

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Random Reveries

The Book Club of California publishes a Quarterly News Letter, the Spring edition of which has just been received by the membership. In the current issue is an article entitled, "Some Random Reveries of a San Francisco Antiquarian Bookman," by Harold C. Holmes, which is of interest to Monterey and all collectors of Californiana.

Harold C. Holmes is the dean of antiquarian booksellers of the San Francisco bay area, wise and genial, he has served the needs of local collectors for well over half a century, so his bookish reminiscences are of value to the interested reading public.

Probably Bancroft's Histories of the Pacific States, are the best known and most valuable addition to any public or private library interested in the history of the far west. Holmes writes this interesting bit about these books: "In, or about 1900, a scavenger wagon, filled to the top with Bancroft's histories drew up to the curb in front of our store. They consisted of the various bindings from cloth to pigskin and free calf. We parted with \$10, the price asked and promptly dropped them like so much coal into the basement. After segregating the books, we selected a number of broken and odd volumes stacking them on an outside table at twenty-five cents each. In a month or two the entire lot of 1,500 or more was sold."

About this time, Holmes reports, Bancroft entered the store and wished to know how they had acquired the Bancroft volumes and how many they had left. Finding that they were nearly all sold, he told how the books had been turned over to the scavenger with the distinct understanding that they were to be destroyed. However, he remarked, as long as the firm had been innocent buyers, nothing could be done about it.

Now one volume of Bancroft brings a large price and a complete set may be obtained for a few hundred dollars, if available at all.

Holmes tells another story of once hearing a conversation between two collectors, one of whom stated that he owned a copy of the first book printed in California. After the visitor had departed he asked the proprietor of the shop the name of the book. He did not remember but when Holmes suggested that it might be

Figuerola's "Manifesto," published by Zamorano in Monterey in 1835, he replied in the affirmative. Holmes asked to purchase the book but the dealer replied that he had been offered its weight in gold and had refused. Holmes came back with an offer of its weight in diamonds. He seemed surprised and asked what that would be, and Holmes offered \$250. The dealer accepted, and Holmes was the new owner of this book, which with the Bancroft Histories, is listed in the "Zamorano 80," about which we wrote recently.

Two years after Holmes purchased the book, it was included with a number of other Western items which he sent to the Anderson Galleries. It brought \$1,750.

An outstanding collection of Western Americana and Californiana items was that of Elisha O. Crosby, according to Holmes. Crosby was a member of the first Constitutional Convention held in Monterey in 1850. He was also mainly responsible for the adoption of the English Common Law System.

Crosby died in Alameda in 1895 and 26 years later his wife sold his library, partly to a book dealer in Oakland and partly to Mr. Holmes. Holmes paid the book dealer \$800 for the books he had acquired for \$100, and then called on Mrs. Crosby, from whom he purchased the remainder of the Crosby library.

The letters and personal reminiscences, especially his interview with Lincoln, which was sold in the Thomas W. Norris (Carmel) catalog in 1948, Crosby's lengthy manuscript on the life of H.E. Robinson, state senator for the first two sessions of the legislature, was sold to Templeton Crocker and is now in the possession of the California Historical Society.

Mr. Holmes relates that Mrs. Crosby later told him that had he been a week or so later, the material in the old outhouse which he had purchased would have been given to a junk man. It pays to think before any old papers or books are destroyed. They may contain valuable material.