

# NOTICIAS del PUERTO de MONTEREY

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## DEMISE AND RESTORATION

Montereyans, while viewing (many with less than the celebratory attitude of some) the demise of one—albeit “young”—landmark, the San Carlos Hotel, have compensatory pleasure in following the restoration of the Cooper-Molera Adobe compound. It occupies a dominant and imposing position among the components of the Monterey State Historic Park complex. Although work of the extensive project is walled off during construction, there is a community sense of excitement and participation. This is generated in large part by an extraordinary little lady who with her camera, research, and presentations is preparing us for the day when the Cooper-Molera Adobe will again be open. Then successive eras in its 150-year occupancy will come to life. Doubtless no California restoration project has had the equal in unique coverage and personal dedication that Marcia De Voe is giving this one. Here we understand why and how.

### THE ARCHEOLOGICAL BONUS AT THE COOPER-MOLERA ADOBE RESTORATION

By Marcia Frisbee De Voe

*(This article is dedicated to the memory of three early members of the Monterey History and Art Association, who were influential in my life: my mother, Viola Frisbee and her two dear friends, Mayo O'Donnell and Myrtle Youngman.)*

The challenge presented to me in 1980 by the Old Monterey Preservation Society to become the documentary photographer for the Cooper-Molera Adobe Restoration project, came after 41 years as an educator and pioneer in audio-visual education. When I told my mother about the proposal, she was most enthusiastic and told me that ‘of course I should do this volunteer work, for even as a child I had been involved with the complex’. When father was offered the position of starting the Industrial Arts Department at the Monterey High School in 1918, we moved from Pacific Grove to new apartments that had just been built next to the Molera barns on Polk Street in Monterey. Mother told me that I learned to walk on the outdoor upstairs porch, and I couldn’t be kept away from the end of the porch from which I could peek down at Andrew Molera and the horses in the yard next door. When Terry Royster (a cousin of the Moleras through the Vallejos) gave me some old photographs to copy, I discovered why I was so fascinated: in addition to Andrew’s Arabian horse, he had pintos and Appaloosas! I can remember walking down past the barns when I was older. Andy would sometimes appear in the doorway and invite me to ‘come on in and see the horses’. It was all I needed, but my companions would scamper away: for although Andrew had a quiet manner, he was a huge imposing man in his black derby hat.

It is almost three years ago that I first walked through the gate in the beautifully old preserved adobe wall that surrounds the 2 acres and the several buildings, as “part of the crew” under the Building Supervisor, Henry Wilson who works for the California State Department of Parks and Recreation and the Department of the State Architect. The fascinating history of what is now called the Cooper-Molera Adobe began to come alive, and I felt its influence somewhere deep inside me! As I am called repeatedly to “come over, Marcia — we have just discovered some old blue pottery sherds showing up under the earth”, or “we’re ready to pour the first cement for the foundations this morning and need you to record this process with your camera” — I experience endless excitement and enthusiasm. In researching the history of the buildings and the many people who lived and worked here from the early 1820’s to

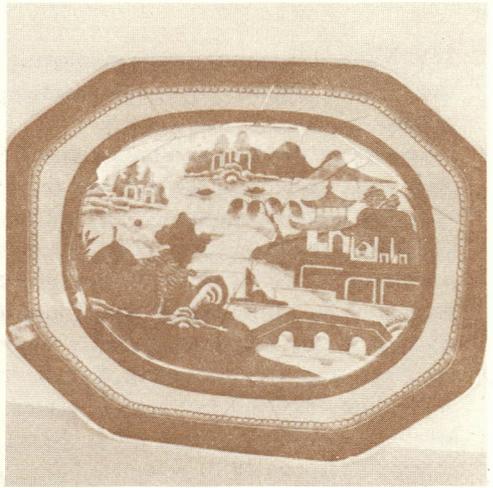


Marcia Frisbee De Voe

1968, as well as relatives and their families who still live in this area — Terry (whom I mentioned previously), Nettie Harrow, related through the Moleras, and Martha Lang, a direct descendant of the Coopers, — I am constantly revitalized by the foresight of their forebearers and their belief in the future of this area that was to be my birthplace and which I dearly love. But enough of my personal involvement and on to the part that makes the whole story of this restoration come to life.

