

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

January 30, 1967

An Exhibit Of Note

Members and friends of the Monterey History and Art Association are cordially invited to visit Casa Serrano any Saturday or Sunday afternoon from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. to see a special exhibit of antique glass, old fans and other miscellaneous articles. Mrs. Guernsey V. Nevius installed the exhibit and all who have seen it praise it highly.

There are at least two hostesses on duty both Saturday and Sunday who are happy to receive guests and answer questions.

A few years ago the Book Club of California produced a set of keepsakes entitled "Early California Stationery," with humorous pictures of miners during the Gold Rush, which the miners bought to send back home to their friends and families. Now comes the announcement of a major work of western history published by David Magee of San Francisco's Antiquarian Book Shop, Joseph Armstrong Baird Jr, the editor. The title of the publication is "California's Pictorial Letter Sheets, 1849-1869."

In the two decades following 1849, artists and printers in the West produced thousands of vivid pictorial records on sheets of writing paper, and those remain the major surviving visual accounts of California in that era. California letter sheets are a curious blend of local enthusiasm and optical recording, of commercial efforts to capitalize on the captive market, of postal regulations and pathos, to quote from Dr. Baird's introduction.

The letter sheet was, in a way, the precursor of the picture postcard and during the Gold Rush (and after) many pioneers bought them eagerly to pen their own news, their plans, their aspirations, and their homesickness to the "folks back home." And rather than use a piece of plain white paper, how much more pleasant it was to write on sheets which carried a view, say, of San Francisco or Sacramento or some mining town to show relatives or friends in the East the very place where the writer lived or worked. Perhaps news of a fire or a hanging might interest them; well, here was a picture of such doleful event made to order.

"Interest in original letters", wrote the author, "has grown enormously over the past few years. On the infrequent occasions when they occur for sale there are

always collectors and institutions anxious to acquire them. Thus a need for a guide to collecting these fascinating mementoes of California's early days became imperative." True, Peters' "California in Stone", published over 30 years ago, was some help but this pioneer effort deals only partially with the subject by its very nature. Now with the publication of "California's Pictorial Letter Sheets" this need seem to be filled.

Dr. Joseph Baird, professor at the University of California, art historian and author of "Time's Wondrous Changes", among other works, has spent five years compiling this catalog of letter sheets. He has traveled the country over visiting collectors, libraries, art museums—any place likely to have material necessary to make the book as complete as humanly possible. That he has succeeded in doing.

The book is enhanced with at least 60 letter sheets in original sizes. None has ever been reproduced before.

The volume is limited to 475 copies and the price is \$60 plus sales tax.