

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

March 23, 1950

A Document of 1833

A valuable and historical document, dated May 31, 1833, was accepted by the Monterey History and Art Association Board of Directors at a special meeting held Monday afternoon in the Old Custom House. The document, which is the original, "concerns the project for the construction of the Casa Consistorial (town-hall) and jail at Monterrey, California, in the year 1834."

The old document has been acquired by purchase for the Association from the late Joe Mora's estate, and will be added to the historical archives of the city as soon as a suitable fireproof building, such as the new library, is available. The goodly number of pages in the document, the paper of which is brown with age, is entirely written in longhand in the Spanish language in beautiful penmanship.

The first two small leaves which appear in the document read as follows: "Since the premises of the jails of this Presidio are too limited and hardly offer any comfort to the military criminals, and since in them are also housed, the criminals from the ordinary jurisdiction, it may easily happen that through their continuous association in such a kind of habitation the bad germs (humores) may propagate with the consequence that a contagion may take place among the unfortunate delinquents, and since the laws provide that a very special care be taken about the salubrity of these places, it therefore becomes necessary that the Illustrious City Council should take the necessary measures in order that a jail may be built in the best possible manner for the purpose of housing the criminals of the ordinary jurisdiction. I manifest it to Your Lordship, who may refer it to the indicated corporations so that the desired action may be effected."

It is signed by Jose Figueroa, Governor of California – "Dios y Libertad, Monterrey, Mayo 31 de 1833.

Farther on a document signed by Jose Maria Maldonado says that the project has been referred to the proper committee for action.

On the first leaf (first and second 8"x12" pages) the first estimate of expenses is given; but this project includes not only the jail which had been requested by Jose Figueroa, but it also includes the complete housing for

the Municipal Council or Town-Hall (Casa Consistorial del Ayuntamiento); and Juan Bautista R. Cooper calls attention to the fact that such a large sum may cause a delay in the execution of the project, and that it might be wiser to limit the project to just the jail that had been requested by Figueroa.

On the third leaf (seventh of the 8"x12" pages) the signature of Jose Figueroa appears again in a statement to the effect that he has consulted his secretary, Captain Augustin Zamorano, whose scientific knowledge has been useful in contributing certain corrections and improvements on the projected building.

On the seventh of the 8"x12" leaves (page 13) an interesting mention is made of the fact that the capital of the territory is expected to be moved from Monterrey to Los Angeles (Nuestra Senora de los Angeles) and hence that the housing for the Territorial Committee should not be included in the plan.

In the following pages as well as in the final plans (in color) the project which is approved includes not only the jail, but also the Ayuntamiento (City Hall or Town Hall). The final approval is dated Monterrey July 31, 1834 and is signed by Jose Carrillo and Jose Maria Maldonado. And on the last page of the document the following statement appears: "On the 23rd day of February of the year 1835 the foundation of the jail was begun, which are the ones marked in the plan with the numbers 2, 7, 13 and 10. And on the 2nd day of March of the same year, at four o'clock in the afternoon, the Mayor, Mr. David E. Spence, placed the first stone, in the room marked No. 10 in the plan, and in the corner which faces to the Northeast."

No signature appears on this last statement.

The above translation and report was executed by Raoul J. Fajardo at Stanford University.

Jose Maria Maldonado was secretary to David Spence, the Alcalde. Captain Zamorano established the earliest California printing press in Monterey. He came to Monterey in 1825 as the executive secretary of the territory of Alta California and served 11 years as second administrative officer. Joan B. Cooper was an American trader who came to Monterey in 1822 and built the old adobe home at the intersection of Alvarado, Munras and Webster streets.