

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

August 16, 1956

### The First Press

We know that there was a printing press in Monterey before the first edition of *The Californian* was printed by Augustin Vicente Zamorano, for it was Zamorano who imported the first printing press to be set up in the West. He had come to California from Mexico in 1825 as the executive secretary of the Territory of Alta California and served as second administrative officer. For six years he had commanded the most important military post within the Territory, the Presidio of Monterey.

After the fall of the Presidio at Monterey on Nov. 6, 1836 the printing press, by either purchase or confiscation, passed to the new revolutionary government and was operated by various persons at Monterey and Sonoma until March, 1845.

Among the E.L. Williams papers in the Old Custom House files are several valuable papers, historically, which throw some light upon the printing press in question.

A letter from Micheltorena in Los Angeles to Manuel Castanares, Collector of Customs at Monterey, written on March 15, 1843, requests this information:

"This government wishes to know if it will be possible to currently issue a sheet from the press now at your port. If such is the case, you will please advise me of the result by the return of the schooner *California*, in order that if it can be done, some editions should be published transmitting those that may come out to this government, taking care also of advising me in case there should be no one who can manage it, so as the order what maybe convenient, and seek some intelligent person, which it will not be difficult to find, according to the information. I have obtained: for it is of vital importance that the citizens be acquainted with the gubernative resolutions, and that they express through the press, freely, their sentiments and opinions.

God and Liberty

Micheltorena."

The answer to the Governor from Castanares was: "Most Ext. Sir—In compliance with your excy's superior order dated the 15th of March last past, I preceded to examine the present condition of the press belonging to

the Government of this Department. It consists of a press in good condition requiring small repairs, and four boxes of type illy supplied.

"Although with difficulty, because there are not sufficient spaces, I believe that the sheet can be printed, of which your Excy. Is pleased to speak to me in the order aforesaid, and I have the honor to forward you part of a copy of the abridgement of the Castillian grammar that you may see the kind of type of which to make use.

"Wishing to contribute in some manner to the patriotic and enlightened views of your Excy. I propose that, in company with the Director of the Establishment of Education, Don Enrique Cambuston, we will make the compositions until an intelligent person be found for that purpose.

"All of which I have the honor to say to your Excy. in due reply renewing to you the assurance of my respect.

God and Liberty, Monterey, May 6, 1843

Manuel Castanares

On June 6, Gov. Micheltorena wrote again to the Collector of Customs at Monterey: "I am apprised of the present condition of the press and I thank you for the offer to work it. "We will made it sweat for the good and the edification of the Department on my next visit up."

In the transitional period between Spanish printing and the time that Americans took over California to begin the era of American printing, a letter was sent east by Thomas Oliver Larkin, the only American consul in California. The letter follows:

Monterey, May 31, 1845 "There is a printing press here belonging to the government. As it was old when imported ten or twelve years back, it has not been improved since—therefore have no newspapers in California for which I attribute four reasons—either one may suffice.

"First, there are no printers—second, no press, three, no editor, fourth, none to take the papers."