The first step in the restoration of any historical area almost always leads to discovery of artifacts under the ground. Since 1976, several official archeological digs by The State of California have taken place (poachers have had theirs, too), exposing over 500 identifiable and reconstructable ceramic pieces found in a series of trash pits dating from 1820 to 1900 (Two severe earthquakes in the 1830’s may explain in part the high quantity of material found.) These “finds” range from common pottery bowls made in Mexico to beautiful Chinese export porcelain platters. Some of the Canton patterns are the same as those dating from 1790, found at Mt. Vernon, and believed to have been used by General and Mrs. Washington. A Frenchman by the name of Honore Escolle, a local baker and amateur potter, who, according to a relative, Muriel Pyburn of Pacific Grove, made flower pots for the San Francisco market, also may have made an earth-colored teapot that was found dating back to the 1800’s.

Unearthed in one old privy area alone are 135 glass containers plus 121 restorable ceramic vessels, representing 8 different potters. 63% of the pieces, large and small, are British transfer prints including dishes by Thomas Walker of England who made a pattern called “Tiger Hunt” and another, “The Texian Campaign”, celebrating the Mexican battles in 1846. A gorgeous chamber pot in blue and white from the Shirley & Co. of Scotland — should I say — “turned up”? Some of these earthenware pieces are hand painted, others are plain white, such as the old serving dish made by “Davenport” found under the corner store. The fact that his name is written in lower case letters with an anchor on the back of the piece, dates it 1793-1810, since his marks employing all upper case letters were in use after 1805. (Godden — 1964, pg.



Upper left: Lustreware pitcher and "Toby Mug"; Upper right: Canton Chinese export porcelain, 1800; Lower left: Infant's feeding bottle; Lower right: Ladle, British transfer print circa 1830.

(All photos courtesy of Marcia De Voe)

189) Most of the ceramics bear colorful and intricate transfer prints first introduced in the 1750's. The patterns show landscapes, floral patterns, or important people and places.

Several pieces of dark blue printed Staffordshire, English earthenware, carrying pictures of American scenery and the familiar willow pattern were found. Staffordshire work stood for quality production merchandise. In "Designs On Old Blue", Gresham Copeland states: "In considering the various pictorial productions, it is a temptation to concentrate on the subject of the picture itself and overlook the other aspects of the china which contribute to or detract from, its quality. In this type of ware, as in other ceramics, quality depends on the character of the body, the potting, the glaze, and the decoration. Excellence of decoration implies not merely a rare or interesting view but one which is well designed and clearly printed." To me these lovely blue ceramics show great charm and delicacy. Dark blue was the color most common prior to 1830. After that date, prints in lighter colors — pink, green, brown, lavender, and lighter blue — were developed by potters such as Spode, Enoch Wood, and T.J. & J. Mayer. Examples of these have been found at Cooper, as well as the "Flow Blue" made by AMOY.

Other British pottery of special interest is a hand painted "*Toby Jug*" named after a drinking character of British folklore, Toby Fillpot. These jugs have been made since the 1770's. Lustre-ware, a decorated common pottery, relatively uncommon in California sites, was discovered. Two small pitchers or creamers represent a method of applying an acidic solution containing "gold dissolved before firing." The gold solution produces a gold or coppery finish when applied to the body. Lustre-ware was most popular between 1810 and 1840.

Ceramic and glass artifacts break easily, but do not deteriorate in the ground. Most pieces deposited in a trash pit at the same time, if picked up together are recoverable and restorable. The marks of the potters and the glass manufacturers help determine dates, and the items reflect life styles of the owners and their times. It is safe to presume that the Cooper and Molera, Diaz, Jones, Spear, and Warren households, who occupied buildings at one time or another, had access to some of the finest goods that passed through the Custom House at Monterey.

Medicine bottles, as well as those that contained bitters, brandy, wine and soda water (one embossed Martinelli, Watsonville), have been carefully unearthed. The names of local pharmacists of the late 19th century were embossed on bottles with name and address of the druggist, and it is possible to date these by locating them in old business directories. Abbott of Salinas, and Palace Drug, and Del Monte are represented. Some bottles containing "Sarsaparilla", "Expectorant", "Hale's Honey of Horehound & Tar", "Ayer's Pill", and Dr. "Hostetter's Stomach Bitters", were sold as cure-alls by "medicine men" of the day. All later proved to be high in alcoholic content.

