

NOTICIAS del PUERTO de MONTEREY

A Quarterly Bulletin of Historic Monterey Issued by
The Monterey History and Art Association

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WE PRESENT OUR FIRST QUARTERLY

With the publication of its first quarterly bulletin, the Monterey History and Art Association takes a long step forward. Since its founding in 1931, the Association has had as its primary objective the preservation of those reminders of historic Monterey: the old adobe homes and significant buildings of the early days of Spanish, Mexican and American California. The Association has also obtained through purchase and loan numerous articles for exhibition in public museums such as the old Customs House, the Stevenson House, and Colton Hall. It has taken an active part in impressing on the people of Monterey the inestimable value of the City's place in history, the uniqueness of their heritage, and the importance of retaining for succeeding generations of Californians, adopted or native-born, those irreplaceable relics of a bygone age which embody the state's romantic story.

However, there is a feeling that the Association has another obligation: the encouragement of general interest in local history through the publication of articles covering Monterey's colorful four hundred years as the "cradle of California history." Furthermore, the decisions of the Board of Directors, the calendar of coming events, and news of important acquisitions need wider circulation among the members. For these reasons the Board has sponsored this quarterly.

The editors propose to make the *Noticias del Puerto de Monterey* not only an item of interest for local members, but a genuine contribution to the history of California by including in each issue an article drawn from hitherto unpublished primary historical sources.

We would welcome comments and suggestions from our readers.

THE LARKIN HOUSE BECOMES A STATE MONUMENT

Historically and architecturally, one residence of California's transitional period of the 1830's to 1850's stands in a unique position. The Thomas Oliver Larkin house, erected by the first and only United States Consul in California, the de facto first capitol under General Halleck and his Adjutant-General Lieutenant William T. Sherman, the center of California's business life and the focus of American official activity in the crucial 1840's, is a precious historical memento of the State's formative years.

Through the farsightedness and generosity of Mrs. Henry W. Toulmin (Alice Sistare Larkin), Thomas Larkin's granddaughter, this valuable and evocative



The Larkin House in the 1870's. Note the cannon planted in the street to prevent wagons from cutting the corner too sharply. Photo gift of Harriet Coombs

old adobe, one of the most beautiful and historic in California, became a permanent part of the domain of the State of California on March 15, 1957. For many years it has been Mrs. Toulmin's hospitable custom, reminiscent of those open-handed days when Spanish tradition governed Monterey, to open her home for the Adobe House Tours of the Monterey History and Art Association and to serve the elaborate tea that was the climax of the day. This house will now become the heritage of all the people in California.

The house presented, on its completion in 1837, a startling architectural innovation in Mexican California and inaugurated the popular "Monterey style" that has persisted today. The previous adobe dwellings of Monterey, and indeed, of all Mexican frontier ranches and settlements, were generally of one story with a gable tile or heavy shake roof. If an attic room was used, it was reached by an exterior stairway. The adobe walls, since they were prone to melt down into their native earth under a driving rain, were frequently protected by a coating of whitewashed plaster and, in some cases, covered with boards or branches on the side exposed to rainstorms.

Larkin instituted several major variations on the existing adobe theme. His roof was a hip roof and all four sides of it were shingled. The home was of two stories, but the living quarters on the upper floor were reached by an interior staircase from a central hall. The railed verandah balcony which ran about the east and north sides of the house at the second story level was a sensation in the Monterey of 1836. It was ample enough for any number of family activities, it commanded a splendid view of the town, the harbor and the gently rising wooded hills to the east, and it allowed the family to maintain its privacy despite the business activities which were carried on in the store and office on the ground floor.

It has often been said that the Larkin House, built as it was by a Yankee from the outskirts of Boston, reflected a New Englander's nostalgia. It seems much more likely, however, that the Larkin House is an echo of the elegant plantation houses of the Carolinas where he had spent ten years in business before coming to

California. There are many examples of the pillared verandah with a second story railed balcony throughout the Southern states.

