

Murder.

Death from an Abortion...The Body Exhumed... Result of a Post Mortem Examination... Arrest of Dr. Charles O'Donnell.

[Daily Alta California, Volume 23, Number 7630, 11 February 1871](#)

Mrs. Addie C. Hand, wife of Joseph W. Hand, died on the 7th instant, at No. 333 Clementina street, and was buried on the following day. Information was left at the Coroner's office on the day of the funeral, that the deceased had not come to her death from the result of disease. Coroner Letterman at once took steps to have the matter thoroughly investigated. The services of Detectives Sellenger and Jones were secured, and with the assistance of Thos. O'Brien, Esq., Coroner's Clerk, the truth in regard to Mrs. Hand's death has been brought to light.

The certificate sent to the Health Office states deceased was twenty years and seven months old, and that the cause of death was congestive chills. It was signed by a physician who, it seems, was called in to see Mrs. Hand just as she was dying. It was ascertained that Mrs. Hand told two women that a certain Doctor had produced an abortion. Coroner Letterman repaired to the Cemetery yesterday, and exhuming the body, held a post mortem examination. He found that an abortion had been produced, and that the uterus had been ruptured.

Last evening Dr. Charles O'Donnell was arrested by Detectives Sellengor and Jones, on suspicion of being connected with the case. No charge has yet been entered against him.

Abortion— Murder.

Coroner's Inquest in the Case of Mrs. Addie C Hand.....Positive Testimony Against Dr. O'Donnell.....Verdict of the Jury.

[Daily Alta California, Volume 23, Number 7631, 12 February 1871](#)

At half-past 10 o'clock yesterday morning, Coroner Letterman held an inquest in the case of Mrs. Addie C. Hand, who died on the 7th inst. Following is the testimony elicited:

TESTIMONY OF MISS JENNIE WEST.

I live at 412 Ellis street; I called to see Mrs. Hand on the Thursday before she died which was February 7th); she asked me if I would come on Friday and stay with her while she was sick; told her I would; went to see her on Friday noon; she said the doctor had not been to see her for two days; asked her what doctor she had; she said Dr O'Donnell; about half past 9 or 10 o'clock that (Friday) evening. Dr. O'Donnell came; she began purging; he said if he had been sent for sooner he could have stopped it; I asked him if we might give her anything to relieve her; he replied we might give her ten drops of laudanum; the doctor came again Saturday morning, about half-past 9; she told him she felt very bad and weak, and would like something to relieve her; he said she needed nothing. as she was getting along nicely; he asked her if she felt any soreness in her bowels; she said she did, a good deal; he told us then to apply hot fermentations, which we did; Saturday evening the Doctor came about the same hour; he said we would have to watch her very close that night, that there would be a change about twelve o'clock: he said he had fears of congestion setting in; had a conversation with Mrs Hand as to the cause of her sickness; she told me that she had been to Dr. O'Donnell's and had an operation performed on her; she stated she was [enceinte](#) [pregnant]; she said she had been to see him twice; She said the operation had been performed with instruments both times; he told her to take care of herself not to take cold, and not to pat her hands in cold water; asked her why she did not have another doctor: she said she was afraid that they would suspect if she told them she had had Dr. O'Donnell; heard Dr. O'Donnell tell her that if she mentioned his name to another doctor, and that she had an operation performed it would disgrace herself and husband; Dr. O'Donnell asked me to leave the room, but I did not do it; he desired to make an examination; this occurred on Saturday night; he also made an examination on Sunday night; he did so every time he came; Mrs. Hand died on Monday.

