

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

April 30, 1951

Amesti Portraits

The Old Custom House in Monterey will be open tonight for members of the Monterey History and Art Association and their friends, from 8 until 10 o'clock. The event has been planned to show for the first time the old portraits of Don and Dona Jose Amesti and their daughter, Dona Caledonia Amesti de Arno, which have been given on a long term loan, by descendants of this early family. Mr. and Mrs. Ray Hoffman and the former's mother, Mrs. Rooney, all of Watsonville, who are the granddaughter and great-grandson of Don and Dona Amesti, will be guests of honor.

The paintings were probably the work of Leonardo Barbieri, an early day artist, who also painted the portraits of many of the prominent residents of Monterey, although there is no signature to identify the artist.

Jose Amesti was born a Spanish Basque. He came to Monterey in the early 1800's on board the "Panther". He swore allegiance to Mexico and became a prominent merchant and landowner. In 1824 he married Prudenciana Vallejo, the daughter of Jose Ignacio Vallejo. They were the parents of four daughters, Carmen who was born in 1825, Epitacio in 1826, and Celedonia in 1829, and Tomasa Madariaga in 1835.

In 1827 Jose Amesti was the grantee of Corralitos Rancho. He was "Jurez," in 1841 and "Alcalde" at Monterey in 1844. In Thomas Larkin's notes in 1845 he describes Amesti as a man of "good character, being not only wealthy but respected, a man disgusted with the Mexican government and favoring a change."

Amesti died in Monterey on July 22, 1855. His mother was Maria de la Cruz Ariz Mendez. His widow, Prudenciana died in 1883. Their daughter Carmen Amesti de McKinley passed away on October 29, 1901. It was Carmen and her husband who lived in the Amesti adobe on Polk street, which dwelling had been built by her father and given to the McKinleys in 1848. It is now the home of Mrs. Frances Elkins.

Mr. E.L. Williams, whose articles, documents and diaries have been used in this column from time to time, wrote in 1902: "It was the summer of the year 1855 in Monterey that your writer was invited to go that evening to the house of Jose Amesti, an old resident

who was born in Spain. Upon his arrival he was shown to the patio, a courtyard in the interior as it were, of the dwelling. The bonfire lighted up the courtyard so that it was easy to discern all that might be going on. Your writer found himself to be the only English-speaking person of the group of some ten persons all of whom were natives of Spain and educated, intelligent persons. Besides Mr. Amesti, there were Boleras, Ripa, Castanas, and Oliveras; these last four were partners, and engaged in raising stock, of which they had some thousands of head, where now is the town of Hollister.

"An adjournment was had to the sala. In the upper story of a large house like that of Amesti's there is always a large room in which guests are received or important business is transacted. We would call it sometimes a parlor or living room. This was a very large room, nearly as large as the court room of the county (Colton Hall), without carpets, but otherwise well furnished; with many windows and polished floors."

Mr. Williams ends his story by telling what happened to each of the guests from 1853, when they met, and 1902, when he wrote the article above quoted."Oliveras departed on a vessel bound for Europe... and all the funds he had taken..."

"Rafael Ripa, after gaining a fortune, returned to Barcelona in Spain and soon after died at his father's house."

"Joaquin Bolado was living on his rancho about 15 miles from Hollister before he passed away. He was extremely wealthy and with him lived his old partner, Castanas."