

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### History On Sale

When history goes on auction, it is a great day for historians, collectors, investors and just plain book lovers. The prices paid are unbelievable, but the purchaser is overjoyed at his find and hugs a book as a child would a bright toy.

Several years ago there was a great auction of a collection of books of Dr. Harry Plath, noted Oakland physician and bibliophile, at the Park-Bernet Galleries in New York.

For more than 30 years Dr. Plath gathered an extensive collection of volumes on the West. If his library did not contain many of the great rarities, there were sufficient items and enough good solid material to attract a large and enthusiastic audience at the sale, reported David Magee, a book man of San Francisco who was present.

The high spots in the collection were of considerable value and importance. Monterey figured several times in the interest and bidding. The highest prices at the sale were brought by "The Constitution of the State of California," San Jose, 1850, and Jose Figueroa's famous "Manifesto," Monterey, 1835.

Of the "Constitution," only three copies are known: the one spoken of here and those in the Library of Congress and at Pomona College. Bound with it was a collection of acts (94 out of a possible 145) passed by the legislature in 1850 and printed that year in San Jose or San Francisco.

Gov. Figueroa's "Manifesto" was the second book from the Spanish press in California, printed in Monterey in 1835 by Augustin Zamorano, California's first printer. This little book, crudely printed on a hand press brought from Mexico in 1833, is of great historical value and importance. It is the governor's defense of his administration, particularly in regard to his attitude toward colonization plans of Higar and Padres.

It is understood that the \$9,000 paid for the "Constitution" was at that time (1959) the highest price any single volume on California has brought at a public sale or auction. The "Manifesto" sold for \$5,750, more than three and a half times the figure a similar copy fetched when it last appeared for sale in 1945.

It is a pleasure to report that both these rarities returned to California. They were purchased by John Howell's Book Shop on behalf of a private collector.

Dr. Plath had the wisdom during his collecting years to buy California county histories. These large, usually rather clumsy, volumes, with portraits of California pioneers and lithographs of ranches and homesteads, were once considered of little or not importance and consequently ignored by collectors. At this sale they were in demand.

The rarest (rivalled only perhaps by Cox's "Annals of Trinity County") was A.J. Bledsoe's "History of Del Norte County." Dr. Plath's copy, in the original wrappers, brought \$1,800 and was purchased by Peter Decker, a New York dealer. A first edition copy of Monterey County brought \$325, Marin \$160, Eldorado \$120 Amador \$155, to mention only a few.

"Brown and Dallison's "Nevada, Grass Valley and Rough and Ready Directory," the first mountain directory printed in California, brought \$425.

The recent death of Harold Holmes, bookseller of Oakland and San Francisco, brought forth more history. Mr. Holmes entered the book business in 1895, one year after his father started the Holmes Book Co. in San Francisco. The senior shop prospered by selling large quantities of books to seamen who stocked up for long voyages.

Harold Holmes was particularly proud of the early Western books and manuscripts that he was able to contribute to the University of California's Bancroft Library and the California Historical Society.

His rarest and most valuable single acquisition was a copy of Figueroa's "Manifesto," an 1835 political document. Only six copies of the work have even been found and are now worth \$10,000.