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Buildings of Wood

Under the American regime in Monterey, lumber has been the main building material, usually redwood, but often pine has been used. In one instance, the building of the old wharf in 1869, the lumber was brought from Puget Sound in Washington. However, the railroad wharf, built in 1875, was made of redwood from Santa Cruz. It has been said, according to Dr. Aubrey Neasham, that redwood shoots, some of them three feet in length, appeared upon the pilings of that wharf, some months after building. The Chinese fishermen's village, in the days when they lived at China Point, was made of redwood stakes.

Burned brick, although used as early as 1847, and in small quantities during the Mexican period, did not come into great popularity until after the impetus to building in the 1870's. Mr. Doud's brickyard, located one mile south of Monterey on the Carmel road supplied much of the brick used in Monterey in the 1870's and 1880's. Important early brick buildings were the first brick buildings built in California, erected by Gallant Dickenson in 1847; the fireproof brick building on Alvarado street, near the steamer landing, owned by Smith and Bardin; and the building known as La Porte's.

Some of the most interesting types of buildings erected during the early American period were those built by Milton Little in 1849. Composed of zinc brought from England, they were among the first of that type used in California. One was erected on the site of the present Kimball Hotel, and another in New Monterey on Lighthouse avenue.

Some of the building contracts in Monterey during the early American period have been preserved in the Bancroft Library of the University of California. They are valuable for showing the type of work done at that time. One, a contract between Thomas Larkin, the owner, and Elijah Ehner and Samuel Thompson, called for the building of two frame houses in Monterey in 1848.

The contract for painting the two houses has also been preserved. Louis Springer, as the painter, agreed: "To paint for Thomas Larkin, two two-story houses each about 32 feet by 16 feet in size situated on Larkin street in the town of Monterey." The houses were to have

three coats of white paint on the outside. The casings of the doors and the windows were to have such fancy color as said Larkin might order. Larkin was to furnish all the paint and "to pay Springer the sum of ninety dollars for which sum the said Springer is to take a note against James Stokes dated November 26th, 1847, for One Hundred and Seventy dollars, due six months after date and account to Larkin for the balance between the amount of the note and the amount of the contract."

Another interesting contract was signed in April, 1847, between Larkin and Andrew Baker for the building of two log houses in Monterey. Those houses to be built near the beach, as described in Baker's contract, which read:

"I hereby agree for the sum of 75 dollars cash to be paid me by Thomas O. Larkin when the work is completed to build for him two log houses on his lot near the beach in this town to wit:

"To take the logs and joints to the spot, hew off the rough places of the Logs and put them up in a workmanship manner, putting in one set of joists (joints), and leaving notches cut out, to saw down the spaces, for the doors and windows. The houses not to be over thirteen logs high each – the logs of each side to be equal thickness. Said Larkin to have the logs and joist ready and loan me the axes and cross cut saw."

Tile of various sizes was made, usually upon wooden forms. It is said in Bancroft, that the ordinary Indian laborer could make as many as 125 tiles per day, although such a quantity meant that they would be poorly made. The lack of iron was so great that thongs and strips of rawhide were used to tie the ceiling and other timbers, when necessary. Flooring of lumber was used rarely in Spanish Monterey. Vancouver had mentioned the wooden floors in the commander's apartment in the 1790's; and as late as 1820 it is stated, nobody but the governor and the padres had wooden floors or doors.

J.B. Alvarado in "Historia de California" tells of having one of the original bricks in his possession, which he saved from the old presidio foundation. Its size was 1 1/2x41/2x11 inches, and it was very heavy and hard.

Dr. Neasham writes in his Historical Evolution of Monterey: "Old timers claimed that, because of a lack of saline salts in the water and soil of Monterey adobe bricks made there lasted a much longer time than those of San Diego and other southern regions of California."