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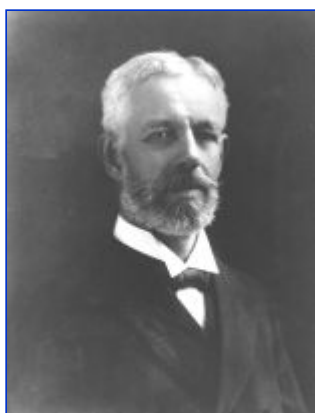
## The Library Associates

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# Mysterious Disappearance: Noted Professor of Berkeley Has Skipped. Said To Be Short in His Accounts.

**Mr. Elwin H. Covey, BS '49, MLS '67, "re-discovered" two items while weeding out his files recently.**



Joseph C. Rowell 1919.

A recent Bene Legere issue about UC's first university librarian, Joseph C. Rowell reminded Mr. Covey of these items that had been "buried" in his personal files for more than 50 years.

The first document was the UC Annual Announcement of Courses of Instruction in the Colleges at Berkeley for the Academic Year 1893-94, a 4.5" x 7" paper-bound booklet describing course offerings to Berkeley students. The second item was a handwritten 8" x 13" manuscript copy of a letter from the first University Librarian Joseph C. Rowell to UC Chemistry Professor and Dean Edmund O'Neill, dated October 21, 1906, transmitting an 8-page handwritten "skit." To the best of Mr. Covey's recollection, these items had been

discarded in a wastebasket in Gilman Hall when he was a student lab assistant in 1940-42 working for Chemical Engineering Professor Merle Randall.

It was Mr. Covey's hope that these items would not only be welcome additions to the collection, but also provide information on the more creative and "playful" side of Mr. Rowell's personality. We want to thank Mr. Covey for his generosity in sharing these glimpses of UC Berkeley campus life a century ago. Here, transcribed, is the text of Joseph C. Rowell's two-part skit.

Dear O'Neill-

If this little skit will serve to amuse you for ten minutes of your enforced leisure, I shall be much gratified.

Most sincerely yours,

J.C. Rowell

Oct. 21, 1906

From the "Morning Bawl"

Sept. 28, 1906

Mysterious Disappearance

Noted Professor of Berkeley  
Has Skipped.  
Said To Be Short in His Accounts.  
The College Town in a Ferment.  
President Wheeler Non-Committal.

Not since the great scandal attending the McKowan defalcation several years has such tremendous excitement reigned in Berkeley as in the last twenty-four hours. Society in general and the college faculty in particular are in a spasm of nervous apprehension over the sudden and total disappearance from their midst of Professor Edmund O'Neill, head of the Chemistry department.

Two days ago he was seen on a Key Route train about two o'clock P.M. bound for this city's line. He is known to have dined at four o'clock at Taste's and to have left about five-thirty; but his subsequent movements are unknown, although one intimate friend of the professor thought he saw him at the lower end of Market St. in the early evening.

All sorts of rumors are afloat. Some are of the opinion that the learned savant has met with foul play, has been the victim of one of the villainous thugs who are becoming so daring of late, thanks to the "innocuous desuetude" of our police and their fool chief. But the professor in person is greatly above the average in weight and bodily vigor, one whom the ordinary footpad would hesitate to attack; and if that calm, penetrative glance of his, energized by the strange qualities of radium, with which he has been experimenting so much, once fell upon a would-be robber, the latter would shrink from an encounter.

There certainly is no woman in the case. While a man of vivacious temperament and genial disposition—one apparently by nature most susceptible to the tender passion, he was ever regarded as a confirmed bachelor. Only recently, and after middle age he married one of the most charming and cultured of her sex, to whom he has shown unremitting devotion.

A more sinister rumor weighs on the heavy hearts of his friends. It is whispered that he is short in his accounts! It is well known that many thousands of dollars are paid annually as fees by students in the chemistry laboratories, but it is understood that such fees are paid in at the Secretary's office, so that it is not easy to see how a professor could lay hands on any amount worth consideration by one so well fixed in this world's goods, and enjoying so munificent a salary as Professor O'Neill. The sale of chemical supplies to students could yield only a dribbling sum.



O'Neill

For some years, however, he has been a Director of that choice coterie of college profs known as the Faculty Club, whose financial affairs have been descending from bad to worse under (it is said) the continued mismanagement of a frequently changed steward. But it may be ascertained later that his condition of the Club's finances is directly connected with the disappearance of O'Neill, which followed immediately in abortive attempt by its board of directors to float some thirteen or fourteen thousand dollars worth of bonds. The members, when questioned, seem to be ignorant of the exact purpose of these bonds, although they admit the necessity of rehabilitation by means of some such heroic measure.

Some slight clue as to the real reason of the professor's departure is shadowed dimly forth by the following facts. Two other active directors of the Club, holding office contemporaneously with O'Neill, were "Jerry" Landfield and "Billy" Armes. The former left Berkeley a few months ago for Russia, ostensibly to study the politics of that distracted czardom, but in reality, if recent reports are correct, to prosecute a successful suit for the hand of a princess of the royal family. Armes left only a fortnight ago for Harvard, on a leave of absence for the purpose of studying California literature-in Massachusetts!

