

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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The Larkin Papers

The University of California is announcing the publication by the University Press of "The Larkin Papers" – the personal, business and official correspondence of Thomas Oliver Larkin, merchant and United States consul in California. "The Larkin Papers" is edited by George Hammond, director of the Bancroft Library of the University of California.

In the foreword of the announcement, which has been mailed to the Friends of the Bancroft Library, the following information concerning the writer of the Papers is given: "Thomas Oliver Larkin, probably the most influential merchant in Mexican California, was the first and only United States consul in California. He worked under specific instructions from the State Department to win Californians over to the idea of separation from Mexico. From 1847 to 1849 he was naval agent and naval storekeeper for the United States at Monterey. Later, when California became an integral part of the United States, Larkin served as a delegate to the State Constitutional Convention. Larkin's many duties and activities resulted in a rich and varied correspondence."

Larkin kept many of the letters and papers which came to him, and often made rough drafts of his own writings. Copies of his official correspondence as consul and naval agent were carefully penned by himself or a copyist. These documents, totaling more than 4,000 pieces are being published in a subscription set of 10 volumes.

Doctor Hammond writes that Larkin arrived in California in 1832, early enough to observe the leisurely pastoral life of the Mexican province, where mission buildings were already crumbling, where the white sails of the Yankee ships engaged in the hide and tallow trade moved from port to port – from San Diego to Bodega Bay and back again – and where the harmless rattle of an occasional local revolution only momentarily broke the quiet round of daily living.

Larkin lived at a time when he saw the westward moving stream of American emigrants, at first very small, and then their arrival with increasing force from the other side of the Sierra Nevada. He saw the flag of the United States raised over the Old Custom House in

1846, and four years later he took part in the celebration when California became a state in the United States. He helped to draft the first constitution at the Constitutional Convention held in Monterey in 1849. He witnessed the frenzy of the Gold Rush before his death in 1858.

The Bancroft Library received the Larkin papers from Hubert Howe Bancroft who had acquired them from the members of the Larkin family and they are still a part of the library at the University of California. Bancroft wrote of them: "This collection is beyond all comparison the best source of information on the history of 1845-46."

Doctor Hammond goes on to explain what will be found in Volume I. It was touch upon such events as the "incident" of the arrest and shipment to Mexico of the American rifleman, Isaac Graham, and other foreigners by the Mexican governor of California, Juan Bautista Alvarado; the arrival at Santa Barbara of California's first bishop; the establishment of Sutter's Fort near Sacramento; the coming, in 1841, of the first overland-to-California parties; the visit of the United States exploring expedition under Lt. Charles Wilkes; the establishment of the Hudson's Bay Company in San Francisco; and the premature occupation of Monterey by Comdr. Thomas ap Catesby Jones, in 1842.

(More Tomorrow)