

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Early Buildings

"Portals West" is the newest publication of the California Historical Society. E. Geoffrey Bangs has produced this book for the historical society in order that we may look back to our vital architectural heritage. He is a distinguished California architect who has roamed the state, photographing mansions and barns, churches, bridges and stores, many of which are shown in this publication along with illuminating description accompanying each of the 36 plates. Only 1,000 copies have been printed and the price is \$10.50.

This folio of the late 19th Century architecture contains a preface by Hobert Gordon Sproul, distinguished California educator and president emeritus of the University of California. Mr. Bangs, the editor and photographer, has been intimately associated with the development of California, largely in the design of educational and public buildings. He was at one time state director of housing and has served as consultant for several California communities.

The selected photographs," states Dr. Sproul in his preface is an attractive glimpse in pictures and instructive presentation in prose, of the development of the architectural styles of California in the last half of the 19th Century, stimulating in its analysis and discussion of salient features by E. Geoffrey Bangs, a talented architect of the region."

The selected, photographs are truly representative of the architecture of the territory extending from the Monterey Peninsula on the south to the Oregon border on the north, and from the Pacific Ocean on the west to the Sierra Nevada on the east. As the author tells us in his Introduction, "the purpose of this folio is to present a brief glimpse of our architectural heritage . . . and create a more widespread appreciation of our charming provincial architecture"

Dr. Sproul continues, "The theme chosen by Mr. Bangs is not only Interesting but timely, in view of the widespread activities in the field of both urban and suburban development, and the consequent destruction of many interesting old neighbors and some handsome edifices with character. This theme is developed by photographs, each accompanied by a brief description of the subject, and an occasional

anecdote to liven the text. While some of the buildings shown, on the whole, are not of historical importance or examples of architecture at its best, they do have value as basic forms that successfully serve a vigorous society."

"The cultivation of the attitudes of mind and habits of thought identified with the arts, and not least with architecture, depends in no small part upon an understanding of the creative process as a whole as it expresses the divergent values of many cultures. Thus, and only thus, can the drive toward conformity be avoided and progress, inspired by independence, encouraged. Transition from the past to the present there must be, but it will be a more profitable transition if it pays respect to the models established by antiquity as examples of a golden age, or even in the case of architecture, of a comfortable age such as described in this book."

The first photograph in "Portals Past" is the Larkin House in Monterey. It is plate No. 1.

We will take the privilege of quoting the text which accompanies the picture: "This well known house of a better known man is a superb example of early California architecture.

"Thomas O. Larkin, Yankee trader, confidant, diplomat, and first and only United States consul in California, was the most respected and useful American during the kaleidoscopic days of California's early history. Larkin arrived in California from Boston in 1832 and selected Monterey, where in 1834 he completed this handsome home in which he lived until 1852. It was one of the first two-story houses in Northern California, an innovation made possible by the use of large timbers, which Larkin provided from his recently established redwood mill near Santa Cruz. He introduced another innovation: glass windows. The walls of the new home were three feet thick, all of adobe, which Larkin noted as quite durable from the rain, a precaution he took by extending the roof beyond the wall. The balconies of the other three sides were not only functional but also afforded this much needed protection.

"Larkin's house cost about \$5,000 and it became the center of his business operation as well as his home. It also became a diplomatic and political meetinghouse in the precarious years during which California moved through uncertain seas to statehood. It was from here

that Commodore Sloat issued his proclamation bringing California under the American flag.

“The consul’s granddaughter, Mrs. Alice Larkin Toulmin, recently gave the Larkin House to the State Division of Beaches and Parks and it is now noted as a State Historical Monument.”