TESTIMONY OF MRS. VICTORIA HAND

I live at 18 Prospect Place; am a sister-in-law by marriage to Mrs. Addie C. Hand; before she was taken sick in bed she told me what the trouble was with her; she said she was enceinte; this was seventeen days before she died; I was paying her a friendly visit; we were together in her room; she suddenly turned around, called me by name, and said, "don't you tell anybody if I tell you something:" I said "no." not thinking what it was; I said to her, "What is it?" she then told me she had been to see Dr O'Donnell; I asked her, "Why, what is the matter?" she then told me she was enceinte, and that she had been to him to have an abortion produced; she said it had been done the day before, and that Dr. O'Donnell had told her if that did not have the desired effect to come again in a few days; asked her if she would go again; she said certainly she would; as I started to leave, she whispered in my ear, and told me to keep what she had told me a secret; I said to her, "Oh, how bad you are, Addie, you endanger your life;" asked her what her reasons were that she did not desire to become a mother again? she said her husband could not afford it; asked her if her husband was aware of what she had done? she said no, and that she would not tell him until it was all over; saw her again two weeks before she died at my house; asked her how she felt: she said she was going to see O'Donnell again ; told her not to go, that once was enough; she said no, that O'Donnell had told her to come again, and she would do it; she had gone so far and would go through with it; she said, " For mercy's sake don't let another know it;" the next evening I went with my husband to see her; she was quite well; she came to my house the day following; mother started out of the room; Addie then said to me, "Vic I feel very sick ; what will you do with me?" told her I would put her to bed and keep her warm until she could go home ; presently mother came in and said, " Why, Addie. what is the matter with you ?" she replied that she had done two weeks' washing and then came up to our house, which made her feel very tired ; she remained for supper, and then asked my husband to go home with her ; offered her my cloak, but she refused it ; a week before she died her husband told me Addie was very sick and that she had the chills all day ; went to see her, and her husband asked her if the doctor had called ; she said, "No; it is very mean of him ; he knows that I am sick ;" her husband said he would go for the doctor, and I was left alone with her; asked her what doctor she had ; she said O'Donnell ; asked her why she did not have another dootor ; she said he knew her condition better than any one else ; the next day I called to see her again ; asked her how she felt ; she said no better, and that the doctor had come after I left the evening previous ; he told her she was suffering from inflammation and that the abortion had had the desired effect, but that the abortion had nothing to do with her sickness ; she said O'Donnell had given her a powder, which made her feel very sick ; she said the doctor had been kind to her ; also that he acknowledged to her that he committed the deed on Eugenia Chauvette, and that she, like a fool, had caught cold ; he told Addie if she did not take care of herself and keep her hands out of cold water, she would meet the same fate ; she said the

washing she had done had given her the cold, but that she believed Dr. O'Donnell would bring her out of it all right ; that was the last time I ever saw her alive.

After a few minutes' deliberation, the jury rendered the following

VERDICT

We, the undersigned jurors, convened to inquire into the cause of the death of Adelaide Hand, do find that the deceased was a native of Connecticut, aged 20 years, and that she came to her death from peritonitis and enteritis, consequent upon an abortion having been produced upon her in the city of San San Francisco on or about January 20th, 1871, by Dr. C.C. O'Donnell. (signed) John J. Sweeny, Geo. T. Allen, Augustus Ludorf. B. M. Whiting, S. Richard, Z. Hammer. San Francisco, Feb. 11th, 1871.

CORONER'S WARRANT.

City and County of San Francisco; the People of the State of California. To any Sheriff, Constable, Marshal or Policeman in this State: An inquisition having been, this say, found by a Coroner's jury, before me, stating Adelaide C. Hand has come to her death by the act of C. C. O'Donnell, by criminal means, be having produced an abortion on her, in consequence of which she came to her death. You are. therefore, commanded forthwith to arrest the above C. C. O'Donnell, and take him before the nearest or most accessible Magistrate in this city and county. Given under my hand this 11th day of February, 1871. J. Letterman, Coroner.

