

NOTICIAS del PUERTO de MONTEREY

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

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Courtesy of Monterey Peninsula Herald.

Help Save This Unique Painting of Monterey

In its efforts to preserve and restore the historic adobes of Monterey, the Monterey History and Art Association has done a work that merits the gratitude of the entire state. The emphasis given to the historical part of the association's purpose has been justified by the desperate need to awaken the community to the value of the irreplaceable adobe buildings that were threatened with destruction. The word "Art" in the association's title, however, reminds us of another obligation: to collect and preserve historic paintings of the local scene and to promote interest in the artistic growth of the Monterey area.

At this very moment, the society has the opportunity to acquire a painting almost 100 years old which uniquely fulfills both the historical and artistic aspirations of the association. Hanging on display at our headquarters at the Casa Serrano is an 1869 oil painting by G. J. Denny. It was painted for Alfred Oliver Larkin from the famous print of Monterey made in 1842 to the order of Thomas Oliver Larkin, the first and last American consul to California. The picture is a period jewel; its condition is remarkably fine; its colors are bright and sharp.

Myron Oliver has obtained the promise of Walter Wallace of New York, the owner of the painting, that the Monterey History and Art Association be given a brief time to try to raise the \$3,000 asked for this rarity of old Monterey. The association cannot afford the sum asked, and in this extremity it turns again to those generous and public spirited citizens who have supported its program for the preservation of these inestimably valuable relics of a past era of historic California.

"It's one of those rare things that's come west and is looking for the proper home," says Myron. The painting is a Monterey landmark; its home is truly here.

Your check to help this project may be sent to Mrs. W. M. O'Donnell, financial secretary, at 336 Pacific Street, Monterey. A donation of \$3 from each member would return this painting to Monterey.

The Story of the Amesti Adobe

Conceded by all visitors to be one of the outstanding examples of Monterey Colonial architecture, the Amesti Adobe is a show place of present day Monterey and although its galleried front boldly crowds the sidewalk, behind the facade and its towering garden wall there basks in the warm sunlight a perfect formal retreat, shaded by flowering trees and redolent of a bygone era.

Its builder, Jose Galo Amesti, was born in San Sebastian, a colorful Basque town on the shores of the Bay of Biscay, in October, 1788, to Juan de Amesti and Maria de la Cruz Arizmendez, both also natives of the town. He left Spain for Mexico, and in 1821 he arrived in Monterey on the ship *Panther* bearing an official message relating to land distribution which he delivered to Juan Bandini. It was probably an order from the Spanish authorities, but the long war for Mexican independence was drawing to a close, and in April, 1822, Amesti cheerfully became a Mexican citizen.

In Monterey the new arrival set himself up as a merchant. He met the Vallejo family and was soon attracted to Prudenciana, the seventh child in a family of fourteen. He was 33, she less than half his age, but the distinguished, well-educated Spaniard from the land of her ancestors fascinated her and she hoped he would ask for her hand.

Prudenciana's father, rough old Ignacio Vallejo, was inordinately proud of his pure Spanish blood and Amesti's courtship was probably not unwelcome. Besides, Vallejo himself had married a young wife and their life together had been good, so consent was given to Prudenciana's marriage. The happy couple went off almost immediately to the Corralitos area near Santa Cruz to prove up on land for which Amesti was petitioning.

Little Prudenciana, however, found that life was not easy, far from her family and alone in the isolated hills. Her first child was born in 1824. The birth, unattended by a doctor, was a difficult one. She scarcely survived the ordeal. An old vaquero cared for her during convalescence, moving her cot out into the sun each day and and laying the baby Carmen in her arms to bring her love and a desire to live. It was



Courtesy of Monterey Public Library.

The Amesti Adobe just before it became the home of the Old Capitol Club in 1955.

months before Prudenciana was able to walk, and for the remainder of her life she was hunchbacked. It was not until over ten years after her marriage that Prudenciana had her own home in Monterey, and by then she had borne two more children, both girls.

