

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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The Amesti Adobe

Casa Amesti on Polk Street in Monterey is probably one of the best known homes of adobe construction in the city and is also recognized as one of the most perfect specimens of early California architecture. It is the residence of Mrs. Frances Elkins, well known interior decorator, whose studio on Fisherman's Wharf is an example of what can be accomplished artistically from, what might be said, nothing.

While thoroughly enjoying reading notes which had been made by previously interested persons from the scrapbook of the late E.L. Williams, I came across the interesting items concerning the Amesti home and the life there in the year 1855. Across the newspaper clipping there was written in ink "August 2, 1902, McGarrahan Claim, E.L. Williams," and the printed article is signed, E.L. Williams.

"It was in the summer of the year 1855 in Monterey that your writer was invited to go that evening to the house of Jose Amesti, an old resident who was born in Spain. Upon his arrival your writer was shown to the patio, a courtyard in the interior as it were, of the dwelling. The bonfire lighted up the courtyard so that it was easy to discern all that might be going on. Your writer found himself to be the only English-speaking person of the group of some ten persons, all of whom were natives of Spain and educated, intelligent persons. Besides Mr. Amesti, there were Bolado, Ripa, Castanas, and Oliveras; these last four were partners, and engaged in raising stock, of which they had some thousands of head, where now is Hollister.

"An adjournment was had to the sala. In the upper story of a large house like that of Amesti's, there is always a large room in which guests are received or important business is transacted. We would call it sometimes parlor, and at other times sitting room, according to its use. This was a very large room, nearly as large as the court room in this county (Colton Hall), without carpets, but otherwise well furnished; with many windows and polished floors.

"Oliveras had departed on a vessel bound for Europe ... and all the fund he had taken..."

"Rafael Ripa, after gaining a fortune, returned to Barcelona in Spain and soon after died at his father's house.

"Joaquin Bolado was living on his rancho about 15 miles from Hollister until some years ago when he died exceedingly wealthy and with him lived his old partner, Castanas." So ends the story of the four guests of Amesti that evening in 1855.

Jose Amesti was born a Spanish Basque. He came to Monterey on the "Panther" at the age of 30 years. He swore allegiance to Mexico and became a prominent citizen and merchant. In 1824 he married Prudenciana Vallejo, the daughter of Jose Ignacio Vallejo. They were the parents of four daughters, Carmen who was born in 1825; Epitacio in 1826, and Celedonia in 1829, and Tomasa Madariaga in 1835.

Jose Amesti was the grantee of Corralitos Rancho in 1827 and 1844. He was "Jurez" in 1841 and "Alcalde" at Monterey in 1844. In Thomas Larkin's notes in 1845 he describes Amesti as "a man of good character, being not only wealthy but respected, a man disgusted with Mexican government and favoring a change."

Amesti died in Monterey on July 22, 1855. His mother was Maria de la Cruz Ariz Mendez. His widow, Prudenciana, died in 1883. Their daughter Carmen Amesti de McKinley was born in Monterey on July 29th, 1825, and passed away on October 29, 1901. It was Carmen and her husband who resided in the Amesti adobe.

A few years ago a great-granddaughter of the original Amesti family presented copies of the portraits of Don and Senora Amesti and their daughter, Celedonia Amesti de Arano, to the Monterey History and Art Association and these framed pictures are hung in the north wing of the old Custom House. The paintings were probably the work of Leonardo Barbieri who also painted the portraits of Mr. and Mrs. W.E.P. Hartnell and other prominent residents of that time. The painting are now owned by another great granddaughter, Mrs. Rooney, who resides in Watsonville. It is hoped that someday the originals may hang in Monterey for at least a short time, that they may be seen and enjoyed by those interested.