

**DAMIAN L. REYNOLDS**  
**A MAN WITH IDEAS**  
by  
**Walter B. Petersen<sup>1</sup>**

He was man of ideas. And one of these ideas found fruition in the organization of Sons In Retirement. That story you probably know for it has been previously and well told.

In 1968 JOHN BRAUNER, Historian of then Peninsula Branch #1, prepared "A Brief History of Peninsula Branch #1, Sons In Retirement," which ably relates the incidents and events leading up to the formation of the parent branch of SIRdom to which all thirty-four branches of 1971 owe their parentage. From the initial meeting on July 23, 1958 when nine members attended<sup>2</sup> it, total membership has grown to nearly 8,000<sup>3</sup>. Thus Sons In Retirement stands as a mighty monument to a man with an idea, and yet of the man himself little has been told. This all too brief account reveals a few of the facets of this complex and effective human being.

DAMIAN L. REYNOLDS was a man of ideas. This characteristic was dominant in his life. His life had many other sides, too, but were you to be held to a brief description of him you would ever return to that thought - "He was a man of and with ideas."

He once said, "I never buy anything I can make." He believed it important for man to express himself through the use of his hands. He had a modest machine shop in his garage. He built a furnace for melting brass and aluminum. From metal so melted he cast and finished most of the hardware used in his home, high in the hills of Hillsborough.

That home was itself a product of a man with ideas. The home was designed, the plans were drawn by Damian. He personally acted as contractor and in the four months which he took off from his regular employment he nearly completed this 14 room home, a home which, though now thirty three years old, incorporated most of the modern home conveniences of the sixties. These items were not available and on the market in 1927 but Damian had ideas of what his home should incorporate, and the skills to produce them himself.

The lighting fixtures, both wall and chandelier, in the Reynolds home were of Damian design. The artistic theme in wrought iron of these was repeated in the fire screens and stair railings. He designed and built a burglar alarm which gave entry warning for every window and door of the house. He built a soda fountain which was a joy for his two children, a daughter, Maxine and a son Robert, and all the kids in the neighborhood. The spacious terraced garden was watered by a sprinkler system the timing control system of which he designed and built and

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<sup>1</sup> Editor of Sons In Retirement "YES SIR," April 1971, Vol. 12, No. 2. 838 Bridge Rd., San Leandro, CA 94577

<sup>2</sup> From BRAUNER: "The luncheon meeting of the four founders was held at the Clarimar Restaurant in San Mateo, on June 23, 1958. At this meeting...it was decided to hold another luncheon meeting..." which was held on July 23, 1958 at which the four founders and five other men attended. These nine men are known as "Charter Members."

<sup>3</sup> 32000 members in 1990 and 170 Branches in 2002

on which he held several patents. This, too, he did before such items were available on the market. His hedges were trimmed with a motor driven cutter of his own design and manufacture.

Possibly Damian Reynolds came by his inventive genius through the genes transmitted to him from his ancestors who were of Scotch-English extraction. There is, however, some evidence to indicate that his ingenious use of ideas was a product of the years of his youth. Certain it is that those years of near poverty sharpened his mind to the necessity of using every resource of his imagination and hands.

Damian Reynolds, the eldest of five brothers, was born on a small farm in Beocia Township, Spink County, South Dakota on December 19, 1888. It was a rigorous life, for the farm provided only provided the barest of necessities. When Damian was eight years old the family came west and for two years lived on a place in the Fruitvale District near Lincoln, California. The next move was to Ophir on the road between Marysville and Grass Valley, which was once the center of a booming quartz mining district. Here Damian's father worked in the mines for several years. There also lived in Ophir at that time a beautiful young girl, Adelia Lininger, but it is quite certain that Damian did not know her then. Years later he did, however. She was even more beautiful by then and in 1913 the two started a happy married life which lasted for fifty-two years.

In 1900, when Damian was twelve, the family moved to Auburn where two of Damian's brothers, Leslie H. and Walter A., still reside. A third surviving brother is Lloyd, a resident of Sacramento.

Damian finished high school in Auburn and then went to Berkeley where he enrolled in Mechanical and Civil Engineering School of the University of California. With Damian's bent one could have expected a brilliant record. Such was not the case, however, for the specified and restricted areas of study of the curriculum at Berkeley did not allow Damian the play he needed for the originality of his mind, and Damian became a "drop-out."

There now followed years of moving from one job to the other, as building projects were engineered and finished. It was these years of diversification, working on all kinds of projects and with many eminent architects and contractors which gave Damian the practical education he needed and wanted. This the University could not supply to this innovative restless young man. He worked on the construction of the Marina power generating station for the Sierra and San Francisco Power Company later absorbed by Pacific Gas and Electric Company. He worked with Willis Polk, probably San Francisco's leading architect of the day, who was designing the P.G.&E. steam generating plant in Sacramento at that time.

