

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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More Larkin Papers Published

Volume VIII of the Larkin papers from 1848 to 1851, has just come from the University of California Press in Berkeley, as published by the Bancroft Library. The book, composed of 420 pages, contains personal, business, and official correspondence of Thomas Oliver Larkin, merchant and United States consul in California. George P. Hammond, director of the Bancroft Library, edited the publication.

Thomas Oliver Larkin, probably the most influential merchant in Mexican California, was the first and only American consul in the province. He worked under specific instructions "from the State Department to win Californians over to the idea of separation from Mexico. From 1847 to 1849 he was naval storekeeper for the United States. Later, when California became an integral part of the U. S., Larkin served as a delegate to the State Constitutional Convention. His many duties and activities resulted in rich and varied correspondence.

I We know that Larkin arrived in California in 1832, early enough to observe the leisurely pastoral life of the Mexican province, where Mission buildings already were crumbling, where the white sails of the Yankee ships engaged in the hide and tallow trade moved from port to port, and where the harmless rattle of an occasional local revolution only momentarily broke the quiet round of daily living, the dust jacket of the eighth volume tells the reader.

Volume I, 1822-1842, touched upon such events as the Graham affair; the establishment of Fort Sutter; and the coming in 1841 of the first overland-to-California parties.

"Such original sources are never exhausted," said Dr. Hammond, "no matter how often they are used. To one writer they serve one purpose; to another, still another. So it is that today these famous old manuscripts are being consulted by a younger generation. To them the records, odd and hoary with tradition, are truly new discoveries. Indeed, that is how it will be a hundred or so years from now. It is, therefore, our responsibility to make sure that they last that long."

Dr. Hammond goes on to say: "These documents often fragile and crumbling, are in constant use. A way had to be devised to preserve the originals, if possible." To Dr.

Hammond, publishing the Larkin papers seemed the only reasonable answer. In that way, he could make the material available to anyone interested in California and Western history, and, at the same time, preserve the originals.

On Feb. 15, 1849, Larkin wrote to Jacob P. Leese: "Accompanying this you have 31 and one-quarter ounces placer gold (\$500) which please expend for me in Canton, in purchasing the following articles:

"One set of drawers having the top to turn over into a writing desk. Within this several small drawers for papers and writing. The set of drawers may be say 3 feet high more or less, containing three or four large drawers below the desk.

"Two portable writing desks similar to the one I gave M.G.V. but more complete.

"One set of handsome chocolate color trunks, camphor wood outside, handsome covered, well tacked and good brass corners; matting fine for three or four rooms.

"A few, say six small fancy fine shawls for Caroline, two of them gold and silver embroidery. A few very fancy-dress stuff for Caroline, four to six superior ladies shawls, one of them black - orange embroidery; two chocolate color rich showy embroidery; the others of fancy embroidery and fringe, say dove pearl or coffee color.

"Some fancy handkerchiefs, dress and tight articles of ladies' use for Mrs. Larkin. Have the furniture of the best with my name in full and the year.

"One full tea set and dinner set of best china-wear, large pieces marked Rachel Larkin and small pieces R. L.

"Some few filagree articles for table or sideboard display.

"Should my \$500 be insufficient, make up from our funds, I paying in California the profits on the amt. advanced. Should the furnishing of the china require more time than you have, pay some merchant the cost and have it shipped hereafter, the same with other articles.

"Wishing you a pleasant voyage and speedy return, I am, your most Obt.Svt. (Signed) Thomas O. Larkin."