Near New Orleans, the Ormond Plantation, which was erected in the 1780's, is almost the prototype of the Larkin House. It has the hip roof, the two story gallery and verandahs and slim square pillars that are the distinguishing features of the Monterey house. In the Natchez district up the Mississippi, there are other homes reminiscent of Thomas Larkin's fine residence. The architecture of these plantation "big houses" seems to be a natural development in response to social customs, climate, and the French and Spanish influence of Charleston and New Orleans.

Thomas Larkin came to Monterey on April 13, 1832, after a somewhat unsuccessful career as a businessman in North Carolina. He clerked in the store of his half-brother, Captain John B. R. Cooper, who had come out in 1822, and within a year young Larkin had amassed a capital of \$500 and wedded a girl from Massachusetts who was stranded in Monterey by the death of her sea-captain husband. In the same year the shrewd, respected little Yankee trader set himself up as a storekeeper, built a flour mill, organized trade with Hawaii, Mexico and other California towns in lumber, hides and horses and began to contract houses.

Larkin the businessman kept his account books in strict detail. Fortunately for us, for from these dry records of 1832-1837 (now part of the Manuscript Collection of the Bancroft Library, University of California) we get an unrivalled, authentic view of the realities of Californian life from the inside, from an unromantic, hard-headed Down East merchant who knew the value of a penny, even if his happy-go-lucky Mexican neighbors did not.¹

When he came to build his house, like so many have done before and since, he reckoned his expenses and budgeted for them, and like many a homebuilder today, he under-estimated. Everything cost more than he had anticipated. Not only the budget but the weather caused him anguish. He kept a running account of its vagaries from the digging of the foundation in April, 1835, until the completion of the building.

The lot, a fifty vara (136 feet) quadrangle on the corner of present-day Jefferson and Calle Principal, was fairly expensive; it cost \$12.40 and the title deed cost \$3.20 more. The foundation, forty-five feet square, good and solid to support the enormous weight of the thick, two-story adobe walls, was of "white" chalk-rock, 126 loads of it at one dollar a load. Six to eight men worked seven days digging and laying it and received \$38.50 in pay. The oven was begun at the same time, so that his first month's expenses ran \$222.

Wooden moulds for shaping the adobe bricks had to be made while the Indian workmen were treading out the sticky mass of earth and straw to the correct consistency. The moulds cost \$6 and a handcart to carry the sun-dried bricks to the masons cost another \$6.50 to repair. By the end of May, the adobes were shaped and all was in readiness to commence the actual construction. Larkin had figured these adobe making expenses at \$23.48, but his actual cost was \$34. June, he planned, would be the month for the erection of the abode walls, since it was usually warm and dry, but this year the weather was "unusual." The rain came down in dismal showers and ruined the adobes that had already been prepared. It cost \$11.20 to remould them, plus extra outlay for a hoe and trowel.

July turned sunny and the labor now went forward merrily. Larkin estimated that the work would cost \$601.60, but his increased purchases of adobes shot the true expense up to \$849.60. Adobe bricks cost him \$15 per thousand, and in July alone he bought 12,000 of them. The cartage cost was \$60. Indian laborers (how

¹ Parker, Robert J., *Chapters in the Early Life of Thomas Oliver Larkin . . . Building the Larkin House at Monterey*, Special Publication of the California Historical Society, No. 16, San Francisco, California, 1939. This publication contains not only a copy of Larkin's house expenses, but also the weather report.

many are not mentioned), received \$67, probably mostly in trade goods, since later on he specifically notes it when he pays cash to them. His more expert American carpenters got \$86 for the month. These labor costs do not give quite an accurate picture of the situation, because Larkin had to shelter and feed his workmen. In July, their food cost him \$40, a high figure when all meat and grain was home-grown. The heavy planking, floor joists, poles and pillars came to \$172.80, ten door plates came to \$30 and the nails to hold them to sixty cents.

