

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

June 30, 1950

A Building Boom

"The Mexican period in Monterey's history, 1822 to 1846, found many changes in the appearance of the town," wrote Aubrey Neasham in 1938 in his "Preservation of Historic Monterey." Whereas Spanish Monterey had been a concentration, largely within the walls of the Old Presidio, Mexican Monterey had found expansion outside, between those walls and the fort upon the hill above the harbor." In 1846 when the United States forces took possession, Monterey had the atmosphere of a growing town and not that of the fortified enclosure of the Spanish period."

Governor Eschaendia's order of August 18, 1826, asking for between 15,000 and 20,000 adobe bricks to be manufactured, as well as other important materials for rebuilding parts of the Presidio, emphasized the need of repairs. This order is filed among the State departmental papers in Sacramento.

The description of the French scientist, A. Duhant-Cilly, who visited California in March, 1827, tells of Monterey at that time. In Bancroft's "California," Vol. 2, he quotes the scientist as follows: "Whoever shall arrive at Monterey expecting to see a considerable town, would suppose he had made a mistake about the anchorage. The first buildings seen on rounding Point Pinos are those of the Presidio which present a quadrangle of 200 yards, and which, being of a single story, resemble long warehouses covered with tiles. On the right side of the Presidio, looking from the water, on a little verdant plain are seen some 40 scattered houses of quite a pretty appearance, also covered with tiles and whitewashed. This, with a few straw (tule?) huts, is what constitutes the capital city of California."

Among important private homes built outside the Presidio during the Mexican 1820's were those of Munras, Pacheco, Hartnell and Cooper. New governmental buildings had been built, also by 1827 the new landing place on the site of the present Custom House. Those consisted of a house of timber, mud, and tile, with two rooms used for a storehouse and the guard, a wood and tule hut nearby for the sailors, and a shed for the protection of boats, according to Neasham's survey appearing in The Herald on March 16, 1938.

The greatest expansion of Mexican Monterey took place in the 1830's and the 1840's. During those years, to 1846, most of the historic buildings existing in Monterey today were built. By 1846, over 150 building lots and extensions of lots had been granted or confirmed, many of which had houses built on them.

Private houses of the 1830's included, among others, those of Gonzales, Stokes, Spear, Amesti, Alvarado, Spence, Malarin, Vallejo, Wolter, Gomez, Castanares, Bonifacio, Sanchez, Larkin Escobar, Watson, Jimeno, Kinlock, Rios, Garcia, Estrada, Carrasco, Montenegro, West, Vasquez, Mendez, Tresconi and Serrano. Some construction was done also upon the Custom House.

The 1840's found continued activity in the building in Mexican Monterey. Private homes built during that era included those of Castro, Ferguson, Rodriguez, de la Torre, Gutierrez, Stokes, Soto, Soberanes, Deleisequez, Dutra, Swan, Garner, Abrego, and Pacheco. The Casa de Gobierno (Government House) popularly called El Cuartel, which was started in 1840, were the two foremost government buildings constructed. The building of the Casa de Gobierno came as the result of a lack of quarters, not only for the troops, but for the offices of the capital.

Written in 1843 for Thomas Larkin and possibly by him, is a manuscript in the Bancroft Library at the University of California. It was probably written to accompany sketches made in 1842, entitled "The City of Monterey, California," looking from the bay. It describes Monterey as follows:

"The houses are much disfigured by having the south ends lumbered up with boards or brush to keep off the rain from the south. The rains are very heavy from November to March.

"The roofs are made of tiles made something like a half tumbler lengthways (without the bottoms) or shingles. The walls of the houses are some 22 inches thick – others are 33 inches made of (adobes) sun dried bricks, 22 inches long, 11 wide and 4 thick. When well made and under a good roof will last some time. I have seen them taken from a house 60 years old to build another with.

"The streets are very straight and about 21 yards wide ... the ships lay about half mile to a mile from the castle (fort), and the same from the beach or Custom House ... The Custom House is about a half mile from the nearest house (near that of Larkin). Every house in view has

been built within 20 years, mostly within 12 years. First two-story houses were built in 1834 and 1835 by Juan B. Alvarado and Thomas O. Larkin. The houses when plastered and whitewashed make very good appearance.