

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Thomas Oliver Larkin

Thomas Oliver Larkin was born in Charlestown, Mass., in the vicinity of Boston, on December 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 Charlestown a freeman. His grandfather, Ebenezer Larkin, fought in the Battle of Bunker Hill. .

Because the historic old Larkin House in Monterey, built by Thomas Oliver Larkin, officially became State property on Feb. 21, during a meeting of the State Division of Beaches and Parks in Monterey, we thought it would be an appropriate time to acquaint our readers again with a bit of the background and history-making of the builder of the adobe home at the corner of Jefferson and Calle Principal.

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 years, 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 in May of 1831 from North Carolina. The letter was on loan from Mrs. Samuel Wood of San Francisco. We do not know if that loan still exists, but we hope that it is available to historians, and particularly to those interested in California.

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 5 feet, 7 ½ inches tall.

A very handsome portrait of him still hangs in the dining room of the Larkin House, as well as one of Mrs. Larkin, given by Mrs. Toulmin, their granddaughter, when she presented the Larkin House to the State of California.

Mrs. Toulmin also had a copy of the painting of Larkin made for the Thomas Oliver School in Monterey.

Larkin's first work in Monterey was 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-gear flour mill. He hired foreigners to make shingles and to shape lumber, and also began 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. According to his notes in the Bancroft Library he supervised the construction of additions to the Custom House in 1842. Larkin was appointed United States Consul at Monterey on May 1, 1843, continuing in that business for four years. He became a member of the Constitutional Convention in 1849, with the honor, along with Abel Stearns of Los Angeles, of having lived in California longer than any other member, except the Spanish citizens.

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