

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

May 20, 1959

Mr. Larkin's Wharf

"Accompanying this you, have a translation of the debt and contract of a wharf I had in this town with the former Collector of the Custom House, which I beg leave to present for your consideration. You will perceive that including the principal and interest up to the seventh of April eighteen hundred and forty seven, the amount due me is four hundred and twenty four dollars." Thus wrote Thomas Oliver Larkin to Commodore James Biddle from Monterey, March 5, 1847.

Continuing Mr. Larkin, the first and only United States Consul to California, informed the Commodore: "Since California has been under the flag of the United States I have been most of the time so engaged in Government Service, and at a distance from the town, that I have been unable to attend to the contract, or debt I now present to you, as Commander in Chief, on this coast. I therefore ask of you that you pay the debt now due me, or give orders that the wharf shall be given up to me with sufficient water lot each side of it as my property, and allow me to present a bill against the United States for wharfage during the time the wharf has been occupied in United States service. I am with due respect Your Obdt, Sev't."

(Signed) Thomas O. Larkin.

The above letter appears in Vol. VI of The Larkin Papers, just off the press of the University of California for the Bancroft Library. The edition is edited by George P. Hammond, director of the Bancroft Library, and contains personal, business, and official correspondence of Thomas Oliver Larkin, merchant and United States Consul here in 1847.

James Biddle wrote Larkin from the U. S. Ship Columbus at Monterey on March 13, 1847; "Your letter without date is received. I am not authorized to purchase a wharf at Monterey, nor is it expedient that a wharf for the Navy be purchased, as the presence of our ships of war in this bay is only temporary. It is more likely that the Army may require a wharf, and that you should address yourself to General Kearny rather than to me.

"I request that you send me a copy of any written agreement you may have made with any of my

predecessors in command of the Squadron in relation to the wharf.

Very Respectfully Your Most Obedient
James Biddle."

Larkin replies to this letter: "Your letter received. I have no contract with any of your predecessors relative to the wharf. For some months before Commodore Sloat took possession of Monterey, to the present month, I have felt too much interest in affairs of my Government, in this quarter, to enter into question of my private rights. I told Commodore Sloat, and Commodore Stockton, that I had a right to the wharf, and expected he would either purchase it, or pay for the use of it. One of the two proposals they said, must be complied with. For reasons as above, I did no more in the business at that time.

"I do not request you to purchase the wharf, if it is inconsistent. I only wish to know if it is taken from me. If it is not, I wish to take possession of it as my property, and take care of it. Under present circumstances the wharf dally receives injuries, for want of care.

I am with much respect
Your most Obt.
Thomas O. Larkin."

A prompt reply arrived the next day (March 14) from James Biddle on board the U. S. Ship Columbus: "I have received your letter of the 13th in which you say you only wish to know if your wharf is taken from you by government. Certainly, you already know that I have not taken your wharf from you, and that I cannot possibly have any information upon the subject except that which you have written me.

Very respectfully Your Most Obedient,
James Biddle, Cong. Pacific Squad,"

The wharf concerned in all this correspondence was situated in front of the Custom House and over the huge rock formation still to be seen on the right hand side of the entrance to Fishman's Wharf.