In 1833 the *Ayuntamiento* (town council) gave Jose Amesti a *solar* (town building lot) measuring 30 *varas*, or slightly less than 30 English yards, in each direction, and in the following year, Prudenciana requested that the area be increased to 40 *varas* in each direction so as to provide space around the house that Jose had built. This first house was probably a typical one-story adobe with useable attic space. The famous lithograph made for Thomas O. Larkin in 1842 shows the Amesti Adobe as a one-and-a-half story structure with five openings on the east wall of the ground floor and three openings in the attic story. At that time there was no balcony. When Jack Swan came to Monterey in 1843 the house was still in its first stage as he did not list it among the two-storied houses of the old town.

Sometime between 1843 and 1853 the southern portion of the house was probably added and the walls raised to their full two stories. Larkin's elegant adaptation of the southern plantation mansion to the Monterey scene had created a sensation with its upper veranda and slim square columns. The famous Monterey style of architecture had been born, and the home of Jose Amesti, the wealthy merchant and landowner, proudly displayed its long balconies both front and rear. We date the completion as 1853 from a statement found in the probate of the will of Jose Amesti which declares that he owned a "lot in Monterey and built thereon the house in which he lived with his family from the time of its completion in 1853 until the time of his death."

We may imagine that Prudenciana was happy to be "home" in Monterey in the 1840's. Here she was close to many of her family. Her sister Encarnacion, married to Captain J. B. R. Cooper, had her home just down the street; equally convenient was the fine new home of her nephew Juan Bautista Alvarado, who served as governor of California from 1836 to 1842. After Larkin moved to San Francisco in the Gold Rush, Prudenciana's sister Rosalia settled with her husband J. P. Leese in the Larkin House, just across the street from the garden gate of the Amesti property. And, of course, there were many nephews and nieces: Maiano Soberanes, Rafael Estrada, etc. Her father, Ignacio Vallejo, had died at the ripe age of 83 before the Amesti Adobe was built, but her mother, Maria Antonia Lugo de Vallejo continued to live in her little adobe on Pierce Street and welcomed friends and relatives from near and far.

The three daughters of Jose and Prudenciana Amesti married well. Carmen, the oldest, married James McKinley, a well-to-do trader and rancher in 1848 and they had a home on the present site of the Monterey Peninsula Herald building. Epitacia (Santa) married Rafael Pinto, member of a prominent California family, and Celedonia married Ascencion Arano. A fourth child was also reared in their home. This was Tomasa Madariaga, the orphaned child of Prudenciana's sister Josefa Vallejo and Bonifacio Madariaga. Tomasa was legally adopted and shared equally with the other daughters in Amesti's will. She married Ascencion Mendia and finally settled in Watsonville.

The 1850's brought many changes to the life of Prudenciana and the Amesti Adobe. Jose Amesti died in July, 1855; Prudenciana's beloved mother had died only shortly before, in May. In October Tomasa, the adopted daughter, lost a ten-week-old baby. Her daughter Carmen and James McKinley became estranged; at one time they lost their home on Pacific Street through a judgment against him, but his brother, Finlay McKinley, redeemed the property. Either because James was still liable for law suit or because of family matters, the house deed was made out in Carmen's name alone. In 1857 the Rancho Corralitos where daughter Santa lived was "squatted on" by 34 would-be settlers. The long and costly suit to clear the title was not ended until 1860 when Judge Samuel B. McKee decreed that the 15,-440.02 acres should be confirmed to Prudenciana. Then there were the lawyers to pay and half of the land was distributed among the four daughters according to the terms of Jose Amesti's will.

Prudenciana Vallejo de Amesti centered her life around her home from its first building in 1834 until her death in 1883, a span of almost half a century. Her daughter Carmen lived with her during the later years, for the McKinleys had separated and James had gone to live on his ranch near San Luis Obispo some years before their divorce in 1871.

Throughout the period since its completion in 1853, the Amesti house has been one of the important adobes of Monterey. Like most of the old residences it faces generally eastward. Behind a high, thick, hand-made adobe wall which effectively shuts out the noise of urban life lies a large garden area where the family could have protection and privacy and where, in the old days, stood the buildings in which all the special household activities might be carried on: the cook-shack, the corral, the baking oven. The graceful balconies are made for visits with friends over a cup of chocolate in either morning or afternoon sunshine.

