

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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California Trade Cards

The Book Club of California, has just sent out to the membership a series of Keepsakes consisting of nine folders, issued to members of the Book Club during 1966. The series is edited by Margot Patterson Doss and John Hussey and printed by Grabhorn-Hoyem.

Number 1 in the collection of early California Trade Cards is "Widow Fink's Champagne."

"Good Wine needs no bush," wrote William Shakespeare in *As You Like It*, paraphrasing and shortening Publius who had said, long since, "You need not hang up the ivy branch over the wine that will sell," so this first paragraph tells the reader.

The vintner's bush may not look like the progenitor of Li'l Ol' Swiss Winemaker but think about it for a minute. It made its way to the carved wooden signs that hung over the wine shops of Europe. When the hanging signs were abolished by law as a possible menace to passers-by, the signs, bush and all, were transferred to paper, advertising trade cards.

The billboards that mar your scenery, the singing commercial, the television series, the ten-page supplement are really that same old bush, or shortening two steps in the evolution, merely trade cards bigger than life.

Trade cards came with the colonists to New England. The distinguished Bella Landdauer collection at the New York Historical Society has several issued by Paul Revere. Another issued by the Boston Bookseller Larkin, whose nephew made his way west and settled in Monterey to become the first and only American Consul to Monterey.

Mrs. Doss, who wrote the text for this folder, is a student of San Francisco history, best known for her weekly "walks" in a San Francisco newspaper. She is the author of the book "San Francisco at Your Feet" and presently is working on another of California wines.

John A. Hussey of the National Park Service wrote the text for the No. 2 folder published by the Book Club of California as the Keepsake for 1966 for its members.

This folder features A. C. Robinson & Company. This firm features "pearl and abalone shells, ivory and tortoise shells, birds, animals, gold fish, fancy fowls."

These words from the 1880 trade card of A. C. Robinson & Co. conjure romantic business, which indeed it was, and still is. This firm, established in 1849, or 1850, flourishes today in San Francisco as Ansel W. Robinson Co., world famous as the store that "sells people to pets."

I quote Dr. Hussey, regional historian in San Francisco for the National Park Service, "Through Robinson's contact with seamen he began to acquire all sorts of curios from distant places.

"Chinese sailors in particular brought him strange animals and birds, and soon his store bulged with brilliant Macaws, monkeys, and talking parrots. One story holds that the first goldfish imported into the United States were kept in a watering trough on his front stoop."

The A. C. Robinson & Co. trade card reproduced in the collection dates from 1879 or 1880.