

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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'Libros Californianos'

In *Westways*, the monthly publication of the Automobile Club of Southern California, we have found this timely reference to the writings of the late Phil Townsend Hanna, whose book, "California Through Four Centuries," we recommend whole heartedly to anyone interested in California history: "Sooner or later every veteran bookman is called on by less experienced readers to choose for them what he regards as the best books on a given subject."

Thus, in 1931, the late Phil Townsend Hanna compiled "Libros Californianos," or five feet of California books, in which not only did he select 25 most important books of California, but included, also, the choices of three other authorities in the field, Leslie E. Bliss, librarian of the Huntington Library; Robert E. Cowan, bibliographer and librarian, and Henry R. Wagner, collector and historian.

Its sub-title inspired by Harvard President Eliot's "Five Foot Shelf of the World's Classics." *Libros Californianos* was published by Jake Zeitlin, Los Angeles bookseller, and printed by Ward Ritchie, then just making the start which was to take him eventually into the front rank of American printers. In spite of shrinking purses in the depression days, the book soon sold out an edition of 1,000 copies, as readers and collectors eagerly recognized it as the best thing of its kind ever compiled. During all these years since, "Libros Californianos" has been out of print and scarce, rarely to be found in second-hand bookshops or listed in their catalogs.

Last summer, after the death of Phil Townsend Hanna, friends expressed the hope that there would be a new edition of "Libros Californianos." Jake Zeitlin stood ready to publish it. Ward Ritchie again was to print it, and so, the present writer, Lawrence Powell, a disciple and friend of Phil Hanna, undertook to revise, enlarge and bring the book up to date.

The work has now been completed, and a new edition of *Libros Californianos*, similar in format to the first with about 40 pages of added material, is now in press and will appear later in the spring. Although the price has not yet been set, it will be less than \$5, we have been told, and orders may be placed with your bookseller.

Powell, writing for *Westways* says: "My contributions include a prefatory memoir of Hanna, a revision of his

25 choices to indicate books now out of print or revised, and my own selection of 25 most important books of Californiana published in the quarter century since 'Libros Californianos' first appeared."

In addition to the original lists of Bliss, Cowan, and Wagner, two of California's leading antiquarian booksellers, Warren Howell of San Francisco and Glen Dawson of Los Angeles, were asked to collaborate on their choice of the 25 rarest works of California not included in any of the earlier lists.

Thus, Phil Townsend Hanna's book is 'reborn again and will live long after him. I am reminded of the words Gilbert Highet wrote about the Roman satirist *Journal*, continues Powell:

"The life of a good book is far longer than the life of man. Its author dies, and his generation dies; and his successors are born and die; the world he knew disappears, and new orders which he could not foresee are established on its ruins; law, religion, science, commerce, society, all are transformed into shapes which would astound him; but his book continues to live. Long after he and his epoch are dead; the book speaks his voice."