The atmosphere of walled garden and house developed within the bounds of a city plot is very Spanish and extremely warm and pleasant. When E. L. Williams was invited there on a summer evening in the 1850's he noted the bonfire that lighted

the courtyard so that "it was easy to discern all that might be going on." He was impressed, too, with the large *sala* on the second floor in which guests were received. To his eyes, it appeared to be almost as large as the courtroom in Colton Hall. The floor, greatly prized for dancing because of its springiness, was beautifully polished and the furnishings were elegant. When the family finally left Monterey, a magnificent table with 36 matching chairs was sold to Gump's in San Francisco. Some descendants of Dona Prudenciana, however, still have a few pieces of the fine furniture Don Jose imported for his new home.

Prudenciana's back had never straightened after the birth of her first child and each year brought more weakening. During her last years she was wheeled to church and to her visits of kindness and mercy to the poor of Monterey. When word would come to her of families in destitution, her gifts of food appeared on their tables; when death called for the poverty-stricken, in spite of her invalided condition, she prepared the body for burial. (There were no undertakers or funeral parlors in small towns then, and they were unheard of in communities with Spanish traditions. It was the duty of the family or of pious old *beatas* to prepare the dead for the wake.) When infants died she dressed the little bodies as *angelitos*, after the old custom, and herself lined the tiny coffins. The coffin was made by the town carpenter at her expense.

Jose Amesti was described by the great California historian Bancroft as being a man of good character and well-respected. However, he was sometimes involved in quarrels by reason of his fiery temper. Family tales say that as a bride Prudenciana was very happy to marry him, but that afterwards he was "most cruel". Only three children were born to them, and these all daughters. A devout Catholic, Prudenciana evidently sought comfort and consolation in her religious duties. She not only spent much of her time in this manner and in serving others in distress, but we have been told how she worried when Saint Catherine's Academy, founded by Dominican nuns in 1851, moved away to Benicia in 1854. Since there were no longer any nuns in Monterey to teach the children their catechism, she started a class in her own home. She brought under her roof her orphaned niece and treated her as her daughter, and when her first-born Carmen's troubles were at their height, she welcomed her back to the Casa Amesti. Generous to her church, she gave the land for the Church of Our Lady of Perpetual Help and for the Boys' School near Watsonville.

Prudenciana's portrait often brings the comment from strangers that she looks stern and hard. True, she has the long severe nose of her Spanish ancestors and a tightly compressed mouth, but what suffering accented the sharpness?

After her death the house was willed to Carmen and remained in possession of the family until sold, about 1913, by a son-in-law of Carmen, Santiago J. Duckworth. There is a story that around this time the adobe became a boarding house run by a flower-loving Frenchwoman. Not content with a garden in the patio, she planted flowers in front of the house as well. The fact that her blooms and shrubs occupied what would have been the sidewalk and part of the street was of no particular importance to anyone. The city street department simply detoured around the pretty sight, and soon the street had a decided bulge before the Amesti Adobe. Eventually, either the gardener moved away or the city asserted itself, for today the curb runs obediently straight and the sidewalk almost touches the house.

In 1918 Mr. and Mrs. Felton Elkins purchased the property. Frances Elkins, a noted interior decorator, restored the house to serve as their private residence, furnishing it with fine examples of eighteenth and nineteenth century furniture. By

Mrs. Elkins' will it was bequeathed in 1953 to the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Today, the beautiful Amesti Adobe is maintained by the Old Capitol Club as its headquarters and carefully protected and vigilantly defended by the members. Once again, it is a center of hospitality and friendship.

Mrs. A. W. Elkinton

Sources

Probate No. 66, Monterey County Records; Atkinson: 100 Years in the Pajaro Valley; Baptisms, Mission San Carlos records; Registro de Solares, 1831 - 1849, Monterey County Records; Cardwell, K.H., Historic Building Survey 1958; Jack Swan, Monterey in 1843, San Jose Pioneer, March 30, 1878; Records of the Vallejo Family; Monterey County Deeds, Vol. D, pages 602 and 605; Burials, Mission San Carlos records; Williams, E.L., Articles written for the Salinas Index; Divorces, Monterey County Records; Interviews with Amesti descendants, and with Emma Butler Ambrosio and Maria Antonia Bach Thompson who knew Dona Prudenciana when they were children.

