

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **Books and Printers**

Speaking of books! John Howell, the well known book dealer in San Francisco, wrote an article for the Quarterly News Letter, published by The Book Club of California, in which he tells the story of "A California Bookman."

Describing his own life, which first began as a medical student and then turned to books, he wrote, "I have never regretted giving up the idea of medicine for newspaper work and, in turn, giving that up for books."

During his many years in the business of collecting, buying and selling books, Howell was associated with the great and wealthy in this country and in Europe and assisted in forming several of the notable collections, including that of Henry C. Folger, president of Standard Oil Co., who later gave his complete library and a building to house it, to the American nation. It is now one of the show places of Washington.

Henry E. Huntington who established the Huntington Library at San Marino, and Hugh Walpole, noted author, who had the largest collection in the world of old editions and manuscripts of Sir Walter Scott, were also Howell's devoted friends and fellow collectors.

One of the most delightful stories which Howell tells in "A California Bookman" concerns President Herbert Hoover, the White House and books. The story goes like this: "In 1929, when President Hoover on his first night in the White House, looked for something to read, as was his custom before retiring, there were no books. There were food and flowers, curtains and linen, and everything else needed, but no private library"

The White House was a home without books in the interval between Presidents. Douglas Watson, in Washington at the time, advised Howell of the lack and he at once took the matter up with the American Booksellers Association – a convention of the Western Branch of which was being held in San Francisco. A library of 500 volumes was voted unanimously, to be followed every four years by 200 additional books. There are now 1,500 volumes in the library and this last fall 200 books were added.

"In a recent letter to me," Mr. Howell reports, "President Eisenhower expressed his appreciation of the plan. I am looking forward to being present at the

White House when the additional 200 books are presented, as I have been appointed honorary member of the presentation committee."

Early this year, 1954, The Book Club of California will launch a new publishing venture, preparations for which have been underway for many months. The project – which will continue for several years – will consist in the publication from time to time of facsimile reproductions of some of the rarest and historically most important products of California's first printer; namely, Agustin Vicente Zamorano, according to an announcement in the Quarterly of the club.

By way of inaugurating this series, the club will reissue – in a form identical with the original – the first major piece of printing ever executed on the coast; that is, a 16-page pamphlet entitled "Reglamento Provicional," produced in Monterey in 1834. Bound with this historic document (of which only two copies are known) will be a translation of the Spanish text (laying down rules governing the conduct of the legislature of the province), together with a comment, on its significance, both from the historical and printing standpoints, by the leading authority on Zamorano's life and works, George L. Harding.

Anyone journeying to Sonoma usually visits the Gen. Vallejo home and museum, a state historical monument administered under the supervision of the division of Beaches and Parks. In one of the glass cases is the general's bookplate, made by him on the Zamorano press which he brought to Sonoma in 1837 for the purpose of printing his military proclamations. His typography has the charm of naivete, although the general's presswork is considerably weaker than that of the printers of today.