

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Old Building Ways, Prices

Building materials during the Mexican period in Monterey varied from redwood, pine and adobe bricks, and the cost also varied. Redwood and pine lumber were priced about the same at Monterey, according to scarcity, quality, and size.

In 1834, for instance, lumber cost as much as \$100 per thousand board feet, and varied during the period 1834 to 1846, from \$40 to \$100 per thousand. The usual cost of hewing was from \$1.50 to \$6 per thousand, sawing from \$20 to \$60 per thousand, and hauling to Monterey as much as \$10 per thousand.

Gate posts measured as much as 12 by 14 inches, laths, three to four inches wide, and 12 feet long cost from 1 cent to 5 cents each; lintels (capitalsados) varied in size from three inches by 11 inches to four inches by 24 inches; logs cost \$1 to \$5.50 (one tree sold for \$4); stair cases cost about \$20; shingles, costing from \$2 to \$5.50 to make, sold from \$6 to \$9 per thousand, and \$2 per bundle of 200.

Other materials used, from 1834 to 1846, were adobes of different sizes selling from \$10 to \$40 per thousand; round and square iron bars, usually $\frac{3}{4}$ inch to 1 inch in diameter, and flat iron bars, which sold for 12 $\frac{1}{2}$ cents to 20 cents; bricks, which sold at 2 cents to 17 cents each. Digging was charged for at \$2 per foot and drilling for 50 cents to \$1 per foot. Door locks brought from \$2 to \$8 each and doors from \$7.50 to \$10; flagstaves at \$3, glass was sold from 20 cents to \$1.50 per pane, sliding glass windows of 24 panes at \$15 each (usually from New England), tile from \$25 to \$40 per thousand; a weather cock for \$8.50, and digging a well, \$100.

There were various descriptions of interesting phases of building during the Mexican period, when the American influence in construction began to be felt in California. The use of shingles instead of tiles began first in the early 1830's, when George Young, who had settled in the Napa Valley, made them for the Vallejo adobe near Sonoma. Charles Brown, who worked with Yount, explained the method of making shingles at that time, a method which was also used near Monterey.

Brown in his "Early Events in California" wrote that "The shingles had to be made in the most primitive manner as we had no machinery – the tree was felled, barked,

cross cut off in blocks of 18 inches long – then split and shaved. With all these difficulties, Young and myself used to make about 1,000 shingles a day each – and I have seen men make as many as 1,500. Those shingles we made were the first that had been seen in the country. Young made a contract with Vallejo to supply the shingles that he needed and put them on this house. I don't remember the price he got under the contract but I was working for Yount at wages per month - \$25 per month in goods and found – that was considered high wages at the time. Later I made shingles on my own account and got as high as \$8 per thousand, which was the current price. Of course all the pay was in goods or stock, there being but little or no coin in the country."

The renting of a house (next to the Cooper house) and the making of its garden walls is told in one letter from Nathan Spear to Thomas Larkin in July, in 1839. After writing in some detail about selling the house, Spear adds:

"Should Jimeno agree to hire the house ... please settle with Montenegro, he, you remember took the house on the 18th of February, at \$25 per month, rent is always paid in cash as you know. So if he pays hides he will of course not object paying them at cash price. I wish you would advise whoever occupies the house to have the chimney swept for safety's sake. As respects building the wall I would sooner you would do it than Jimeno – he might not attend to it well. It seems a grate price to pay \$1.50 (?) for building it but if it must be done it must. I hope you will have it done as cheap as possible. Front wall 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ adobes thick and back as far as the house the same, the rest one brick thick and as high as the old wall leaving doors and windows and gateway. They to be stopt up with adobes after the wall is done. The gate to be half the size of the present one, frame of redwood 8 to 10 inches thick, the other gate may be put under cover. The gate to be put opposite the old one. There should be a small hole left in the wall opposite the pump to let a hose run through it for the convenience of conveying water into the street should it be wished, and holes left at the bottom of the walls to let the water off in the times of rains." (Quoted from the Larkin Letters in the Bancroft library.)