

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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The Isle of 'California'

A copy of the world's first book to mention the name "California" is now the property of the Yale University Library.

The book, a Spanish novel titled "Las Segas de Esplandian," was written by Gutierrez de Montalvo and published in 1510. The novel describes a mythical island of "California" as a paradise inhabited by handsome, Amazon-like women.

When the Spanish pioneers reached the coast of the area now known as California, legend has it that they gave it that name because they thought it resembled the mythical island.

We remember a number of years ago, before the death of James D. Phelan, we visited his home in the Saratoga foothills which he had named Montalvo. On the garden wall in the patio Mr. Phelan had placed a large and beautiful plaque of Spanish tile which told the story of the origin of the name.

Joseph Henry Jackson, literary editor and author of a number of books, including a valuable one on California's Mother Lode country entitled "Anybody's Gold," has been appointed honorary curator of the California fiction collection in the University of California Library. Chancellor Clark Kerr made the announcement.

The collection, now numbering some 1,500 volumes, was founded in 1894 with a gift of 300 volumes of novels and stories set in California. The collection will also house fiction in book form by all California authors prior to 1900, and by Northern California authors after that date. The University of California at Los Angeles will collect works of Twentieth Century Southern California authors.

Jackson is a well known authority on the literature and history of California. He is a member of the Council of Friends of the University's Bancroft Library, where the collection is housed.

An unusual and amusing bit of information has been gleaned from a letter to Victor Mossop from the late Juan Bautista Alvarado, who died in San Francisco on Feb. 1. Mr. Alvarado's grandfather was Don Juan

Bautista Alvarado, a native of Monterey and the first governor of California.

He wrote: "I was interested in reading about the Larios family because it is the first record I had ever had of one of the old paisanos being an ardent hunter, and this man was something. It seems as if the family at one time lived on the Quien Sabe, Santa Anita Rancho, in fact owned it. The Santa Anita acreage has been in the hands of my cousins the Bolado-Davis family for many years but I never did know what the older history of the place was. It is now owned by a younger generation of this family – the two Ashe boys. (The Santa Anita Rancho is near Paisanos in San Benito County).

"Speaking again of hunting old Gen. Vallejo claims to have shot a bear in the thicket that grew where the Palace Hotel now stands on Market street in San Francisco. However, he was a bit fanciful in his statements so it might have been his brother, Salvador, who was a recognized Indian killer and might have been pretty expert at killing bears. Nowadays the woods and fields are a bit depopulated and bears are mostly found stuffed in museums."

R.L. Underhill of Berkeley, California, the author of "From Cowhides to Golden Fleece, the Story of Larkin of Monterey," writes as he sends in his check for another year's dues in the Monterey History and Art Assn.: "Was going to let this die but I got to thinking of Larkin, Portola, Bill O'Donnell and Herbert Bolton and I just could not resist revivifying it. So we will carry on another year."

Mr. Underhill has been a very frequent visitor to Monterey Peninsula for many years, but now age and ill health will not permit him to travel far from his own fireside but his interest in the community and its past history will not let him forget it for long. It was Mr. Underhill who helped to plan and bring to fulfillment the placing of the granite boulder and bronze plaque in memory of Portola at the Junipero Serra Landing place at the foot of Pacific street, in readiness for its dedication on June 3, 1949.