

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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A Zamorano Letter

The Stanford University Library chose a letter from Don J Agustine Vincente Zamorano to the "Alcalde del Pueblo de San Jose Guadalupe" for the University's representation in the Keepsake series of the California Book Club.

The old, mellowed letter was selected by J. Terry Bender, the librarian, from among the very large collection of Californiana in the fine library at this university. Separate from the text written by Bender, a photostatic copy of the letter written in three columns on a single folded sheet, is enclosed. It is so perfect that one might very well believe that it was the original.

The letter is dated Aug. 14, 1832, Monterey, from the "Comandancia General Accidental de la Alta California." The paper is thick, rough-textured, early 19th Century letter stock, and the ink, though it has browned slightly, maintains its clarity. Bender writes that the ink has begun to act corrosively on the paper, but the condition will probably not be serious for another century. The hand is firm and slanting with occasional calligraphic flourishes but is amazingly legible.

The contents throw an interesting light on Zamorano's situation during the interlude prior to Gen. Figueroa's arrival and the assumption of his duties as civil engineer of the territory.

Zamorano is probably best known in Monterey as a printer, for it was he who printed the first newspaper in California "The Californian" and also the most important book, according to authorities, "The Manifesto a Ja Republica Mejicana" by Jose Figueroa, comandante general y pege politico de la Alta California, in Monterey, 1835.

In 1825 Zamorano came from Mexico as the executive secretary of the territory of Alta California and served 11 years as second administrative officer. In addition, he commanded for six years the most important military post within the territory, the Presidio of Monterey.

Our informant tells us that George L. Harding, the greatest authority on Zamorano, says in his "Don Agustine Zamorano, Statesman, Soldier, Craftsman"; "There is no escaping the fact that Don Agustine V. Zamorano was both de jure and de facto governor of

Alta California from Feb 1, 1832 to Jan. 14, 1833, and that Echeandia was but a revolutionary guerrilla chieftain who managed to maintain some semblance of local autonomy in defiance of the government of the territory."

Through a typographical error the book dates the Monterey letter as Aug. 14, 1832, rather than Aug. 4. The latter date is the correct one. The original of the Monterey letter was in Hubert Howe Bancroft's collection and was destroyed in the San Francisco fire of 1906. Prior to this, however; the letter was summarized, and transcripts of these summaries were deposited in the "Monterey Archive:" Mr. Harding had to depend upon the Monterey summary for his information, as the Stanford letter to San Jose was not known to him at that time.

J. Terry Bender, chief, Division of Special Collections and keeper of Rare Books at the Stanford University Library, reports: "As a matter of fact, none of us knows where this letter was at the time of Mr. Harding's research.

"The letter was presented to the Stanford Library by a group of anonymous donors in June of 1937, three years after the publication of the Harding book. No record was kept of the names of these donors, and hence there was no provenance for the letter. Perhaps some reader will be able to give us a clue to the history of the piece. It would be particularly interesting as Mr. Harding tells us he knows of the survival of no other original from this group of letters."