

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Carmel's Thomas Norris

The December issue of "Bancroftiana" published occasionally by the Friends of the Bancroft Library of the University of California, has devoted two full pages to an article relating to the life of the late Thomas Wayne Norris of Carmel, and to his collection of Californiana which the University has acquired from his estate.

Tom Norris came to Carmel to reside in 1946 and soon became a valuable member of the Monterey History and Art Association and later the president until his death in May 1952. Thomas Norris, the Bancroftiana informs us, bought his first book at the age of 19 years. In 1948 his distinguished collection of books, pamphlets, maps and prints on California and the West, numbering 4,311 items, was sold by the Holmes Book Company from a catalogue printed by the Grabhorn Press. That catalogue now sells for \$20. At the time of his death in 1952, he left the finest collection of California manuscripts in private hands, plus a large collection of Grabhorn Press books and a number of rare tomes not included in the Holmes sale, or acquired since that event.

Mr. Norris, with his family, moved to Salinas in 1893. He graduated from high school there. He married Augusta Merritt of Oakland in 1906, and two years later joined the Coast Manufacturing Company with headquarters in Livermore. In 1918 he became president of the company, a position he held until he retired to live out the remainder of his life in Carmel. During his lifetime on the peninsula he was not only president of the History and Art Association, but Monterey chairman for the Society of California Pioneers, member of the Monterey City Museum board, president of the Peninsula Community Hospital board and a member of the Rotary Club.

His manuscripts were always his most absorbing interest. The Bancroft library publication quotes this letter from him as evidence of his knowledge and interest in creating a complete collection of the subject in which he was at the moment interested. This letter was written in January 1939:

". . . What I would like to have are pictures of Juan Temple and his bride, the Temple adobe if there was

one and of Father Boscano. I think I have enough stuff on the marriage of Juan Temple to fix up a book and with pictures it would make quite a showing."

Again the editors quote from a letter which shows how Norris proceeded in his selection of materials: "On my return to my office this morning, I found the four Fremont documents which I was most delighted to receive . . . These are going to be quite an addition to my American Occupation of California scrapbook. With the aid of a flatiron, I will have the documents looking almost as good as new."

It was with the purpose of sharing his enjoyment that, in 1936, he chose the rare "Jackson's Map of California with Appendix" and had it reproduced at the Grabhorn Press as a Christmas gift to his friends. Thereafter, each Christmas through 1951, his last, he selected a manuscript from his collection and had the Grabhorns print it in facsimile with accompanying text, an event awaited eagerly by his friends, and later by numerous libraries and collectors as well. The Monterey library showed a complete collection during the holidays.

The approximately 1,000 Spanish language items in the Thomas W. Norris collection in the Bancroft Library well illustrate his interest in California. It has often been our privilege to hold in our hands these very items and often times to present them to our readers in this column. Tom was never at a loss to furnish something for us to write about and always kindly shared his interest with his friends.

These Spanish documents cover the period between 1769 and 1888 and are concerned exclusively with Alta and Baja California. Approximately two-thirds of the Spanish documents are located in 11 volumes of assembled California county materials, five volumes on prominent personages, and several miscellaneous volumes. The other one-third is in loose manuscript form. The collection may be broken down, according to the Bancroft Library report, into titles: papers of the California Mission friars and the father presidents; California civil government documents, military orders and reports, legal and land title papers, papers of prominent individuals and miscellaneous papers.