

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

July 13, 1950

Three Old Adobes

The Cooper or Molera adobe is one of the largest and most readily identified of the Monterey adobes. It is a two-story balconied structure and is in a good state of preservation. With the exception of one shop the entire structure is devoted to a home. In addition to the main building, there is a large reinforced barn and an adobe-walled enclosed garden. The barbecue oven and old well are still visible. A charming, ancient looking gate provides the only entrance to the garden from the east or the Munras avenue side of property.

The building stands on the southwest corner of Polk and Munras streets, the entire property occupying a space of about a quarter of a block. In the early records it was shown to be 50x80 varas.

Captain John B. Cooper, also known as Don Juan Bautista Cooper, trader and skipper, who arrived in Monterey in 1822, built the house in 1829 for his bride, Dona Encarnacion Vallejo. It is now the property of Miss Frances Molera, the grand-daughter of Captain Cooper.

John Bautista Cooper was a native of Alderney Island, in the English Channel, where he was born in 1792. He came to the United States when a small boy with his mother and they settled in Massachusetts. By a second marriage the former Mrs. Cooper became the mother of Thomas O. Larkin, first and only American consul to Monterey.

Cooper's arrival on the west coast in 1822 was as master of his own vessel, the "Rover." Although he later sold the ship to Governor Arguello he continued to command her until 1826, making trips to China and elsewhere. That same year he became a resident of Monterey, and the following year, 1827, he was baptized and also married Dona Encarnacion Vallejo, and six children were born to the Coopers.

In 1834 and 1835 Cooper was regidor of Monterey. He resumed his seafaring life in 1839, when he became master government schooner "California," making many trips to the Mexican coast and the Islands until 1844. From 1850 until some time in the 60's he resided with his family in Monterey and at his El Sur rancho, a large grant which he acquired by purchase. In 1851 he

was appointed harbor-master which he held for many years.

The Cooper family moved to San Francisco some time after 1860, where Cooper died in 1872 in his 80th year.

The Soberanes Adobe or the House with the Blue Gate, located at 336 Pacific Street, was erected by Don Jose Estrada, ranking officer of the Presidio under the Mexican regime, Estrada sold the property to Don Feliciano Soberanes, who married one of the daughters of Don Ignacio Vallejo.

In 1902 the property was again sold, this time to Mrs. Reuban Serrano, a grandson of Florencio Serrano, former school teacher and alcalde of Monterey under Mexican rule.

The house was sympathetically restored by Mrs. Serrano and is now the home of Mrs. William M. O'Donnell.

The living room of this home has been used as an example of an early California adobe in the Thorne collection of miniature rooms and was given by the creator with the others in the "Early American Homes" group to the Chicago Art Museum. The room is completely furnished and from the windows there is a delightful view of the miniature garden and the Blue Gate.

The La Porte Adobe is located on the northwest corner of Alvarado and Pearl streets and is in very good state of repair.

Originally the structure, according to historians, was a one-story adobe with a lean-to. A small addition on the second floor, it is said by some, was used as the office of General Don Juan Bautista Alvarado, the first native born California governor under the Mexican regime, from 1836 to 1842. On the lower floor a flourishing saloon and gambling business was conducted by Mauricio Gonzales. There was a high adobe wall surrounding the lots in the rear of the building and here were staged Mexican acrobatic gymnastic acts, the audience being seated on crude board tiers somewhat resembling the circus seats of the present day.

The assessors' records of 1855 show the building as being assessed to Governor Alvarado for a value of \$6,000.

In 1874 La Porte Brothers purchased the property and added a frame second story, naming the same La Porte Hall.

In 1936 the building was completely renovated. It is now owned by heirs of Edward Burns and is completely occupied by stores and offices. In 1949 the Native Sons of the Golden West and the California Centennial Commission placed a plaque upon the building noting it as the headquarters for Governor Alvarado.