

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **A Discriminating Shopper**

In the second volume of "The Larkin Papers" published recently by the Bancroft Library of the University of California, we have found a letter written by Thomas Oliver Larkin to Alfred Robinson, which we think should prove interesting to our readers. The correspondence is dated from Monterey April 30, 1844, and is addressed to "My old Friend."

Larkin asks Robinson to make a lengthy list of purchases for him, including articles of clothing he declares he will need to properly represent the United States as the first Consul of California. After a consultation with Mr. Henry Mellus, a San Francisco merchant, Larkin was advised to send his order for clothing, books and furniture to Robinson, asking him to make it his particular interest.

Larkin wrote: "Some of the articles are such that if you do not see to in person need not be purchased. Mr. Mellus is of the opinion that you will attend to the whole with pleasure. If I was not of that way of thinking I should not request the favor of you."

"In choosing the furniture," Larkin told his friend, "you need not be guided entirely by my Bill (meaning estimate), as you know my house, its dimensions, etc., and in measure, my taste. The mirrors I want something like a pair I sold to Mr. A.B. Thompson. You have seen them in his hall. If you can purchase four National pictures with handsome frames worth about 20\$ or so each, do so."

Attached to the letter was the list of further purchases he wished made for his Monterey adobe home, the first and only American Consulate in California (now the residence of Mrs. Henry W. Toulmin).

A consular uniform was also desired by Larkin, and in his letter to Robinson he included detailed specification of the garment. It had to be single breasted coat, with standing collar, ten navy buttons in front, one button on each side of the collar or cape, four on each cuff, four under each pocket flap, one on each hip and in the folds; two on each side of the center and one on each side of the same at the lower extremity of the skirts. He then asked Robinson to see Consular Book, page 39. For the dress he sent "measures in English inches."

Robinson was ordered to get one sword for the consul. In choosing the sword, sash, belt and uniform, he was

warned to think of the fineness and beauty of the embroidery to suit the taste of the people Larkin lived among. "That is as far as can be done with our own taste of propriety and beauty. The sword may cost 40 or 50\$. The worth of the U..... I do not know."

After ordering all these items for the Consul and the Consulate, Larkin added: "By the by I forgot to say I was appointed US. Consul last May for this place. As our government in its wisdom often replace their officers before they have hardly begun the duties of their office, you had better inquire of the secretary if my appointment, being given during the recess of Congress, was ratified by the Senate and if I am still in office, that you may judge whether I want all my orders filled or not. The furniture I want, Consul or no Consul."

Especially interesting in light of present day prices is Larkin's estimate of the cost of the desired furniture, which was to be of excellent quality and design and the best that Boston could produce. Chairs were sold in Boston for \$35 to \$40 per dozen, and Larkin ordered four dozen. He also wanted two rocking and two arm chairs; two pairs of sofas, good length (\$90-\$100); two ladies' work tables (\$10 to \$20); two wash stands (\$10 to \$15); one pair of large dining tables (\$35 to \$45); one pair of large, heavy round tables and four pair of large candlesticks of varying patterns.

Larkin also ordered 500 passports in English and 500 in Spanish.