He worked for the Mountain Quarries Company of Auburn, for Sloan and Robson Civil Engineers in San Francisco, for Arthur L. Adams another of San Francisco's Civil Engineers. Thus was the mind of Damian honed on the stone of experience without blunting the originality of a creative mind.

Between jobs Damian returned to Auburn where the lovely Adelia was living at the time, and where on October 11, 1914 she became his bride. The work at Brentwood where he was employed at the time of his marriage was soon finished. When an offer from the State Reclamation Board was received the young couple moved to Sacramento. He spent a short time with the Civil Service Commission and then took what looked like the ultimate of jobs, a

position in the Engineering Department of the City of Sacramento, which was at that time involved in projected improvements in its water and sewage facilities. But Damian figured without the vicissitudes of politics. When the next city election was held the incumbents were out and so was Damian. This was a low point for the newly married couple which they met in a most resourceful way. Damian's father had acquired an old Stanley Steamer which had given up, The boiler was made of copper and this Damian retrieved from the chassis and sold to a junk man. With the five dollars thus acquired the brave young couple went to Brockway on Lake Tahoe where Damian worked as a carpenter for Lawrence Comstock, who was building a large hotel on the lake. They lived in a shack and the winter winds came through the chinks in the walls. It was a rugged life but it was work and even here Damian was gaining experience by doing. His belief that "experience is the best teacher" was amply confirmed.

World War I draft brought another interlude in Damian's life. Since flat feet impressed military more than a brilliant mind, Damian was hastily returned to the nations work force. Possibly it was just as well for there was so much to do and Damian's ingenuity was probably better used in the nation's work and war effort.

Then Damian, through the efforts of one of his earlier employers, who held his abilities in high regard, found employment with Pacific Fruit Express. These were happy and congenial years, with every opportunity to utilize the inventive genius which was his. It was during these years that a number of inventions were patented, which assured him an income for the rest of his life. The development and application of a non-pilferable bulkhead for refrigerator cars was particularly profitable to his company and to Damian too. It was during these years that Damian took the four months leave and built his Hillsborough home described earlier.

Years later when fourteen rooms were too large, the home was put on the market. Within a short time Damian took it off. As Mrs. Reynolds explained it: "He took it off the market because he feared it would sell" - so, attached was Damian to this home. Eventually it was sold, but there must have remained a regret in his mind, for this was the product of his own ingenuity, almost a part of the man himself.

For sixteen years he worked for Pacific Fruit Express. By then the country was in the depressed years and Pacific Fruit, like others, were laying off men. Here Damian made a decision which reveals the deep concern and compassion he held for fellow man. His security, founded on continuing patent royalties he felt sufficient. He therefore asked that he be retired so that some younger, less secure man, might be retained. These concerns he again showed clearly when he stated his reasons why retired men should develop an organization such as Sons In Retirement.

Not long after this he accepted what was to be a six week temporary job with Columbia Steel Company. The six weeks grew to twelve, and on to six years when finally Damian retired at fifty five years of age.

He now turned his mind and hand to his hobbies, a photography laboratory, the repair of watches and clocks, particularly ancient ones, which needed new parts, which he skillfully made on his precision lathe. He became active in fraternal circles, the Shrine, the Jesters and served as President of the Peninsula Shrine Club. In spite of these activities there was still something missing in the retired life of Damian Reynolds. It was the loss of companionship with the

business man, with plant associates, with engineers, with those with whom he had worked, and most of all with those who made the country run by the output of their minds and hands.

From his years of trial, through the years of affluence, Damian Reynolds steadfastly knew that the true worth of the world lies in the friendship of man for his fellow man. This he held more valuable than the earthly goods that he had acquired. This thought, this idea he wove deep into the fabric design of our organization, Sons In Retirement.

The last twelve years of Damian's life were a torment. Operation followed operation. Treatments tortured his body and mind. Through it all Damian's courage and resourcefulness carried him from one day to the next. Each day was a new one with new opportunities for service to his fellow man and a challenge to his active mind.

Most of us in Sons In Retirement knew him only in those years and appreciate his greatness under adversity.

A few days before his death on August 24, 1965, he wrote a letter to the members of: Peninsula Branch #1, the birth of which he midwifed, and which he ably served as the first Big Sir. "I have received dozens of cards, letters and phone calls, messages filled with the kindest and most sympathetic wishes for my recovery. I want you to know the cheer and comfort your acts of kindness have given me." So to, the end, Damian's thoughts were with Sons In Retirement and his host of friends.

Peninsula Branch #1, as such, is no more. It has been renamed Damian Reynolds branch by unanimous vote of Peninsula's membership. Thus is Damian's name and life honored not by a bronze plaque or stone monument but by a living, growing monument Sons In Retirement.

*Note: Scanned from a poor copy of "Sons In Retirement 'YES SIR' April 1971." No changes were made in syntax or punctuation. Dwight B. Sale, 109 La Mesa Drive, Burlingame, CA 94010-5919, 650-344-4958. November 15, 1997*