

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

May 5, 1955

The Larkin Family

When we think of Thomas Oliver Larkin, first and only United States consul to Monterey under Mexican rule, we are very apt to think of him as the builder of the Larkin House and as a prominent merchant in the city from 1832 until 1847 and forget that he also was a family man with all the domestic problems which most fathers, even in 1955, experience in everyday life. Larkin was the father of seven children, two of whom died in early childhood, three boys. Oliver Jr., Frederick and Alfred Otis Larkin, are interesting to us today.

The mother of these three boys was Rachel Hobson Holmes, a widow who married Larkin on board the 'Volunteer,' in Santa Barbara in 1833. She was the first American woman to live in California and her son, Thomas Oliver Jr., born here in April, 1834 was the first child born to American parents in California, according to Bancroft's Pioneer Index. Adelaide, Frances and a daughter who married Sampson Tams, were the other children. Alfred, born in 1848 became the father of Mrs. Alice Larkin Toulmin, the present owner of the Larkin House in Monterey.

In one of Larkin's earliest letters he laments the fact that Oliver at the age of six had learned so little English that he, his father could not even talk with his son as he would like to do. At that time most of the population in Monterey, of course, spoke the Spanish language and it is understandable that young Larkin would speak and understand that language.

The news began to drift to Larkin and other California parents from the sea captains plying the Honolulu-California trade routes, that good schools were available in the islands. The Oahu Charity School for the instruction of English-speaking boys and girls was opened there on Jan 19, 1833. By 1840 when the Larkins were looking for a place to educate their oldest son, there was a very comprehensive program of education in the islands. It is said that in 1840 there were 15,000 pupils in the schools in the islands.

In September 1840 two ships set out from Monterey bearing special cargoes on board the Aleiope was the person of Thomas Oliver Larkin Jr., a lad of six years. He, with five or six other boys, aboard the Don Quixote, was bound for the Honolulu home of Mr. and Mrs. Andrew

Johnstone, who, connected with the Oahu Charity school, were to be their teachers.

Oliver's instruction in English must have started immediately upon his arrival for in Johnstone's first letter to the parents he relates: "Your little boy can already master the first two lessons of Worcester's primer and very nearly the third. He began to take a great interest in his books within a few days and is by no means backward in picking up English.

In the recent issue of the fifth volume of the Larkin Papers by the Bancroft Library, we have found a letter written to Larkin on Aug. 17, 1846, by ? Childs from Lynn, Mass., in which he tells of the safe arrival of Oliver and Frederick Larkin at his home on June 21. The boys had been sent there to attend school and live with Childs, the half-brother of Larkin, and his family.

Childs writes: "Your 2 sons, Oliver and Frederic, reached here in pretty good health. Frederic was subject to a pretty bad cold & cough for a few days after reaching here though quite rid of it now. His eyes were also sore but they are much better now. I find he is not so rugged as Oliver. They appear to be quite happy and contented and as fond of play as most boys, much more so than they are of books though they are as proficient as could be expected in their studies. They go with my son, at present, to a woman's school. I sent Oliver at first to the academy, but the preceptor thought it would be best for him, for the present, to go to some other school.

"We find that a great many of the clothes you sent with them will be entirely useless owing to their being so small and entirely out of fashion here and we presume that you would wish for them to wear only such as are good and fashionable. I shall, as you requested, return them by the first opportunity. There seems to be no vessel bound for California at present.

"I received two little bags of spending for the boys which I keep separate and give them as I think proper. I tell them they may have 12 ½ cents per week which I think is a great plenty, double what I give my son.

"They frequently ask for things which I do not know whether you would wish them to have, for instance, Oliver asks me to get him a set of carpenter's tools. Therefore I wish to know what is your pleasure about it."

There follows a number of human interest letters from the two boys, written after they had settled themselves

in the family of their relatives many miles distant from
the little Spanish town of Monterey.