

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **Oliver Larkin's Birthday**

Monday, Oct. 27, was the 100th anniversary of the death of Thomas Oliver Larkin, a Yankee newcomer to Monterey in 1832, who was distinguished for many "firsts" in the land of his adoption. He has the distinction historically of being the first and only United States consul to California, the first real estate salesman, land speculator and sub-divider, first "press" agent, first American political power, and leading merchant-trader.

We would list Larkin first as the U. S. consul, the builder of the Larkin House in Monterey now a State Historical Monument, the keeper of early California records which have been recorded in the Larkin Papers being published by the Bancroft Library at the University of California, to result eventually in nine volumes of historical material which would not have been recorded had not Larkin preserved copies of all letters he sent to the United States and the original replies which he received from his superiors in Washington. Larkin also took a prominent part in the Constitutional Convention in Monterey in 1849.

Larkin was born in Charlestown, Mass., in September 1802. At the age of 15 years he was orphaned and thrown on his own resources, so he started out into the world alone. He became a storekeeper in North Carolina at the age of 20 years and was a postmaster and justice of the peace there three years later. A severe illness took him back to Boston, where he completed his plan for a voyage to California, where he landed in 1832.

In September 1849, the historic Constitutional Convention met in Monterey. In the now famed Colton Hall, 48 delegates sat in assemblage there to debate until California was launched as a state in the United States of America.

Thomas Oliver Larkin was of course, present there as a delegate, as a host from his country and as the consul. The Larkin House brought honor and dignity to the occasion by extending even more than its old and famous hospitality. It was "open house" at all hours of the day, for it was Larkin's last official act as the representative of the new ruling government.

While engrossed in these tasks and the problems of the days, Larkin became ill on one of his travels and was

forced to pause in Colusa to recuperate. After reaching his home in San Francisco he developed typhoid fever from which he did not recover. On Oct 27, 1858, in his 56th year, Thomas Oliver Larkin, said "Adios" to the "land where he had in no small degree helped to bring about a change of flag and of destiny".

The pioneer master trader was buried in a cemetery near San Francisco overlooking the Golden Gate and not far from where he had landed on the shores of California nearly three decades before.

Reuban Underbill in his book "From Cowhide to Golden Fleece" writes this: "Monterey might have been more restful, more appropriate for the long siesta - somewhere on the pine clad slopes with their sweeping vista of the grey and blue Pacific, in sight of the historic settlement in which his genius and activities had dominated, of the home made famous by its New England hospitality, and of the shore line where he had built the Custom House and the first wharf in California."