

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Larkin's Life

Thomas Oliver Larkin was born in Charlestown, Mass. in the vicinity of Boston, on Dec. 16, 1802. His ancestors were people of English extraction who had settled in New England in the 17th Century. Larkin's paternal great-grandfather had come over on the Mayflower and was admitted to as a free man. His grandfather Ebenezer Larkin fought in the Battle of Bunker Hill.

Larkin's mother, Mrs. Ann Rogers Cooper, was the widow of Thomas Cooper. She was born on July 18, 1771, on the island of Alderney, the daughter of Capt. William and Martha Rogers. Young Larkin's father, for whom he was named, was born on July 11, 1769, and died in Charlestown on April 18, 1808. So at the age of 16, after the death of his mother, the young Larkin set to work

Thomas Oliver Larkin first tried the art of making books in Boston. In 1821, he left Boston to spend 10 years in business in North Carolina. The California Historical Society in San Francisco has on record a letter from Larkin written in May of 1831 from North Carolina. The letter is on loan from Mrs. Samuel A. Wood of San Francisco.

A quick decision to go to California was made by Larkin in 1831 and he sailed from Boston on Sept 5. He traveled on the Newcastle by way of the Sandwich Islands, arrived in San Francisco early in April of 1832, and in Monterey on April 13. He was 29 years of age and was five feet seven and a half inches tall. A very handsome portrait of him hangs in the dining room of the Larkin House and a copy of that painting was given by Mrs. Alice Larkin Toulmin to the Thomas Oliver Larkin school in Monterey.

On his arrival in Monterey, Larkin began work as a clerk for Capt. Cooper. After a couple of years in this employment, he opened a store of his own with a capital of \$500. He sold general merchandise, produce and liquors. He built the first double-g geared flour mill. He hired foreigners to make shingles and to shape lumber and also began the construction of various buildings on contract and built up a very good trade with the Sandwich Islands, Mexico and various California points in lumber, potatoes, soap, beaver, sea-otter skins, and horses a varied business we must admit.

Larkin did not wish Mexican citizenship, but in 1836, he obtained a "carta" which was renewed from year to year. He once visited Mexico on business. According to his notes in the Bancroft Library he supervised the construction of additions to the Custom House in 1842. That year he also opened a branch store in Santa Cruz under the management of Josiah Belden. Belden had arrived in California in 1841 and later became a prominent citizen of San Jose.

Larkin was appointed United States Consul at Monterey on May 1, 1843, but did not assume office until April 2, 1844, continuing in that important position for four years. He became a member of the Constitutional Convention in 1849, with the honor, along with Abel Steans of Los Angeles, of having lived in California longer than any other member, except the Spanish citizens.

Larkin died in San Francisco on October 27, 1858, following an attack of typhoid fever. The city named a street for him and in Monterey we have both a street and an historic old adobe residence named in his honor.

It is interesting to note in the record of the cost of the Larkin House, as kept by Thomas Oliver Larkin, that many of the rooms were papered. It cost him \$8.00 to have the lower room papered and the paper and paste cost \$11.00.

On Jan. 1. 1837, Larkin recorded that his house and lot had cost him a total of \$3,843. At this time his record book noted that the house was well furnished with a desk costing \$40.00 two sideboards, valued at \$30.00 and \$40.00 respectively, two looking glasses valued at \$25.00, a dozen chairs at \$36.00, and one bedstead at \$25.00. Kitchen tiles for the kitchen came to \$28.00 for 700.

Dr. Robert J. Parker who edited "Chapters in the Early Life of Thomas Oliver Larkin," writes . . . It would be much better to say that the establishment now known as the Consul Larkin House originally cost about \$5,000 completed." According to Dr. Parker's computation, the Larkin House when completed with a wall and probably a few auxiliary buildings, cost \$4, 927.6, but probably some costs were either left out completely or added twice by Larkin.