August continues the house-raising with only \$40 for Indian labor, but September brought a much heavier financial drain, \$581 against a budgeted \$439.40. The roof was going up, but according to immemorial custom, the placing of the roof-tree called for "drinks on the house." (Did the phrase have this origin?) Thrifty Mr. Larkin had estimated that \$1.40 would see him through this ceremony, but alas, \$3 worth of rum was necessary to "splice the mainbrace" properly. (And probably no more work *that day*!)

No tiles went on his roof but sturdy shingles at \$10 per thousand. Before the house was finished to his satisfaction, the total cost of shingles came to \$353. 2,600 feet of lumber cost him \$150, heavier timbers \$179.40 and beams \$116. Over a hundred pounds of No. 4 and No. 10 nails cost \$40.40. Indian labor demanded \$29 and in October there is a special note "cash for Indians, \$2.00" Iron for window frames came to \$17.40, and what with more work on the chimney and more Indian labor and board, the month's expenses again outraced the budget \$215.41 to \$182.60.

The weather held fine, however, and November saw \$642.40 invested in the building. "Estevan" dug a well and received \$16 for it. Two iron crowbars disappeared, and Larkin noted the loss at \$12. The next item seems an afterthought: four locks at \$12.

The long spell of good weather broke with the first of December. A little rain fell on December 2, also on December 14, 15 and 16; enough "to make the gutters run." Just before Christmas heavy rains fell. Work fell off sharply. "Gregorio" received \$18 of the \$33 Larkin spent this month, but then, he had only figured on \$26. The rains continued until the middle of January, 1836, and Larkin, estimating on the weather budgeted only \$96. His estimate was far short of the \$152 January cost him. Glass for the windows came (\$30), five doors were made (\$15), the well was completed, and the corral fenced with poles.

The exterior of the house was almost complete in February. The six foot galleries had added more width to the house, and lime for plastering the adobe walls was prepared. Larkin bought 960 pounds of lime for \$15. The cost of doors varied widely. Two came to \$15, and three more to \$30. Parts of the house were now ready for painting (one gallon of oil and one-half keg of paint), and the carpenters put on the gutters. Mrs. Larkin, too, must have welcomed the loads of soil that were brought in for the garden, for this heralded not only Spring, but the end of the heavy work outside the house. It appears that the Larkin family had moved in before the completion of the building, for we have him taking out a store license for the new house in June of 1835.

March brought clear skies and good building weather, up to the twenty-fourth, and after that it rained heavily. Little was done on the house, \$13 being spent mostly for glassing and trimming the windows. Apparently the major necessities of the new house were installed by now, or something interfered with Larkin's plans to continue the work, for no expenses are noted for April. Besides, it rained.

May was just as rainy, but much more was spent. Lumber (\$25) and four padlocks (\$6) went into interiors. June needed a thousand more feet of lumber from Santa Cruz at a total cost of \$52. Since the big room downstairs was to be used as a store and the upper rooms as living quarters, John Smith, an American carpenter, was paid \$87 to put in the upper floor and partitions in July. John Price, an ex-trapper, papered the lower room and earned \$8. The paper and paste cost



The Customs House in the 1850's. The artist is probably in error concerning the second story gallery running the length of the building. Courtesy Monterey Public Library

\$11. Larkin had planned to spend only \$205.30, but the finishing work was expensive. Boards for the lower floor cost \$86, two fireplaces were \$60 (mainly because of the iron used in them, and miscellaneous hardware brought the total to \$251.40. August exceeded its budget, too, but the main expenditures were drawing to a close. More money went out for paint, finishing lumber, glass, sashes and ceiling beams for the upper story. Amount planned, \$214.20; amount expended, \$298.60.

There are no entries for September, October and November, 1836. In December \$157 worth of shingles arrived, 2,000 feet of finishing lumber cost \$96, and more paper (\$20) was put up.

