

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **Prominent Men in 1846**

Thomas Oliver Larkin, United States Consul at Monterey, was requested by the Secretary of State, James Buchanan, to compile biographical sketches of the important figures in the American conquest of California. The list was later published in the Pacific Monthly of August, 1863, and entitled "The Prominent Men of California in 1846." Some of eleven men listed were Californians and some were Americans.

Larkin starts his sketches with Governor Pio Pico. He classified him as a *ranchero*, aged forty-five years in 1846, born in California, married, a man of wealth, good local information, and good influence, standing and popularity; always engaged in the politics of his country, and many years in office. From the oldest member of the legislature he became governor and Larkin relates that his election had now (1846) been confirmed by the supreme government. He described Pico as a well meaning person of quiet disposition, not anxious for salary and owing his influence more to his office than to actual abilities.

Jose Castro, Mariano G. Vallejo, John A. Sutter, John C. Fremont, Archibald H. Gillespie, William B. Ide, Stephen Kearney, Robert Field Stockton and Thomas O. Larkin were listed by Larkin as the eleven important figures in the American conquest. He does not say that he listed them in the order of their importance, but naturally the governor would be first.

Vallejo was the only one born in Monterey. Pico, Castro and Vallejo were the three born in California. Sutter born in Switzerland, was the only one of the eleven born in a foreign country. Larkin and Ide were natives of Massachusetts and Stephen Kearney and Robert Stockton were born in New Jersey. Fremont was from Georgia and Gillespie from Pennsylvania. Kearney, Vallejo and Castro were in the army, Gillespie was a member of the marines and Stockton was a commodore in the U.S. Navy. Fremont was a lieutenant in the topographical engineers; Sutter was for many years a captain in Charles the Tenth's Swiss guards; Ide reached California with the Grigsby-Ide party in 1845 and Larkin was a businessman.

Jose Castro, second in Larkin's listing, rose from a subordinate position to lieutenant colonel by

appointment from the President. After driving Micheltorena from California, he became acting commandante general. He was of much influence among men, according to Larkin, and among all the lower classes, respected by his countrymen, feared by others, of quick inventive, intriguing mind, able to endure much fatigue in a campaign or foraging party, could collect and keep together more of his countrymen in an opposing state than any other Californian. He had a strong and decided dislike to having Mexican rulers or soldiers in his country. He had little property, he was fond of fame, generous and willing to oblige, but Larkin relates that it was always hard to understand him.

The only native Monterey figure prominent in the conquest in Thomas Larkin's opinion, was Mariano G. Vallejo. He had been named a cadet when 15 or 16 years of age, but at the time of the report, 1846, he held the commission of lieutenant colonel, which he received from Bustamente. His father was a Spanish sergeant, equal in power to a captain of that day. Vallejo was a man of large property, married; very studious for a Californian, of much knowledge and general information; always anxious to improve himself and his country. In 1837 he assisted Castro and Alvarado in expelling the Mexicans and from that time on he gradually retired from active military life, "although he has always some command at his place of residence," wrote Larkin to Buchanan.

"Vallejo, in Sonoma, has immense tracts of land, herds of cattle and horses," reported Larkin, "and extensive houses; is hospitable to those who are highly respectable or recommended to him; ostentatious and, for a Californian, a close observer of every passing event; as a private person has little regard for Mexico – as an officer, is confident that Mexico will not assist or protect California, and that his own countrymen have not the capacities; has given much work and employment to American immigrants, always speaking in their favor. He has no wish for government pay (it owes him \$20,000 or \$30,000); speaks English indifferently; would always prefer rank, perhaps office, after affairs are settled; has his part of California the most free from robbery or insubordination, with more safety of life and property, than any other town in California."

(More Monday)