DR. FERRIS' STATEMENT

At the request of Dr. Ferris, who was called in to attend to Mrs Hand, we give his statement in regard to the affair: On Monday night, the 6th instant, between 10 and 11 o'clock, I was called upon by Mr Hand, who told me that his wife was very sick, and that he required my services and those of another physician. I told him to go for Dr. Carman, and in the meantime I went to the house. I refused to give an opinion or any directions, other than to order some stimulants, until another physician was present. The husband returned without Dr. Carman, and I sent him for Dr. Chase, with whom he returned in a short time. Dr. Chase and myself examined the patient, and arrived at the conclusion that there was a congestive chill, and we prescribed medicines accordingly. Dr. O'Donnell was present, and we questioned him to learn the history of the case, but we declined to consult with him because we do not consider him a respectable physician.

Abortion

Preliminary Examination of Dr. Charles C. O'Donnell, on a Charge of Murder.

[*Daily Alta California, Volume 23, Number 7640, 21 February 1871*](#)

At half-past two o'clock yesterday afternoon, the case of Dr. Charles C. O'Donnell, for the alleged murder of Mrs. Addie C. Hand by producing an abortion, was called up in the Police Court. Prosecuting Attorney Louderback appeared for the People, and Messrs. Murphy and Dudley for the defense. At the request of the defense, all witnesses but the one on the stand were excluded from the Court room.

Coroner Letterman, sworn— As Coroner, I hold an inquest in the case of Mrs. Addie Hand; had the body disinterred at the Odd Fellows' Cemetery, last Friday week, to make an investigation; Dr. Bentley made a post mortem examination in my presence: at that time the cavity of the abdomen was examined, and the womb taken out; the body was in a pretty good state of preservation; in the cavity of the abdomen were found from four to six ounces of pus and serum the lining of the membrane peritoneum showing that there had been a high degree of inflammation, also in the intestines; the ovaries were both filled with pus; there was a large sack of pus in the pelvis: think on the right side; on opening the womb on the back of the neck there was found an injury about half the size of an ordinary pea; the womb was enlarged to the extent of one-half the size of a hen egg, perhaps larger, over its normal condition; at the top of the womb, inside, and attached very firmly, was what appeared to me to be a portion of the after birth; the death of the woman was, in my opinion, caused by the intense inflammation of the womb and other viscera of the abdomen; the next day I had the body brought to the Coroner's office, and the viscera of the chest was examined: they were found to be healthy: I discovered nothing more about the case than I have described; cannot tell what produced the inflammation except the injury of the womb; my opinion, based on an examination of the remains of the after birth, is that the woman was pregnant; could not tell anything from the breast: from the looks of the injury, my opinion is that it was produced by mechanical means; could not tell whether an abortion had taken place, except what I have stated; the inflammation was excited by the injury to the womb; the only way the injury could have been produced was by introducing an instrument into the neck of the womb; think the woman was in a state of pregnancy— six to eight weeks;

the cause of the expulsion of the fetus, if there was one, was the mechanical injury to the womb; judge there was a fetus from the afterbirth, which I noticed, firmly attached to the womb.

Cross examined— A fetus is a young child; did not examine it with a glass: don't know how long the woman was dead; if the afterbirth had been removed and shown to me on a plate, I would have known what it was; have heard of afterbirths renewing with a woman who has had children: calomel given to a woman as medicine, would not have produced inflammation the same as in this case; in a woman who might die from the result of inflammation of the bowels, the inflammation might extend to the womb; could not tell whether the puncture in the womb was produced with a sharp or obtuse instrument in this case; there was no inflammation at the puncture: think it was a comparative recent puncture; think it would be difficult for a finger to be introduced into the womb; do not think a finger could be introduced to the place where the puncture was; a knitting needle or common wire could have produced this injury; made the post mortem examination at the request of Dr. Blach; no one else requested me to do so; don't know Dr. O'Donnell; Dr. Blach was not present at the post mortem; observed no other injury than the one I have described.

