

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Decatur House In Washington

That waves of wantonness are sweeping history under all the nation became clearly apparent to the members of the California Historical Society who attended a luncheon in the Comstock Room of the Sheraton Palace Hotel in San Francisco recently.

The group heard William J. Murtagh of the National Trust for Historical Preservation, the only organization chartered by Congress to safeguard America's Heritage of historic sites and buildings.

The speaker presented a number of slides of the before and after variety. The "after" in some cases, where progress had been permitted to run its course, were mighty horrifying.

One of the slides shown was an "after" of Casa Amesti, a restored adobe in Monterey that was bequeathed to the trust by the late Mrs. Frances Adler Elkins, and is now known as "The Old Capital Club."

California entered the picture again when Mr. Murtagh showed a shot of the magnificent ballroom of the Decatur House in Washington, D.C; for worked into center of the floor was the Seal of California, it is assumed that it had been ordered placed there by General Edward Fitzgerald Beale who arrived in the nation's capital heavy with gold from California and bought the house after the Civil War.

The general was the son of Truxton Beale, born in San Francisco in 1856 and one time owner of the vast Tejon Ranch in Kern County, five acres of which now forms the State Historical Landmark No. 129, known as Fort Tejon. Here was the site, of the fort established on August 10, 1854. Tejon is a Spanish and Indian name meaning badger.

Decatur House was named for the builder Commodore Stephen Decatur. It was built in 1818 and designed by a great 19th century Architect Benjamin Latrobe, designer of the portico of the White House and much of the Capitol's interior.

The younger Beale inherited the house and his widow willed it to the National Trust. Martin van Buren and Henry Clay have lived in it and it also has been the embassies of several foreign countries.

The seventh volume of Larkin Papers has been received by all subscribers. The book of 369 pages, edited by George Hammond, director of the Bancroft Library at the University of California, contains letters written by Thomas Oliver Larkin from Monterey to various important people connected with the United States government at Washington before California became a part of that government and while he was consul here. It also contains the answers to these letters, proving that Larkin kept copies of all his letters and also kept the originals of all mail received as well as mail from his friends and family. This volume forms a great history of California from 1847-1848 as seen by Larkin.

The frontispiece is a Portrait of John C. Fremont by Matthew Brady.

During 1847-1848 the influential Monterey merchant and U. S. consul, Thomas Oliver Larkin was occupied with real estate speculation, shipping, merchandising, and other activities, to say nothing of writing reports to the government about the remarkable gold discovery in the California foothills country. As with the previous six, the new volume opens a thousand different windows on the men and events of California's splendid '40s for the enrichment of books to be written for generations to come.