

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

February 4, 1952

For Official Seals

The origin of printing in the fifteenth century and its first use in the new world in Mexico City in the sixteenth, are so clouded by obscurity, that it is no wonder that historians of the present day cannot set a date for the introduction of printing into Alta California. No one really knows as far as we have been able to search, what was the first piece of printing done in California or where, when or by whom it was executed, although it has been an accepted fact among most historians that Zamorano and his press in Monterey, were the first.

One notable exception to the above statement, is the existence of a collection of newspapers and magazine articles, attributed to Edward C. Kemble, which appeared in The Sacramento Union during 1858, and was printed in book form by the Plandome Press, in New York in 1927. Unfortunately Kemble did not give the sources of his information, nor was this to be expected under the circumstances. However when it is recalled that Kemble at one time owned and operated the first printing press, the old Monterey press, that he was personally acquainted with, and a friend of, many of the persons who operated it before him, and that he made every effort to preserve the history of the early newspapers of the State, his statements bear many historical facts.

In the departmental archives of the Spanish and Mexican periods of California's history at the United States Surveyor General's office in San Francisco before that office was destroyed by fire in 1906, there was a valuable collection of early documents. Hubert Howe Bancroft also had much original material which is now in the possession of the Bancroft Library of the University of California.

Robert E. Cowan had the rare opportunity of studying and taking notes of these original manuscripts when they were in their original homes, and earned the deep gratitude of later historians when he issued in 1919 his pamphlet "A Bibliography of the Spanish Press in California." This author did not claim completeness for his bibliography, nevertheless, as the archives probably contained copies of all the printed official documents, and as the Bancroft collection is known to have contained pieces that apparently never reached the

university library, the list reached a very high degree of completeness.

The earliest known piece of printing that might possibly have been printed in California is a letterhead for the "Comisaria Subalterna, y Aduana Provicionales del Puerto de Monterrey," on a document now in the Bancroft Library, dated Aug. 25, 1830. It is set in capitals, in four lines, over a line of unit ornaments of three varieties (California Spanish imprints).

There is also a letterhead for the "Comandancia General Ynspectora de la Alta California" on a document signed by Agustin V. Zamorano, dated Sept. 18, 1830, which was in 1933 in the Spanish Archives of the City of San Jose. This is set in capitals, and lower case, in two lines.

There was also printed a considerable number of letterheads and sealed paper headings. The earliest date found on the latter was "Habilitado provicionalmente por la Comisaria principal de la alta California para el ano de 1831." Victoria Bandini. There is also a document May 15, 1831, on paper with this heading in the Bancroft Library.

Possibly the equipment with which these headings were printed is that referred to by Kemble when he wrote: "In 1825, when Zamorano came from Mexico as Echeandia's secretary he brought a small seal press and an alphabet sufficient for government stamp purposes. Its utmost capacity was a hundred words, and we do not hear that it was applied to any other use than for official seals."