

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

May 28, 1952

Biblioteca Benjamin Franklin

In 1942 The United States Department of State founded the Biblioteca Benjamin Franklin in Mexico City to provide an example of a typical American public library. The Biblioteca's free reference and lending services won such approval among laymen and scholars alike that three branches, in Guadalajara, Monterrey and Puebla have since been established.

Bancroftiana, which is published occasionally by the Friends of the Bancroft Library of the University of California in Berkeley, has an interesting article concerning this international relations project. As a public service institution the Biblioteca Benjamin Franklin has proved its worth, the editor states, not only in Mexico but by its willing cooperation with libraries in the United States.

A short while ago two generous gifts to the Bancroft Library have further strengthened this cooperation. The Biblioteca, through its director, Edward M. Helliger, has sent to the Bancroft Library over two hundred bound volumes of the Mexican "Diario Oficial," the day-to-day record of activities of the various departments of the Mexican national government. This valuable publication began in 1867 and the file to date is basic to an understanding of the national history of Mexico.

This collection will provide an indispensable tool for the researcher in all phases of Mexican domestic economy, foreign affairs, and social legislation. With receipt of this gift the Bancroft Library has been able to fill many gaps in its own file, as well as to pass on to the UCLA Library duplicate volumes not needed on the Berkeley campus.

The Mexican library's second gift to Bancroft is a collection of nearly 1,500 doctoral theses, presented before the several faculties of the University of Mexico. Within these detailed studies, Bancroftiana writes, is a wealth of information, much of it on areas which have never before been written up. Medical students have surveyed the water supply and health conditions in rural communities of every state in Mexico; students of architecture have drawn and described many of Mexico's buildings; candidates in the School of Jurisprudence have written on agricultural credit, public law, collective bargaining, and many other national issues.

Anne Martin, who passed away at her home in Carmel several months ago bequeathed the remainder of her historical records to the Bancroft Library. Miss Martin was the first woman candidate for the United States Senate and organizer of the movement which won suffrage for women of Nevada in 1914.

Miss Martin's niece, Edna Martin Parrott, the curator of the California Historical Society's headquarters and museum in San Francisco, and part time resident of Carmel Highlands, is the executrix of the estate. From time to time Mrs. Parrott has delivered portions of these valuable papers to the library and they are now available to researchers.

Another valuable gift to the Bancroft Library is a vast accumulation of the business papers and correspondence of John Kentfield & Company, together with family letters, scrapbooks, clippings, etc.

Captain John Kentfield came to California in 1849 and by the 1870's and 1880's had established one of the largest shipping firms on the Pacific Coast. By that time the riches of California's forests had become known and he was engaged in supplying redwood timber for construction in California and the Hawaiian Islands. The Kentfield Papers, approximately 174,000 pieces, have recently been arranged and put in usable order by the manuscript department.

Two groups of letters never before available to scholars, have also been added to the already extensive collection of material on John C. Fremont. These new papers add much light on Fremont's last years, from 1873 (when he lost most of his fortune) until his death in 1890.

One set of letters, covering the years 1877-1884, is from General and Mrs. Fremont to Col. William K. Rogers, private secretary to President Rutherford B. Hayes. During part of this period, Fremont was governor of the Territory of Arizona. Fremont never gave up his attempts to recover his fortune, and his letters to Rogers tell in detail of his efforts to promote copper and silver mining companies, railroads, canals, and cattle ranches. Many of the letters are from Jessie Benton Fremont, written in her capacity as her husband's secretary.

Mrs. Fremont and her daughter, Elizabeth Benton Fremont, lived in Monterey during the days when Fremont was prominent in California.