

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

April 3, 1963

The Book Club

The Book Club of California is this year sending to its membership a portfolio of the Book Club Printers, with a foreword by Oscar Lewis. This number 26 in the series of annual Keepsakes, commemorates the 50th anniversary of the club's founding.

When the club was organized in 1912 one of its prime purposes was, to quote Article I of its constitution, "the promotion of the arts pertaining to the production of books." The club always has played by no means an unimportant part in fostering the production of well-designed and well-printed books on the West Coast. Oscar Lewis writes: "While the club has been of benefit to the printers by giving them the sort of commissions they most needed and desired, they in turn have responded by producing books and incidental printing of such quality as to make the club's publications admired and sought after by collectors of fine printing both at home and abroad."

The purpose of the present Keepsake series is to pay tribute to those individuals and firms that have worked closely with the club during its first 50 years. Each of the 12 in the series has been produced by a different press, and its text has to do either with the work the press itself has done for the club, or with that of those presses that are no longer active.

Among the printers contributing to the anniversary Keepsakes are Mallette Dean of Fairfax, The Ward Ritchie Press, The Greenwood Press, The Windsor Press, The Black Vine Press, Adrian Wilson, The Allen Press, The Plantin Press of Los Angeles; Lawton Kennedy, The Grabhorn Press, San Francisco.

The first association with the Book Club for Lawton Kennedy was in 1929. One of the first books he designed was "The City That Has Fallen" in 1933, the story of San Francisco's disastrous fire and earthquake, by James Marlon Reedy. Lawton did the press work for several of the club's annual Keepsakes, including the first two in the California mining town series, Sonora and Sutter's Mill. He later joined with his brother in Oakland to form the Westgate Press and printed for the club "Pioneer Western Playbills." He also did the presswork for the delightful story of Gillett Burgess

"Bayside Bohemia" and the Keepsake series (1956): "Treasures of California Collections."

The Allen Press in its portfolio writes this tribute to the California Book Club: "Just the other day we were asked what we, as book printers, thought of The Book Club of California; what had we extracted from the richly endowed vein of its publishing program. The answer is of many facets; humbleness is necessary but takes time. For us the book club stands as a cultural beacon, an oasis in the publishing desert, a springboard to fame, if not to fortune. My father who was a member from early days, imbued in me a feeling of sincere admiration verging on respect."

Among the Allen Press work for the club has been "Heraldry of New Helvetia": a unique and exciting bit of Californiana assembled by Carrol D. Hall of Sutter's Fort, and later selected by the American Institute of Graphic Arts as one of the 50 books of the year. Then came "The Diary of Patrick Breen," edited by George R. Stewart; followed by Donner Miscellany, gathered by Carroll D. Hall; "La Porte de Maletroit" by Robert Louis Stevenson, and Mark Twain's "San Francisco Correspondent."