

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

December 18, 1951

Papers, Petitions, And a Manifesto

Two early-day personages in Monterey will be discussed in today's Diary – Governor Jose Figueroa and Alexander H. Taylor. Figueroa was governor under Mexican rule from 1833 until 1835, coming to Monterey to assume the office from Sonora, Mexico, where he was for many years the commandante-general. Taylor was the first bibliographer of California. He came to the state with the earliest motley and variegated band of adventurers – though never of it – and lived in Monterey until 1860 when he went to Santa Barbara to reside.

In 1835 Governor Figueroa caused to be printed a manifesto to the Mexican republic in regard to his conduct and that of Snrs. D. Jose Maria de Hijars and D. Jose Maria Padres, directors of colonization in 1833 and 1834. The manifesto was printed in the office of citizen Agustin B. Zamorano. From the Spanish language, it was later translated into English by Alexander H. Taylor and reprinted at the San Francisco Herald office in 1855.

One of the most cherished and valued possessions in the historical collection of Thomas W. Norris of Carmel is an original copy of this translation made by Taylor in Monterey. The original printing in Spanish had been made by Agustin V. Zamorano as has been stated. He was the first printer in California for he established himself in Monterey in 1834, coming from Mexico as the executive secretary of the Territory of Alta California and served 11 years as second administrative officer. For six years he also commanded the most important military post within the territory, the Presidio of Monterey.

In a peculiar way Alexander H. Taylor was a collector of historical material, and in this perhaps, we are most gratefully indebted to him. Aside from his collecting habits, he often contributed to the Monterey Sentinel while it was being published in Monterey from June 1, 1855 to June 1, 1856. His contributions were mostly writings concerning mining, agriculture, weather and historical data pertaining to the Indians and first citizens of Monterey. He wrote of first baptisms, first marriages and the deaths of prominent personages, thus leaving a valuable record to the historians of today.

While in Monterey Taylor acquired a large collection of Spanish documents relating to the history of California from 1770 to 1846, among which were some 40 to 50 letters written by padre Junipero Serra. There were 6,000 documents in this collection alone, 800 of which were known to have been dated before 1800, and 4,500 before 1840. The collection was offered by Taylor to Congress. He required no remuneration but petitioned that Congress permit the publication of them under his supervision.

Congresses before and since have been supremely indifferent, and the Congress of 1854, evidently believed that consistency is a jewel, according to a report of the transaction published in the Quarterly of the California Historical Society. After vainly waiting for three years Taylor presented the collection to the Archbishop of the Catholic church in California and in the diocesan residence in San Francisco they rest – a priceless collection.

Another collection of Alexander Taylor also of great historical value, was burned in the San Francisco fire of 1906. In this collection was a gathering of 400 specimen newspapers printed in California from 1846 until 1854. With these were several proclamations printed in Monterey by Zamorano on his Spanish press between 1834 and 1844, one of which was in all probability the Figueroa manifesto. Taylor had presented this collection to the Mercantile Library. His personal library was sold by him to the University of California about 1871 or 1872.

Taylor owned a drug store in Monterey during his life here and is often spoken of by Bayard Taylor, Bancroft and others. He was born in Charleston, S.C., on April 16, 1817. He came to California from Hong Kong in the brig "Pacific" landing at Monterey on Sept. 8, 1848. He married the daughter of Daniel Hill of Santa Barbara whose wife was Rafaela Olivera de Ortega.

(More tomorrow)