An "*Alexandra Infant's Feeding Bottle*", shaped in such a manner as to be easily placed on the mother's breast; the bottle of a Jean Marie Farina Cologne, probably a favorite of one of the ladies and listed in early Cooper account books; and a Vieux Cognac with shoulder seal are parts of the collection. There are also bottles for *macassar* oil for men's hair. To prevent their chairs from being stained by this hair oil, women made "anti-macassars" (doilies) for furniture backs. In 1880, a boy named Charlie Ross was the first child in America to be kidnapped and held for ransom. His name and picture were embossed on bottles by his parents to keep the search for him

alive. He was never found, and the bottles, some of which were found here, became his memorial! For many pieces found at Cooper-Molera there is just such a story. So many other discoveries will help interpret the life and times of the buildings when restoration is complete. There are barn related items: a small metal leather stamp, an old rosette from a saddle, grooming tools for the horses, bits, buckles, horse shoes and teeth, hoof guards, musket balls and flint, a gun flint lock identified as coming from a French carbine popular during the American Revolution, a Spanish pointed spur rowel, jack knives, and a powder flask top.

Accessories for women, include a delicate washed gold bracelet with a house and seagull engraved on its rounded surface; embroidery scissors; a matilla comb; amber beads; a lady's hair pin dish; and a wooden comb sherd (for combing furs). For children there are toy dishes, dolls, and a small complete dog ceramic figure.

There are bones from the Mexican period, when bones of slaughtered animals were broken, as well as those from the early California period when bones were sawed during butchering. A further rich miscellany of objects includes seeds and pits, buttons made of wood, rubber, and bone, a jew's harp frame, door locks, lantern parts and chimneys, many clay pipes whole and in pieces, skeletons of animals (cows, horses, rodents), a small intricate Chinese wood carving about 1½ inch tall, and Shield nickles and a half dime from 1838-1880. A coin with special symbolic interest is a silver Spanish real minted in Chile in 1776, America's birth year.

The Cooper-Molera material is processed in Sacramento by State archeologists Larry Felton and Lee Motz and their staff. Architectural features uncovered during the excavations will be incorporated into the interpretation and eventually the results will be published. Most of the artifacts will be returned to the Adobe for display. It is said that relatively few large "pre-gold rush" artifact assemblages have been recovered archeologically in California. This one is a very important contribution to California history!

#### Sources

1. Preliminary draft of "Archeological Report on Feature 23-Diaz Privy" at Cooper-Molera and Diaz Adobes, Monterey  
By Larry Felton and Lee Motz
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3. "A Summary of Archeological Features Encountered During Restoration of Cooper-Molera Adobe Complex", By Felton & Motz.
4. "19th Century Pottery and Porcelain", McGill University Press, 1967.
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6. "English Pottery and Porcelain, An Historical Survey",  
Edited by Paul Atterbury, Universe Books, New York, 1978.

## General Information

**JOHN B. ROGERS COOPER:** Born in Great Britain in 1792. Died in San Francisco in 1872.

Went to Massachusetts with his mother, became an American by naturalization. In 1823 at age 31 went from Boston to California as master of the schooner, "Rover" (preceding his half-brother Thomas Larkin by 10 years). He became a Mexican citizen, a Catholic, and married Encarnacion Vallejo, sister of Mariano and aunt of Juan Bautista Alvarado. They had 7 children, 4 of whom lived to maturity: John B. H., William Rogers ("Rogerio"), Ana, and Amelia. Became owner of 5 ranches, 2 lumber mills, and a grist mill.

**HIS HOME** at the head of Alvarado Street, Monterey, was built in the mid 1820's, remodeled in 1832, when it first appears in city records. In 1833 he sold a portion of it to **JOHN JONES**, a U.S. Consul in the Sandwich Islands, who did not settle permanently but resold to a merchant, **NATHAN SPEAR**. He in turn in 1845 sold to **MANUEL DIAZ**, a ship master. In 1843 Diaz had married **LUISA ESTRADA** whose older sister, **ADELAIDE**, married **DAVID SPENCE**, a Scotsman brought from Lima, Peru, to Monterey by Hartnell to handle salt beef trade to Peru. In 1885 Diaz sold his portion in public auction to David Spence. The corner store had been added in 1845.

**COOPER** had remodeled his section again, adding the upstairs in 1850, and he bought some land from Diaz. The skylight room was added about 1858.

**LUISA ESTRADA DIAZ'S** only child died in 1860, and Manuel in 1867. When Luisa died in 1902 her possession, which had been assured by provisions of her loving sister Adelaide Spence, was deeded to **ANA COOPER WOHLER**. She in turn willed it to **MISS FRANCES MOLERA** and **ANDREW MOLERA**, children of Amelia Cooper and **EUSEBIO MOLERA**.

