

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

June 25, 1956

Treasures of Californiana

The 1956 series of Keepsakes published by the Book Club of California consists of "Treasures of California Collections" each dealing with a book, manuscript or work of art in some California library or museum. It is edited by Robert de Roos and is designed and printed by Lawton Kennedy of San Francisco. We think the four just received are as informative and handsome as any received in the six years that we have been at member of this very worthwhile book club.

The subject for each treasure was chosen by the author of the text, in each case, a person prominently identified with the library or museum in question. "The Laws of the Town of San Francisco" is from the Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery and was selected by Robert O. Schad, curator of rare books at the Southern California library.

Carroll D. Hall, monument supervisor at Sutter's Fort, State Historical Monument, edited a "Donner Marriage Book" a treasure from Sutter's Fort. A treasure from the Society of California Pioneers' collection, selected by Helen S. Giffen, secretary for the pioneers, is "Blessing of the Enrequita Mine in the year 1859."

The last of the four beautifully designed keepsakes was chosen from the Bancroft Library at Berkeley by the director, George P. Hammond. It is Gaspar de Villagra's "Historia de la Nueva Mexico."

"The Laws of the Town of San Francisco" was printed at the office of the Californian, the first newspaper published in California, in 1847. There are only two known copies of these laws. One at the Huntington and the other in the Bancroft Library at the University of California. The copy at Huntington was acquired from the Augustin S. Mac Donald collection, purchased by Mr. Huntington in 1916.

The two rarities are strategically located from the viewpoint of the scholar and those interested in research. Mr. Schad remarks in his text that "Collectors might prefer to have one copy in private hands. Then they might hope for a chance someday to acquire a copy for their own collections."

The pamphlet is of approximately 8 1/2 by 6 1/2 inches with only eight pages - in marked contrast to the weighty law tomes of today. The Huntington copy,

according to Schad, is bound in three-quarter brown leather and black cloth with marbled endpapers. Inside the front paper is written, presumably in the hand of the former owner, "Earliest known print S. F. This is the only copy in existence." Fortunately, this statement was not true for there was one in the original Bancroft collection. More than a score of years has passed since the existence of the two copies was first announced and no further copy has come to light. It may then be presumed that its rarity has been established, states Mr. Schad.

Now that the Old Custom House Museum has a miniature whale boat and a whale gun, suitably mounted at the helm of an ancient rowboat found on the bench, it would be appreciated by Mrs. Greene, the curator, and by the History and Art Assn., if there was at least one sample of a scrimshaw there.

You ask, "What is a scrimshaw?" Scrimshaw is the general term applied to the objects that are whittled, carved, or engraved by sailors during the days of the old sailing vessels. Most scrimshaw was made between 1790 and 1840, but some dating back to 1720 is known. These sailors carved, shaped, and decorated everything imaginable from a fragment of whalebone to hog bones from salt pork.