

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### Some Choice Books

The Academy Literary Guild of Fresno, California, has been publishing some really fine books recently on California history which we will share in review with our readers today.

Our first choice is "Ranchos of California" by Robert G. Cowan, an authoritative reference work concerning 700 ranchos of the Spanish and Mexican periods, with name of grants, grantees, locations, claimants under the United States, dates of grants and patents; and a glossary of California terms.

In addition to its value as a reference work, this book presents a brief but most vivid picture of the life of the rancheros – an account as romantic as it is true, gleaned from contemporary sources of this colorful era in a colorful state. The author also traces the motives and activities that led to the land grants and the pastoral period.

We have noted with interest the unnamed ranchos in Monterey, among which we observed the name Manuel Butron, receiver of the first land concession, Nov. 27, 1775, of 140 varas near Carmel Mission. He held this but a short time. Other grantees were Thomas Blanco, Jose Canuto Boronda, Jose Castro, Mariano Castro, Esteban Espinosa, Josefa Martinez, Francisco Perez Pacheco, Antonio Romero, and Hermengildo Vasquez.

The ten Spanish governors of California are listed with their years of service, and the nine Mexican governors. Pio Pico filled in a term and also served from February, 1845 to July 7, 1846 and Nicolas Gutierrez served twice. We have counted 83 grants in Monterey County alone.

We have often observed the life-size statue of Chaplain William D. McKinnon in Golden Gate Park in San Francisco and thought that some day we would find time to learn more about this historic character. The Academy Guild has provided this opportunity by publishing Brother V. Edmund's book "First California's Chaplain."

William Daniel McKinnon (1858-1902) was one of the most heroic figures to emerge from the Spanish-American War as the chaplain of the First California Regiment. While the book brings to light much new material on his boyhood in Prince Edward Island, his work on the docks of San Francisco in the turbulent

1870's, and his early career as a pastor and social worker, the major portion of the book concerns itself with his remarkable military career. His concern for the safety of the men prompted Chaplain McKinnon to walk, unarmed and unprotected, 800 yards across no-man's land to negotiate the surrender of Manila.

Though the book is not a romantic but a serious historical study, yet it makes a vital period in our past come alive again, and portrays, a vigorous and unusual personality in the chaplains of the First California Volunteers.

A book that will be enjoyed by teenagers and their elders alike is "California Dons" by Ralph Leroy Milliken of Los Banos. The book is a result of the visit of an old, old man, Senor Don Estolano Larios, at the Milliken home many years ago. He came to visit for two weeks, but he remained as a guest for three and a half years. He entertained both himself and his host by furnishing the author with the material – some 400 typewritten pages – on which to base the story of his life. Together they made many trips to San Juan Bautista and the scenes of his boyhood, and to Santa Barbara, where he went to school nearly a century before.

Larios also translated for the author a manuscript now in the Bancroft Library, "Vida y Aventuras de su Padre, Manuel Larios," that he had written in 1818 at the request of his friend, Thomas Savage, for Mr. Bancroft. The manuscript was written in Spanish and depicts the life and adventures of his father, Don Manuel Larios, who began life as a private in the army of the King. At his death in 1865 he was the owner of 25,000 acres of land and had risen to the position of the leading Don of San Juan Bautista.

There are several illustrations in the book printed by the Academy Guild at Fresno and sent for this column by Father James Culleton, formerly of San Carlos church, Monterey. The balcony of the General Castro House at San Juan is an attractive frontispiece, followed by photographs of Don Estolano Larios, Don Manuel Larios, Vache's store which still stands on a prominent corner in San Juan and is occupied by an antique store, and the original door of the mission.

Though fiction, this book is carefully based on the personal recollections of Senor Don Estolano Larios and deals with California a century ago.