For years these three have been inseparable friends, jovial members of the Bohemian Club, frequenters of cafes and the numerous joints favored by the haut ton of swelldom. While no reproach has ever rested upon any one of this famous triad for breach of manners or morals-yet they were indeed bon vivants, probably careless in their expenditures. And one of them has spent thousands in the enthusiasm of gathering a wonderful collection of curios, bric-a-brac, and Japanese prints.

It may not be deemed profitable to institute [an] extended search for the latest to depart of that trinity of talented professors, although the circumstances attending his disappearance are suspicious in the extreme. Meanwhile speculation is active, and, for the time-being, absorbs completely the thought of the entire college community.

From the "Evening Gulletin"

Sept. 30, 1906

The Mystery Clears.

Professor O'Neill

Buried Alive!

Startling and Wonderful Experiences

Stranger than any Fiction.

The wild rumors filling the press regarding the temporary disappearance of Professor O'Neill of California University are now set at rest.

Four evenings ago, after indulging in the few pleasures which our metropolis is at present able to offer suburbanities, he was about to step on a street car at the foot of Market St. when the earth suddenly opened and swallowed him, closing together immediately.

As O'Neill related to a "Gulletin" reporter, he fell only a short distance, but into a chasm of considerable extent, and of pitch darkness. Although much shaken and bruised, he did not lose his presence of mind, and began to feel about his strange quarters. But another earthslip precipitated him further, fortunately in soft ground. With characteristic sang froid he drew a somewhat damaged cheroot from a breast pocket, and, having lighted it, used the short-lived match to illumine feebly his surroundings. Apparently he was near the bottom of an extended cavern formed by the action of the April earthquake upon the "made" ground of this locality.

He set his nimble wits to work and by the time he had finished the cigar he had come to the conclusion that it would be impracticable to climb and force a way out upwards. What then? Why down, of course. He must be somewhere near the great Market St. sewer. If perchance it has been ruptured sufficiently, he thought, it might afford a chance of escape, provided it can be found. After carefully

counting the contents of his matchbox-sixteen short tapers in all, he began crawling and slipping downward, stopping once in a while to light a match and carefully scrutinize the sides and bottom of the pit which had entombed him. It was slow, anxious work-to an ordinary person the black silence would have been maddening.

No[t] so with O'Neill. The indomitable courage of his ancestor, a famous war marichal of France, certainly must have animated him as he groped blindly on. He began to hum snatches of the symphonies he had so recently enjoyed in the Greek Theater. He even told over-well-seasoned raconteur-some of his inimitable stories, and without an audience, laughed at them himself! He remembered the good dinners at the Faculty Club, and sturdily resolved they were worth a life struggle. This was too ignoble an end of things, and then, having preached cremation, should he not be allowed to practice it?

His hand touched something hard, moist and cold-was it a stone or a brick? Matches all burned, but-happy, lucky professor-he drew forth a cinder lined carton holding a bit of that precious metal radium, and by means of its steady efflorescence he discovered that he was in contact with the sewer brick. Further exploration brought him to a jagged opening, into which he crept, finding all flow of sewage completely stopped, and the air comparatively pure.

A long rest ensued, and another period of deliberation. He concluded that he could not escape from the lower end by swimming an unknown distance under water; and so, at last on his feet, he limped westerly until he reached a manhole. It was early dawn; no rumble of cars, no sharp clatter of hoofs on the pavement, drowned his shouts and whistles, which were heard finally by Sergeant Judkins, more than once distinguished during his connection with our police force. Assistance was summoned, and before long the professor was hauled to the surface-a badly battered man, worn out by his exertions, but fully conscious and clearheaded.

He insisted that not a word should be said of his wonderful escape, and wrote a batch of big checks to ensure the silence of his saviours. He was carried to a private launch, taken to the Oakland mole, thence conveyed in a closed carriage to his home Berkeley, before anybody in that sleepy town was awake. The reception by his wellnigh distracted family can be better imagined than described. His secret was carefully kept and for nearly twenty four hours no one of the stream of inquiring friends, who had already worn out the hall carpet, had the slightest suspicion of his presence under his own roof.

It remained for a "Gulletin" reporter to scent the truth. A faint aroma of carbolic salve, and the cheerful (suspiciously-cheerful-under-the-circumstances) look on the face of the maid who answered the bell, were all the reporter needed. He at once asked "When did Professor O'Neill return?," was pulled hastily into a side room, and later was allowed to learn the details of this marvelous adventure.

We are more than pleased to be able to publish exclusively the good word of the professor's escape. And we fancy the editor of our esteemed contemporary-"The Morning Bawl," so distinguished an example of modern yellow journalism-will not enjoy the necessity for a prompt withdrawal of the base insinuations against the professor's character which appeared in this issue of the 28th instant.

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