

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

May 3, 1954

### **'Travels in Mexico'**

A small brown cloth-covered book entitled "Travels in Mexico," written by Albert M. Gilliam during the years 1843-4, including a description of California, has been fascinating reading within recent days. Some of the information so intrigued us that we wrote for further information to our friend, Dr. George P. Hammond, director of the Bancroft Library at the University of California with such excellent results that we are now prepared to review the book in the Diary.

The volume of over 300 pages was loaned to us by Edward Mestres in whose library it has been for a number of years. The author of "Travels in Mexico" is identified on the title page as having been late U.S. Consul to California and that information is what caused us to wonder, for we have always referred to Thomas Oliver Larkin as being the "first and only American Consul to California." The book was published in Aberdeen by George Clark and So in 1847.

Chapter 1 begins with a notation of the fact that the author having, with care, kept a diary, from the day of his departure from home, "I shall therefore, give it to the world in the style of the original manuscript." Then he writes, "Having been commissioned by His Excellency President Tyler, Consul of the Port of San Francisco, Upper California, in the Republic of Mexico, and having been presented with the accustomed documents and dispatches to the President Minister of the American Legation at the City of Mexico, I without delay, bade adieu, on the 15<sup>th</sup> of October 1843 to my friends, and the place of nativity, Lynchburg, Va., for New Orleans, the distant port of my embarkment..."

Dr. Hammond wrote from his office at the Bancroft Library: "There is no question but that Larkin was the first and only American Consul in California, although a couple of men were appointed to the office before him. Neither of them, however, came to California to assume the office."

John P. Gilliam was originally appointed Consul for Monterey but he died before reaching the province. In Volume 2 of the Larkin Papers a letter from Ebenezer Larkin Childs to Thomas Oliver Larkin – the former in Washington, the latter in Monterey – written in December 1843, there is this notation: "I saw the Chief

Clerk of the State Dept. today. He says John Gilliam was appointed Consul for your place and is now dead, that his brother has been named for San Francisco and is now on his way there." A man by the name of T. Carlisle was named Consul for San Francisco but never served. Childs mentions him in this same letter to Larkin.

Albert M. Gilliam, brother of the deceased John P. Gilliam, is listed in the Department of State's Register as Carlisle's successor, but on April 11, 1844, Larkin in writing to the Department of State mentioned "two or three" consular appointees to California who had never appeared on the scene and requested permission to open certain packages addressed to them by the State Department in Monterey and San Francisco.

Secretary of State John C. Calhoun, on June 24, 1844, instructed Larkin to open all letters from the Department of State addressed to the Consulate in Monterey or San Francisco. He also informs Larkin that his nomination was confirmed by the Senate and a new commission sent to him on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of February last, that he has been sent "a seal, press, Flag and Arms of the U. States." The letter also names A.M. Gilliam as the San Francisco Consul.

From the above references, as well as from Albert M. Gilliam's book about his travels, it is obvious that he never assumed his consular duties but that he became involved in adventures and hardships in Mexico and eventually returned to New Orleans without ever going to California.