

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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A Scholar's Progress

To continue with the story of young Thomas Oliver Larkin's education in the Sandwich Islands is to tell of the letter received by his father in Monterey saying that the child now seven years old has made such progress that he has been rewarded. Mr. Johnstone relates in a letter:

"During play-hours he amuses himself very contentedly with a something called a velocipede, having three wheels, which Mrs. Johnstone bought for him because of his being so attentive to his book." A velocipede was a small boy's plaything in the Hawaiian Islands even before gold was discovered in California.

The Johnstones had living with them in their home nine boys including Oliver, and their day school was prospering. In this number were sons of well-known California families – the children of the Coopers, Spence, Watson, Wilson, Fitch, et al., who shortly thereafter were joined by a son and daughter of the Kinlocks of Monterey.

Within seven months Oliver was making excellent progress in his school work, studying Worcester's Second Reader and Parley's Spelling Book, and writing words on his slate.

Two years passed before another letter discloses Johnstone's plan concerning Oliver's education. By this time the boy has commenced Blake's geography and his teacher requests Larkin to send "a few copies of Bancroft's History of the United States (abridged edition) which... will undoubtedly benefit our young people."

In the two years intervening in the Johnstone-Larkin correspondence according to the Pomona College bulletin, there occurred an event of profound significance to education in Honolulu and, less directly, to education in California, the founding of the Punahou School in Honolulu. Founded by the Sandwich Islands Mission May 12, 1841, the school was opened July 12, 1842 for the sons and daughters of American missionaries. From humble beginnings, with an original enrollment of 15 boarding and 19 day pupils, rapidly increased by the opening of the school in 1851 to scholars from the whole community, its 9,000 alumni

and nearly 100 years of service testify to its valuable contribution to education.

In 1844 the Johnstones left the Oahu Charity School and started a private school. Meanwhile in California events had transpired which led the U.S. government in 1843 to appoint Thomas O. Larkin, U.S. Consul to California. Oliver's reaction to this honor conferred upon his father and other evidences of his developing personality are admirably shown in the following letter:

Oahu, June 25, 1844.

My dear Father and Mother:

Father I am very glad to write you a letter... You know that once a month an American man-of-war is coming here and then going to Monterey. What a fine chance for the California boys to go home and Mother what a good time for me to go and see you when Father writes for me. I think you will say, Are you learning fast Oliver? I am trying very hard. I am glad to hear that my dear Father is really United States Consul now I think that he will have guns fired by every English and American man-of-war. I cannot tell you how much I want to see you and my dear Mother and brothers and sisters. I think if I had wings like a bird I would fly there very quick. Father is it well for little boys to have wings?

Father do you know that Mrs. Johnstone is keeping a private school? She has 30 scholars, 14 girls and the rest are boys... I read and spell and write and cypher and learn geography. I have cyphered in addition and subtraction and multiplication. I think it is very hard. Father when you were a little boy like me did you like to cypher?

Mrs. Johnstone gives me money sometimes when I ask her but I like the money that you send me the best.

Mrs. Johnstone bought me a little watch for \$1.87 but it does not go. When I get a watch that goes I shall send this to Frederick. Dear Father and Mother do write me a long letter. I shall write you again by the next ship.

Your affectionate son,

Thomas Oliver Larkin, Jun.

(In the next installment Thomas Oliver Larkin comes home.)