

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

July 17, 1951

### **A Paucity of Windows**

Thomas O. Larkin's "Account Books," which are in manuscript in the Bancroft Library at the University of California, show that on June 7, 1841, at Monterey, P. Rios bought one Bible, James Stokes bought one dozen school books, and Jose Castro three school books and two dozen catechisms. These facts are recorded in an article on the History of the Book Trade in California by Hugh Sanford Cheney Baker in the recent issue of the California Historical Society Quarterly.

W.E.P. Hartnell, in collaboration with Father P. Short, had already opened his Pertocinio Rancho for a school some five years before. Sir George Simpson of the Hudson Bay Company, the Englishman who visited Monterey in 1844, wrote: "... intellectual light had a way of filtering in, despite the 'paucity of windows' in Monterey homes."

On June 8 and 9, 1841 Larkin sold a number of books to Rafael Gonzales, R. Garner, Jose Abrego, P. Rios and Juan B. Cooper. Additional purchasers during June were Ramonda Castilla, Francisco Garcia, W.S. Hinchley, Captain J.A. Sutter, Francisco Pacheco, Jose Antonio Noriega, Henri Cambustin, David Littlejohn, Juan A. Vallejo, Samuel Thompson, and Padre J.M. Real.

The only title mentioned in the entire list of sales was a copy of "History of Columbia," sold to F. Pacheco for \$10. From July 1841 through August 1, 1847, Larkin's accounts show that he continued to make occasional sales of books. "Thus, notwithstanding earthquakes, revolts against the government, smallpox ravages, the American conquest, etc., the torch of literacy was increasing in spread; by 1847, Miss Eager's school at Monterey was said to have become very popular," according to Bancroft.

An interesting commentary on the sale of literary contraband in California before 1849 is found in the biography of Mariano Vallejo. When he was an officer at the San Francisco Presidio in 1831, he bought several boxes of books which had arrived on the Leonor. Some were by Voltaire and some by Rousseau, although they were on the list of titles which the clergy forbade Californians to read. Subsequently, Larkin ordered the books from New York for Vallejo, and as late as June 1850 he selected Spanish, French and English works,

including a set of Spanish classics, from Roe Lockwood & Son for Vallejo's library at Sonoma.

Four hundred hides and ten kegs of tallow made up the purchase price of the volumes. Vallejo shared them with his nephews, Jose Castro and Juan B. Alvarado, both near his own age.

In the burning of Casa Grande, Vallejo's home at Sonoma, over 12,000 of his books were said to have been destroyed. Among those saved – because they had already been removed to his new home "Lachryma Montis" – were the scarlet and gold bound Spanish classics, bought in New York in June 1850, for Vallejo by Thomas O. Larkin for \$1,000. These books are now on a shelf in the general's bookcase at the state-owned historic landmark of "Lachryma Montis" at Sonoma and are proudly shown to visitors by Madie D. Brown, the curator.

A key to the beginning of Literary culture in California is found in the history of its early book trade. In fact, because of this trade, general readers on the West Coast were able to live through the period of transition from Spanish to American traditions without foregoing a rich intellectual life, even though they were 3,000 miles from the publishing centers of the United States, and 3,000 more from England and Europe.

It took a sailing ship nine months to go from New York and Boston around the Horn to California; that is it took a consignment of books leaving those cities in January, until September to reach San Francisco.