

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

February 19, 1951

The Zamorano Club

Interest in Californiana was not a passing fancy with the Centennial years. It did not start with those years nor will it end now that 1950, the last of the three centennial years, has passed. There is so much to learn about the Golden State and so much that has never appeared in print, hidden away among old letters, old papers, diaries and the like. And may the supply never cease!

In 1928 in the City of Los Angeles there was organized a club, composed solely of men, who wanted to study and enjoy the arts of the book. They named the group the Zamorano Club, in honor of California's first printer. Zamorano lived in Monterey in 1825 as the executive secretary of the territory of Alta California and served for 11 years thereafter as second administrative officer. In addition he commanded for six years the most important military post within the territory, the Presidio at Monterey.

Zamorano imported the first printing press to be set up west of the Rocky Mountains and on it printed a series of small books and official proclamations that are the rarest of California imprints.

When the Zamorano Club was organized it had become a favorite occupation of collectors to prepare bibliographies of books in their field – Californiana was no exception. For this reason the club decided to publish a list of distinguished books on the subject and called it the Zamorano Eighty.

One of the members, Phil Townsend Hanna, has previously published *Libros Californianos, or Five Feet of California Books*. Three fellow members each prepared a list of "the 20 rarest and most important books dealing with the history of California." The author then selected his own 25. Since all these contributors were members of the club it was decided that a list of 100 books could be assembled, the titles of which would be agreeable to each of them as well [as] three others in the club – one of which was Robert Glass Cleland of the Huntington Library staff.

Lists were prepared by each, except Robert E. Cowan, who was ill. Other members besides Cleland, Cowan and Hanna were J. Gregg Layne, Robert J. Woods, Leslie E. Bliss, Henry R. Wagner and Homer D. Crotty.

When the books listed were checked it was found that there was not a majority in any list of the books found in any other list. So a dinner meeting was held in the hopes of getting a common agreement. After a great deal of discussion a few in excess of 100 was agreed upon. Almost immediately the list began to fall apart when the men, on second thought, decided they didn't agree that some of the books should be included in the list.

After sifting the charges and counter charges, it was discovered that by the elimination of those books which had been published within 25 years (except the Anza diaries), the objectionable items would be taken care of. Then, having the feeling that a list of 80 distinguished books upon which all agreed heartily would be more desirable than a list of 100 acquiesced in reluctantly, a second list was prepared and a second dinner was held, reports Homer D. Crotty in the foreword to the *Zamorano 80 – a Selection of Distinguished California Books, Made by Members of the Zamorano Club*.

It is doubtful whether there are many libraries in the United States where all the books in the Zamorano Eighty will be found, but we hope most of them will be found in the libraries on the Peninsula. The emphasis was made by the club on distinguished books and not on books of great rarity.

Few histories are represented in the list. The great names in California literature have been selected – Bret Harte, Mark Twain, Richard Henry Dana, Helen Hunt Jackson, Mary Austin, Frank Norris, Ina Coolbrith, Joaquin Miller and John Muir. There will be found the ocean voyages, material on the Spanish and Mexican periods, the overland travels, the transition years, 1846-1850, the days of gold and the decade preceding the first World War.