COSAS DE INTERES PARA LOS SOCIOS

Mrs. Alice Larkin Toulmin, granddaughter of Thomas Oliver Larkin, first and only American consul to Monterey under Mexican rule, died at her home in Santa Barbara on February 12, following several weeks of illness. She had come to California shortly after the turn of the century with her husband, the late Henry Wroughton Toulmin, and to Monterey in 1919. In that year they purchased the Larkin House which Larkin had built in 1834, and made their home there until Mr. Toulmin's death in 1952.

On March 15th, 1957, Mrs. Toulmin presented the Larkin House to the State of California as an historical monument, as a tribute to the memory of her famous grandfather. Since that time countless visitors have come to view the old mansion, in which the donor generously left the beautiful furnishings of its early days. It has been described as one of California's historic structures.

Mrs. Toulmin was born Dec. 5, 1879, in Portsmouth, N.H., the daughter of Alfred O. Larkin, and Mary Ball Larkin. Her father was born in the Larkin House, the first Yankee child born in Monterey.

Grandfather Thomas Oliver Larkin had come to Monterey to join his half brother, Captain John B. R. Cooper, and opened the first retail and wholesale store here. Becoming the most influential American in Alta California, he was largely responsible for the peaceful acquisition of California and a great western territory by the United States.

Larkin built the first wharf here in 1845, established Monterey's first non-military hospital, rebuilt the Old Custom House in 1841 under contract with the Mexican government, added to the structure in 1844 and 1846, and was a member of the First Constitutional Convention which met in Colton Hall in 1849.

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Mrs. Raymond Spangler has presented a very handsome daguerreo-type to the association to be added to the collection already on exhibit in a case at Casa Serrano. The case is particularly beautiful. In the daguerreo-type are pictured the children of William Wise, Jr., Brooklyn jeweler. William III was born Dec. 4, 1844; Clara, born Feb. 9, 1842. She married 1st Lt. Charles Walker Raymond, U. S. M. A., 1865; later Brigadier General, U.S.A., Retired. Alfred F., born Nov. 3, 1850.

The small marble-topped table is from the home of Alfred and Mabel Wise

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There are still copies of **Old Monterey and Adobe Tour and Party Table Fiesta Menu and Recipes** for sale at the Casa Serrano, and these may be procured there each Wednesday afternoon from 1:00 until 4:00 o'clock when hostesses are there to receive guests. Members who would enjoy serving as hostesses there are asked to contact Mrs. Tod Singleton, hostess chairman.

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Gifts received from members and friends of the Association in recent weeks have been: One oil painting by Charles Rollo Peters, size 30" x 40" of scene of Monterey Bay and the city at twilight, painted by the Monterey artist in 1901, the gift of Mr. and Mrs. N. J. D'Ambrogio of Carmel Highlands. The painting, in its original frame, is now hanging in Casa Serrano.

From Mrs. Richard Ware Hall has come a Staffordshire salt-glazed English stoneware platter in the blue and white "Willow Tree" pattern, made in Staffordshire, England, probably 1763, a family heirloom, brought from England by Ira D. Sankey (1870-circa.)

Mrs. Kathleen U. Holman of Pebble Beach, a new member, called at Casa Serrano one Open House day and presented a handsome, old-style, dark-red velvet dress and a group of baby clothes for the children's room at the Stevenson House.

Mrs. Harold Chavoya has given the History and Art Association a large and old iron caldron and an iron chain. They will probably be placed in one of the gardens of a State Historical Monument.

FINANCIAL STATEMENT MONTEREY HISTORY AND ART ASSOCIATION

January 1, 1962 through December 31, 1962

	Month of December 1962	Year to Date	
REVENUES:			
Membership	\$ 39.00	\$ 3,522.00	
Cards and Brochures	52.00	\$ 1,113.50	
Rent — Casa Serrano	125.00	1,500.00	
Rent — Fremont Adobe	125.00	1,500.00	
Lavender Bags	4.65	50.70	
Merienda	0.00	3,170.00	
Adobe Tour	50.00	3,242.41	
Interest on Savings	0.00	40.37	
Other Income	35.00	202.07	
Memorial Garden	0.00	517.50	
Garden Fund	0.00	9.00	\$14,867.55
	<u>0.00</u>	<u>\$ 430.65</u>	

APPROPRIATIONS:

