

Goodnight 245 Market

by Scott Bogunia

In 1834 the brothers Donahue—Peter, Michael, and James—immigrated to the Americas aboard ship with their parents from Glasgow, Scotland. Working as boilermakers and machinists in the steel mills of Patterson NJ in the 1840's, older brothers Peter and Micheal sailed to “gold-rush” San Francisco, to ply their trade and make their way in the world.i

James followed shortly afterward, and the brothers opened a blacksmith shop at First & Mission. It expanded to a foundry called Union Iron Works. In time it would become the largest ship building operation on the West coast.

In the 1840's the streets of San Francisco were dark, except for the oil lamps lighting Merchant Street. Although, in the early 1850's, manufactured gas was introduced on the East Coast as a means of lighting. The brothers Donahue took notice. While running Union Iron Works with Joseph Eastland, a foundry engineer and clerk, they began gathering as much information as they could about “making gas.” In 1852 James applied for and received a franchise, from the Council of San Francisco, to erect a gasworks—to lay pipes in the streets and install streetlamps to light the city with “brilliant light.”ii

The Donahue brothers and Eastland incorporated the San Francisco Gas company on August 31, 1852. It became the first gas utility in the West. Its seal bore the inscription “Fiat Lux”—let there be light! The San Francisco Gas company was the forerunner to our beloved Pacific Gas & Electric Company, and by February 11, 1854, San Francisco was the first city on the West coast to have gas street lighting.iii

Leveraging their successful business, the Donahue's built railroads and shipping lines throughout California, and even began the first streetcar line.

From 1923-25 the Pacific Gas & Electric Company headquarters was built at 245 Market Street. The 17-story building is clad in terra cotta on its exterior and complements the neighboring Matson Building. Later PG&E absorbed other power companies. After the Great Depression and WWII, PG&E needed even more space in its headquarters. So, it expanded and built an annex to their original building, and designed it to match the original architecture.^{iv}

This headquarters now resides on the National Register of Historic Places.

Much history has been created by PG&E in the Bay area since the brothers first started laying pipe, just south of Market Street. And now the company relocates to Oakland, to begin the next chapter, in an industry of providing energy to the West.

ⁱ https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/105749731/james-m_-donahue

ⁱⁱ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pacific_Gas_and_Electric_Company

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/105249807/peter-donahue>

^{iv} https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pacific_Gas_and_Electric_Company_General_Office_Building_and_Annex