At the beginning of the new year 1837, Larkin estimated that his all-over expenditure on his house had been \$3,843.03. He now had not only the finest residence in California, but the most stylishly furnished. A desk cost him \$40, two sideboards \$70, twelve chairs \$36, two looking glasses \$25, and an elegant bedstead \$25.

The work on the wall, oven and fences and outbuildings continued, but at a more leisurely pace. Larkin had estimated \$40 would provide an adequate privy, but here one suspects a clash of wills in the Larkin household, for the privy eventually cost \$90. September, 1837, saw more work on walls and more adobes for the kitchen wall and store. What with carpenter costs, this marks Larkin's most serious under-estimate, \$140 compared to the actual \$321. In December and January, 1838, are recorded the last items of hardware, wall paper and labor. The two months cost was \$279.

Mr. Thomas O. Larkin's house was now finished and ready for the historic role it was to play in the 1840's.

—D. M. C.

RECORDS OF THE CUSTOM HOUSE

Isaac B. Wall, a native of Virginia, settled in the Monterey district and was elected from Monterey County to the State Assembly. He served in the 3rd and

4th sessions in 1852 and 1853, being speaker of the Assembly in 1853. He was then appointed Collector of Customs for the District of Monterey under the administration of President Pierce, and took this office in May of 1853.

When he returned to Monterey it was said of him "Mr. Wall has exceeded the anticipations of his warmest admirers, and returns to his constituents wreathed with laurels of which they may unitedly be proud."

We are fortunate in Monterey in that there were a few of the older residents who saved from destruction a number of records, including a box of Custom House records that was left out to be burned. In this was found an old volume of handwritten entries that contains the file copies of letters written by Wall and his successors to various officials in the Treasury Department. The cover of the volume is missing, and through the years the pages have been subject to the ravages of smoke, water, and dirt; but the entries are still fairly legible. The volume is now owned by the State of California and kept in the files of the Custom House Historical Monument—in the same building in which the original letters were written.

In this issue and the next, we will print letters copied from this old record. We have kept to the original spelling, and also the abbreviations as found in the file copies.

We hope that the publication of these letters will prove of value to students of Californiana, and that even the general reader will find them of interest.

—A. K.

Monterey Cal
June 8th 1853

Sir :- I herewith transmit my official bond executed on the 8th Inst. The sufficiency of the surities having been certified to in the manner presented by law.

To the First Comptroller
of the Treasury
Washington City

Very Respectfully
Isaac B Wall
Collector for the Dist of Monterey

Custom House
Monterey 28th May 1853

Sir

I have been instructed by Isaac B. Wall Esq Collector of the District to inform you that your services as Inspector of Revenue for the Port of Santa Cruz will no longer be required.

Mr. T. Allen Russell
Santa Cruz

Very Respectfully
Chs H. Johnson
Depy Collector

Custom House
Monterey 8th June 1853

Sir

I have the honor to inform you that I Entered upon the discharge of my Official duties as Collector for the District of Monterey on the 28th Ult.

I have made the following appointments to the several Ports of my District subject to your approval, Chs. H. Johnson deputy Collector for the District & Inspector at the Port of Monterey, Wm. D. Farrand Inspector at the Port of Santa Cruz, & Wm. J. Graves Inspector at the Port of San Luis Obispo.

Since Entering upon the discharge of my official duties, I have visited the Ports of San Luis Obispo & San Simeon, and do not deem it necessary at present to appoint an Officer at the latter Port.

Hon James Guthrie
Secretary of the Treasury
Washington City

Isaac B. Wall
Collector of Custom
for the Dist of Monterey

Custom House
Monterey 15th June 1853

Sir

Your Communication of the 9th Inst has been recd.

You are required by the Collector of this Dist. to keep a Record of arrivals & departures of vessels at the Port of Santa Cruz, of all fees collected, & the Imports and Exports Coastwise, & transmit a monthly return to this Officer.