**FRANCES MOLERA** deeded it to the National Trust for Historic Preservation upon her death in 1968. The State of California is undertaking restoration under a 30 year lease.

## Additional Sources

Keen local interest in the Cooper-Molera Adobe has led over the years to articles by several of the peninsula's most respected historians.

Each account differs in approach, and some facts vary because of incomplete or belatedly emerging records of the past. Nevertheless, in combination these accounts are important documentations with many archival photos. These sources are available at the Mayo Hayes O'Donnell Library and in the California Room of Monterey Library.

*Noticias*, September, 1971: "None Shall Disturb Her Possessions" by Amelie Elkinton.

*Noticias*, March, 1972: "Rancho El Sur" (with facts about Cooper family) by Amelie Elkinton.

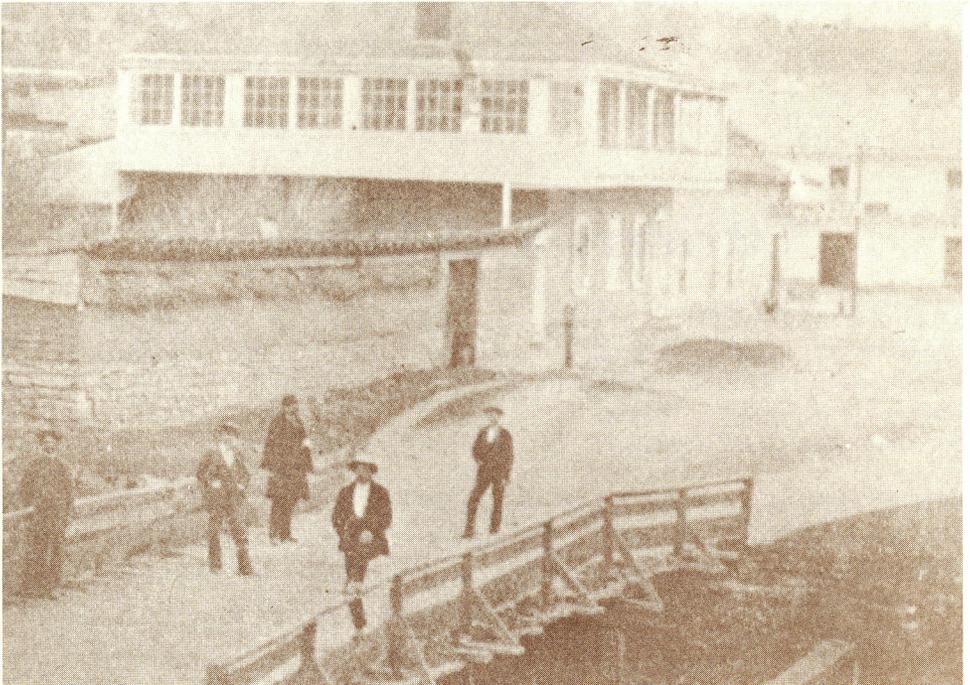
*The Herald Weekend Magazine*, November 25, 1972, pages 10-16, by John Woolfenden.

*The Herald Weekend Magazine*, August 12, 1979, pages 10-14, by Betty Patchin Greene.

*The Herald Weekend Magazine*, December 26, 1982, pages 12-13, by Marcia De Voe.

In addition, we look forward eagerly to the forthcoming book about John Cooper, written by John Woolfenden in collaboration with Amelie Elkinton.

Writing in *Old Monterey* (1934) of the great era of Monterey adobes, Laura Bride Powers described what must have been the view of Old Monterey Plaza activity from the commanding position of the Cooper-Molera House. "Here was the scene of the major community activities — *fiestas, fandangos*, horsemanship feats; and on the opposite corner was the famous Bull and Bear Pit. From the balcony of the Cooper House, the exciting contests between bruin and *el toro* could be viewed. On Sundays and holidays...the hospitable home of Dona Encarnacion...was the rendezvous of relatives and friends. The house has been continuously in the possession of some branch of the family, their pride and joy. Something of a house of mystery, particularly the huge barn in the block-wide garden, where, it is said, much of the elegance of living in the old days of the Capital is exemplified — old furniture, old equipages, old ornament." She added that in effecting preservation of Monterey and replacement of the Old Plaza, the Cooper House would be an outstanding feature and "Let us hope it may be white, as in its youth time."



Cooper-Molera Adobe, circa 1855-1865.  
(Courtesy of Marcia De Voe)

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