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### **A Report On 'Rats'**

A California Historical Society treasure has been chosen by James de T. Abajian, librarian for the California Book Club's Keepsake series. This series of Keepsakes consists of 12 folders, each dealing with a book, manuscript or work of art in some California library or museum.

The treasure is the "Report of the Rat Committee," made by the Eureka Typographical Union of San Francisco in 1855. A photostatic copy of the original report, printed on blue paper and highlighted with a line drawing of a huge rat, is reproduced and inserted in the holder printed by Lawton Kennedy of San Francisco.

Mr. Abajian points out that "The Report of the Rat Committee" fulfills the requirements of an outstanding item of any historical book collection – it has humor, it is a worthy exhibit item, it contains biographical information and it reflects social, labor, institutional and printing history.

The Eureka Typographical Union left a strong imprint on California labor history. The first national charter granted to any group of organized workers on the Pacific Coast was issued to this union in 1854, and its president, Alexander McConnell Kenaday, is today considered to be the father of the eight-hour day in California. The union's virile yet short-lived existence is reflected by its strong action against "the rats" working for the Placer Times and Transcript, a San Francisco newspaper which suspended operations late in 1855, perhaps partially undermined by the printer's determined opposition.

Mr. Abajian writes in the accompanying notes: "From an examination of 'the rats' later careers, the democratizing qualities of the frontier appear to have erased any odium temporarily attached to their names. On the contrary, the record shows 'the rats' to have attained success equal to that of the complaining union members. Of the 14 'rats,' four later became pioneer California newspaper editors and publishers of some prominence; six remained in the printing profession, and two entered adjacent fields of employment. Of their 68 union opponents, 12 became editors or publishers of a wide geographical range of California newspapers; seven rose to ownership of their own printing businesses; seven entered other fields of

endeavor; 35 remained employed as printers; and one even attained the eminence of a California Supreme Court seat. Lure of the gold fields and acts of God combined to cause the disappearance of the remaining names in the intervening 101 years. Thus, printers, then as now, appear to have a solid lot, substantially unaffected by the fluidity of their times. The difference: they no longer set type for Rat Committees.

A treasure for the California Book Club's Keepsake series comes from the librarian of the University of California at Los Angeles, Lawrence Clark Powell. For his selection from the rare book room is a copy of the first book published in Guatemala, a work of which only three other copies are recorded – two in Spain and one in Chile.

The great earthquake of 1773 which destroyed the city of Antigua, with its many examples of early Guatemalan imprints accounts for that country's lacking a copy of its first printed book this theological work written by the Bishop of Guatemala.

The fact that the UCLA Library possesses a copy of this rare monument of Central American printing is due to the generosity of Robert B. Honeyman Jr., of San Juan Capistrano, one of California's most distinguished book and print collectors, who presented the book to the library in 1954.