

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Two Rival Consuls

During the reading of "Travels in Mexico" by Albert M. Gilliam, late U.S. consul to California, printed in 1847, we came across a letter, written by Thomas Oliver Larkin, while doing some further research upon the subject of consuls. The letter referred to is one reprinted in the Larkin Papers, Vol. II, written from the U.S. Consulate of the United States at Monterey on June 24, 1844.

Mr. Larkin's letter was written to John Calwell Calhoun, the original of which is in the National Archives in Washington, D.C., and his personal copy is in the Bancroft Library at the University of California. Larkin writes that he has the honor to inform Calhoun that he has received his appointment as consul for the Port of Monterey from the President of the United States by and with the advice of the Senate.

Larkin further states that he has had the honor to inform the department in the month of April of his commission as before given by the President, and acknowledged by the President of Mexico, with the corresponding exequatur of the government. He then takes exception to the appointment of A.M. Gilliam for the Port of San Francisco as "the Port of San Francisco is not the port of entry, foreign vessels only going there by special license of the government of California, but not allowed by the government of Mexico; Monterey is the only port of entry in California, foreign vessels are fined for going into any other port before entering here, here only they pay their duties; there is therefore no occasion to have but one United States consul in California, and perhaps my commission had better be made out to that effect, all of which I leave to the wisdom of the department."

In Albert M. Gilliam's diary written on his way to California to assume duties as consul from the United States in 1843, he discusses the proposal for the annexation of Upper California, partly because of the necessity for having San Francisco as a harbor; discussion of the feasibility of a railroad from San Francisco to the Mississippi River; and as for Mexico he would not have it annexed because its resources are principally mineral and he does not wish the American people corrupted by the "Intoxicating pursuits" of gold and silver mining!

Proof that both Albert M. and John P. Gilliam were appointed consuls to California are found in at least two statements in "Travels in Mexico." When Albert M. Gilliam arrived in Durango on his way to Monterey, he called upon Germain Stalknit, a German by birth, to whom he had a letter of introduction. He reports the result thusly: "... The accomplished gentleman again turned to me, and I in my turn addressed him, by saying, that it was true he had given me my right appellation, but that I was a person whom he had never seen: to which he replied 'Are you not Dr. Gilliam, United States consul to Monterey?' To his surprise, I informed him that I was the brother of the individual he had mistaken me for."

Still further in the diary Gilliam writes: "None but him who has been similarly conditioned can imagine the feelings of myself, when standing by the tomb of a relative, in a distant and foreign country. The health of my brother, J.P. Gilliam, M.D., United States consul at Monterey, on the Pacific, having become delicate, he retired to the mountains of Caneles, for the benefits that might accrue but, at that retired and isolated place it pleased the Divine will that he should depart from this to a better state of existence."