

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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The Cooper-Molera House

We have been observing with interest the sympathetic restoration of the very charming old low adobe building on Polk street at the rear of the historic Capt. J.B.R. Cooper House facing Munras avenue. At the same time we have been thinking back over the history of the building and the various occupants it has had since the early 1920s when we arrived to make our home in Monterey.

The old adobe is to be the studio and school of dancing of Dorothy Dean, who in private life is Mrs. David W. Stevens. With the cooperation of her husband, this versatile lady has been able to create a charming studio both inside and out. The exterior and interior décor are an attractive addition to Monterey and to Polk street in particular.

From no less a person than Miss Frances M. Molera, the owner, we have obtained this bit of authentic information about the building as it has been passed on to her through her grandparents and her parents - first the late Captain and Mr. J.B.R. Cooper, the builders, and then her parents, the Andrew Moleras. Miss Molera now resides in San Francisco.

The letter from Miss Molera relates: "You ask for information about the building on Polk street in Monterey formerly occupied by the Boys' Club. It was built in 1826 by Captain J.B.R. Cooper for a store house. In later years it was sold to Mr. and Mrs. Manuel Diaz together with the lot on which it was built extending along Polk to California street (the name California has been changed to Munras) with a width of about 65 feet next to the home of Capt. And Mrs. Cooper. Mrs. Diaz (Louisa Estrada) lived in her home, 506 California street, until a few years before she died.

"In 1900 my Aunt bought the property from Mrs. Diaz and willed it to me. I do not know what the adobe bricks were called, but they were made by hand from adobe soil taken near the property.

"In the early 1840s an Opera Company came to Monterey from Mexico. The leading singer or man's name was Maiquez and the company gave several operas in the building."

In going through the adobe before the refurnishing had been completed, we found that at least the inside wall –

the one facing the patio of the property – was of "pisa or tapia" instead of sun-dried bricks laid up dry or with mud mortar. Tapia walls are formed by ramming or pounding stiff earth or clay between molds similar to the molds we now use for pouring cement. Both methods are common in Spanish countries. The old, now almost completely wrecked, hotel at Jolon in southern Monterey County, was constructed in this manner. In the Cooper adobe some Carmel rock was also used in the walls, we noticed.

We remember the time in the middle 1920s when this building was the fascinating shop of the late Miss Emma Waldvogle, who, with her capable assistants, made such beautiful embroidered table and household linens. The shop was a "must" on the list for all tourists and residents alike, and many were the gifts sent by the shop to all parts of the world.

In later years the building was vacant. Finally the City of Monterey, through the kindness of Miss Molera, acquired the property for a Boys' Club under the guidance of Fred Moore, then Chief of Police, and a committee of citizens. We also recall the gift of the late Samuel G. Blythe to the club when he presented the handsome bar, stools, a table or two and a number of chairs, which had been the gift to him of the board of directors of the exposition on Treasure Island.

Samuel G. Blythe was probably the most famous newspaper man and political writer of his day. For many years he was a contributor to the Saturday Evening Post. He was a resident of the Monterey Peninsula for many years before his death in 1947, in his home, Sunset Hill, in Pebble Beach.