Restoration of Casa Serrano	\$ 0.00	\$ 2,025.41	
Restoration of Fremont Adobe	0.00	1,274.88	
Maintenance of Casa Serrano	67.25	4,145.77	
Maintenance of Fremont Adobe	0.00	208.17	
Interest on Loan	75.00	900.00	
Membership Meetings	0.00	366.57	
Board Meetings	28.78	140.92	
Postage and Stationery General Office	1.35	240.57	
Insurance	0.00	654.61	
Quarterly (Noticias)	199.16	716.93	
Cards and Brochures	0.00	600.00	
Merienda	0.00	1,769.50	
Adobe Tour	0.00	1,810.50	
Malaspina Book	0.00	17.50	
Dues and Association	0.00	28.00	
Memorial Garden Landscaping	0.00	117.32	
Memorial Garden Fund	53.34	488.84	
Taxes	0.00	260.26	15,765.75
	<u>0.00</u>	<u>424.88</u>	

UNEXPECTED INCOME

		<u>\$ 5.77</u>	<u>\$ (898.20)</u>
Bank Balance*	\$ 467.32	Bank Balance, Jan. 1, 1962	\$ 3,405.89
Savings Account	<u>2,040.37</u>	Subtract expended Income	<u>(898.20)</u>
Total Deposits	<u>\$ 2,507.69</u>	Bank Balance Dec. 31, 1962	<u>\$ 2,507.69</u>
* On deposit Crocker-Anglo Bank, Seaside Branch	\$ 202.56		
On deposit Crocker-Anglo Bank, Monterey Branch	<u>264.76</u>		
Total Deposits	<u>\$ 467.32</u>		

Prepared from the records without audit
REED AND HECKENLAIBLE, CERTIFIED PUBLIC ACCOUNTANT

THE EDITORS
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AND ART ASSOCIATION

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COSAS DE INTERES PARA LOS SOCIOS

Speaking of gifts, the Monterey History and Art Association would very much appreciate receiving an old full-length mirror for the small sewing room at the Stevenson House. Mrs. Marie Daley, curator, has a handsome white wedding gown on a form, for which she needs a mirror to show both the front and back of the costume. If any member has such an article which they would like to dispose of, please call FR 2-7992.

The Casa Serrano needs several items, such as an umbrella stand, preferably old, and some articles of fireplace equipment. If you have such articles call or come to the Adobe on Wednesday afternoon and tell the hostess on duty. The number is 421 Pacific street, Telephone FR 2-2608.

Membership dues in the Monterey History and Art Association Ltd. is \$4.00 for a single person; \$7.00 for husband and wife; junior membership, \$10.00 sustaining, and \$100.00 Life membership. Dues are due from Jan. 1, to Jan. 1, 1964. Checks should be made to the Association and mailed either to 336 or 412 Pacific Street, Monterey, California.

Mrs. Charles Bentley has accepted the appointment of chairman of the Adobe House Tour of 1963. The tour has been set for August 10th. Mrs. Tod Singleton will be her assistant. Mrs. Robert Stanton (Virginia Stanton) party editor of *House Beautiful* magazine, will again suggest table settings and set two tables herself. The theme will be "A Spanish Wedding Party."

The annual Merienda in celebration of the 193rd birthday of Monterey will be held in Memory Garden on June 1st.

Mr. Robert Littlefield of the Monterey Savings and Loan came to the March meeting of the board of directors of the association and told of the interesting plans his firm had for the restoration and use of the Casa Estrada, formerly Mission Inn on Tyler street. Estrada was the builder of the old adobe about 1823.

Since the last issue of the Noticias the following new members have been admitted to membership: Mr. and Mrs. Oliver Watson, Mrs. Clair Clark, Mrs. Leonard Kirby, Miss Esther Longfellow, Mr. and Mrs. Frederick O. Capen, Mrs. Audrey Mayorias, Col. and Mrs. George E. Fletcher, Mr. and Mrs. J. D. Wilson, Anna W. Beck, Mrs. Mildred R. Hall, Mr. and Mrs. Stuart Moser, Mr and Mrs Nelson Daugherty, Mr. and Mrs. John Rogers, Mr. and Mrs. Duncan Todd, F. J. Titgen, Mr. and Mrs. J. Stuart MacPherson, Charles W. Merrifield, Miss Sophie Burgdorff, Mrs. F. A. Mulvary.