

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

June 2, 1965

Letters Of 1843

If E.L. Williams had not been a history student and preserved all the historical items he could get his hands on from the time he arrived in Monterey in 1849 until his death in Santa Cruz at the turn of the century, much less material would be available to today's historians.

Among his many interesting papers, now treasured by his grandson, Paul Pioda of Salinas, are two letters about a printing press.

Both are in long-hand and evidently are the translations of Mr. Williams. The first, dated March 15, 1843, in Los Angeles, was from Gov. Micheltorena to Manuel Castanares, collector of customs:

"This government wishes to know if it will be possible to currently issue a sheet from the press now at your port. If such is the case, you will please advise me of the result, by the return of the schooner, California, in order that, if it can be done, some editions should be published, transmitting those that may come out to the government, taking care also of advising me in case there should be no one who can manage it, so as to order what may be convenient, and seek some intelligent person, which will not be difficult to find, according to the information I have obtained; for it is of vital interest that the citizens be acquainted with the Gubernative Resolutions, and that they express through the press, freely, their sentiments and opinions. God and Liberty. (signed) Micheltorena.

The answer came back to Monterey on May 6, 1843:

"Most Ext. Sir: In compliance with your ... order dated the 15th of March last past, I proceeded to examine the present condition of the press belonging to the government of this department. It consists of a press in good condition, requiring small repairs, and four boxes of type, illy supplied.

"Although with difficulty because there are not sufficient spaces, I believe that the sheet can be printed, of which your Excy. Is pleased to speak to me in the order of aforesaid, and I have the honor to forward you part of a copy of the abridgement of the Castillian grammar that you may see the kind of type of which to make use.

"Wishing to contribute in some manner to the patriotic and enlightened views of your Excy., I propose that, in company with the Director of the Establishment of Education, Don Enrique Cambuston, we will make the compositions until an intelligent person be found for that purpose.

"All of which I have the honor to say to your Excy. In due reply, renewing to you the assurances of my respect. God and Liberty. (signed) Castanares."

The reader will notice that the dates of these two letters are March and May. It took that long in 1843 for the governor of California to know that he could have the necessary printing done, that he might inform his fellow citizens of governmental affairs.

With these dates in mind, we have looked back over a book on early California printing by Herbert Fahey and found that the Lagoda sailed from Boston harbor for the Sandwich Islands and the coast of California in May, 1833. A list of the ship's cargo, now in Harvard College Library, includes the notation:

"Case printing press. There is a document dated July 28, 1843, in the Bancroft. Therefore the new press was set up and in use on that date. Zamorano printed the new notice announcing the press ready for service. This was the first piece of California printing to carry the printer's name. The imprint read: 'Monterey, 1843. Imprenta de Zamorano y Ca'."

This may have been the same press and type inquired for in the letters we have quoted today.