Dr. Edwin Beatty, sworn. — Made the post mortem examination; found the body in a reasonable state of preservation; found inflammation of the ovaries; suppuration and pus in the pelvis; some blood in the uterus. which was somewhat enlarged; the neck of the uterus was open; found some blood in the womb; at the upper portion, the fundus of the womb. there was a thickened membrane, which, in my opinion, indicated that the woman had been pregnant from six weeks to two months; at the neck of the womb there was an indentation, made by some blunt instrument; saw no evidence of violence which indicated that the instrument entered the womb; saw no other injury except the indentation of the os uteri, in my opinion death was produced by inflammation of the womb, caused by exposure in her condition, and that she took a cold; my impression is that a fetus was expelled in this case: the hemorrhage or flow from the abortion caused the inflammation; in my opinion it resulted from an abortion; the introduction of the blunt instrument was a step toward the abortion; that injury to the neck of the womb alone wouldn't, in my opinion, have produced the abortion.

Cross-Examined— The injury did not produce any laceration; it was simply an indentation; the nail of a finger would have produced laceration.

Dr. J. Regensburger, sworn— Am a practicing physician; saw Addie C. Hand in her lifetime on Clementina street; saw several ladies there; on February 6th, I went to this house for the first time: examined the patient, and found her almost pulseless and in a

dying condition; found a poultice on the upper, and another one on the lower part of the abdomen: told them I could do nothing: did not see Dr. O'Donnell there; could not tell what she was suffering from; supposed she had some inflammation.

Dr. Ferris, sworn— Saw Addie C. Hand when she was dying; was called to see her at 10 P. M.; found Dr. O'Donnell there: this was on the 6th of February; found the lady in a moribund state; refused to give any expression of opinion until another physician was called in; Dr. Chase was sent for; we made an examination of her pulse; passing the hand over the abdomen we came to the conclusion that she was suffering from congestion; Dr. O'Donnell said he had been attending her a week and a day, that she had inflammation of the bladder, then inflammation of the bowels, then typhoid fever, and then inflammation of the stomach; he had given her aromatic spirits of ammonia, calomel, and laudanum; saw her the morning after her death; did not examine her after death; if I had not been misled, I would have made further examination.

Miss Jennie West was the next witness called, and testified to the number of times she saw Dr. O'Donnell call on Mrs. Hand during her illness. The main point of her testimony was as follows : Dr. O'Donnell told Mrs. Addie Hand, in my hearing, that if another doctor was called in she must not say anything about the operation which had been performed; that if she said anything about it, it would disgrace her and get her husband into trouble. At half-past four o'clock the further hearing of the case was postponed until today.

Dr. Charles C. O'Donnell

[Glen Ellen Historical Society](#)

Dr. Charles C. O'Donnell was a controversial figure, whose impact on Glen Ellen is felt to this day. He was born in Baltimore, Maryland in 1835, and came to San Francisco in 1854, where he established his medical practice by the early 'Sixties. Although he was charged with "conduct unbecoming an officer" in the National Guard and arrested for murder in what appears to have been failed abortions in the early 'Seventies, he was acquitted of all these charges and went on to become a successful businessman.

O'Donnell helped organize the Workingmen Party, and served as a San Francisco delegate to the second California Constitutional Convention in 1878-79. There he argued vehemently against Charles Stuart, a delegate from Glen Ellen who strongly defended the Chinese.

In 1891 O'Donnell arrived in Glen Ellen to build a luxurious summer home called Cozy Castle, where he lived with his wife Emma and their son George, as well as in San Francisco where he continued to maintain his practice. He built an extensive mineral springs resort along Sonoma Creek in what became the O'Donnell Tract, which was described in detail in the 1898 atlas published by Reynolds & Proctor.

In 1903 coal and clay suitable for brick and pottery was discovered on his Glen Ellen property, and work began on constructing kilns in partnership with Joshua Chauvet, another early Glen Ellen entrepreneur. The California Brick and Pottery Company was organized in San Francisco with a capital of \$40,000, under the operation of C. Hidaker and Joshua Chauvet's son, Henry. The plant was capable of making 40,000 bricks per day at first, but by 1905 the kilns were firing 250,000 bricks.

Charles O'Donnell died May 1912 in San Francisco, at the age of 77.