You may find on file in your Office the manifest of the Steamer "Major Tompkins" which was left with your predecessor, Mr. A. Russell on the 2nd Inst. you are requested to forward the same to this Office

Very Respectfully

Chs H. Johnson

Depy Collector

Wm D. Farrand Esq
Inspector
Santa Cruz

Custom House
Monterey 25th June 1853

Sir

Herewith you will find enclosed a brief synopsis of the Laws Regulating the Coasting trade & it is Expected of you by the Collector of this District to Enforce the same.

It being possible that droves of living Animals are brought from time to time into California from the Northern Mexican States & Lower California, and that the Importers have Evaded the Revenue Laws: you are directed to be vigilant in Endeavoring to detect any foreign Cattle so imported, & detain and seize the same in all cases - in the Event that those having the animals in charge cannot produce the necessary Evidence that the duties were paid, the following is an Extract from the Tariff Act.

"Living animals not imported for breed, but imported for sale or public exhibition, not to be considered in any case "Specimens of Natural history" within the meaning of the Law, but as merchandise liable under the 3d Sec. of the Tariff act to a duty of 20 per cent ad valorem.

If at any time you should make a seizure of Animals or other merchandise, or vessels, you will immediately report the same to this Office & state fully all the circumstances connected with such seizures. You are directed furthermore, to keep a record of arrivals & departures of vessels, of the imports and Exports coastwise & also of all fees Collected, & transmit a monthly return to this Office. The following are the Laws regulating the importation of Brandy, Spirits, Beer, Porter and Refined Sugar.- Brandy can only be imported in packages of not less capacity than 15 galls. "Law March 2d 1847.- Feb. 27-1850.

Gin & spirits of all kinds (Except brandy as above, & arrack and Sweet cordial) can only be imported in packages of not less capacity than 90 gallons "Law March 2d-1799"

Beer & Porter can only be imported in packages of not less capacity than 40 gallons & if bottled, in packages of not less than 6 dozen; Law 2d March 1799 Refined sugar can only be imported in packages containing not less than 600 pounds; & in vessels of not less than 120 Tons; Law March 2d 1799.

The articles above named, when imported in less than the legalized packages, are subject to seizure & forfeiture, together with the vessel in which they are imported.

Very Respectfully

Chs H. Johnson

Dep. Collector

Wm. J. Graves Esq
Inspector
San Luis Obispo

To Be Continued In The Next Issue

MONTEREY HISTORY AND ART ASSOCIATION

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DIRECTORS' MEETINGS AND COMING EVENTS

The annual meeting of the association was held at the U.S.O. on January 21. Dr. Lindley Bynum of the Bancroft Library, University of California, was the speaker, honoring Thomas Wayne Norris, a past president of the Association, Mrs. W. R. Holman, program chairman, and Mr. Holman showed a portion of their collection of Indian baskets, blankets, etc., many of which had been in the Norris collection.

Claude Faw presented an interesting program of his colored slides of the majority of the old historic adobe buildings in Monterey at the March directors meeting. Mrs. Mary Greene was the commentator. The full membership will have the opportunity to see these slides and hear Mrs. Greene's lively narration at a general meeting to be held on Monday evening, April 29, in the Community Room of the Monterey Public Library.

Several life memberships have been received during the past few months from Mr. and Mrs. W. R. Holman, R. H. Partridge, Mrs. Harry Lusignan, and the Misses Alice and Ardelia Work and Anita Doud. Mrs. Roger Fitch is also a life member, and Mrs. W. M. O'Donnell was made a life member by action of the directors. Mrs. Mary Greene will be presented with a scroll signifying life membership at the April 1st meeting of the directors in honor of her interest and work in behalf of restoration, preservation, and the collection of historic documents, books, furniture and other items of interest and value during her more than 20 years as curator of the Old Custom House. She is retiring July 1st.

Directors voted to place all money received from life memberships in a fund for the purchase of an historic building as a clubhouse.

Mrs. Guy Curtis, Eldon Covell, and Myron Oliver were named by the president as a committee from the Association to act in an advisory capacity at the request of the Monterey Planning Commission.

THE EDITORS
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