Planned in an adaptation of Gothic, and clothed entirely in terra-cotta, it is a distinguished addition to San Francisco architecture.



*This booklet was compiled on
the occasion of the opening of
our new store, Monday, March
Fourth 1929, at Stockton and
O'Farrell Streets, San Francisco*

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