

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

January 31, 1955

California's Early Inns

Ralph Herbert Cross has written a book "The Early Inns of California," the story of where the men and women who were the state's true American pioneers stopped upon their arrival, and how they lived before and after the discovery of gold.

There were no motels, dude ranches and such in the days before 1849 and for some time after, but inns began to spring up over the country and Cross's book attempts to reconstruct the stories of these early California lodging houses, and to tell something of the men who established and operated them. In our opinion he has accomplished a splendid recording even though Monterey does not come out on top.

Mr. Cross writes that when earlier writers have had anything to say about these inns it has almost always been in the form of a repetition of stories and anecdotes that have been passed down from hand to hand, with little or no attempt to verify their historical accuracy. As a result, a number of wholly fictitious literary traditions have come to be accepted as cast iron facts. Then he goes on to write: ". . . as exemplified by the time-honored belief that the Washington in Monterey, was California's first hotel." And apparently, he proves his statement in Chapter III of his book.

Maybe it would be advisable for the Monterey History and Art Assn. to either remove or change the historic marker at the corner of Washington and Pearl streets, where the Carmel rock building which formerly housed the Monterey Peninsula Herald, stands. For Mr. Cross names Vioget's House in San Francisco, then called Yerba Buena, as California's first hotel. It was built and operated by Capt. Jean Jacques Vioget, a gentleman of French-Swiss extraction, in 1840, while the Washington in Monterey, he believes was built between 1848 and 1849.

The material in the book has definite time limits. The period Mr. Cross chooses is between 1844 and 1869. It is mostly concerned with Northern California inns although there is some mention of early ones near and in Los Angeles. This period provides plenty of interesting and worthwhile material for a book, as the reader will observe. The book is limited to 500 copies, is

printed by the press of Lawton Kennedy and is priced at \$10.

Mr. Cross quotes from many of the books and articles which have been written about the historic buildings in Monterey during the past quarter of a century, mentioning the names of Don Eugenio Montenegro, Thomas Oliver Larkin, Alberto Tresconi, Capt. William A. Leidesdorff, Walter Colton, John M. O'Neill, William Rich Hutton and many others, prominent in the gold rush days in Monterey.

One author has written that Don Eugenio, who married Juana Maria Soberanes, was the builder of the Washington Hotel but Mr. Cross's research has found that Montenegro's name does not appear in the records of Monterey until a later date. In 1836 he was listed as a bachelor "who was living in a house described as 'Casa No. 44'," and it was not until 1839 that he is listed as a property owner. He was married in 1839, as recorded in the records of San Carlos Church. According to Mr. Cross still another author writes that the Washington was built in 1840 by a tinsmith named Alberto Tresconi. Tresconi's name does not appear in the Monterey records until June of 1844, when Thomas Oliver Larkin gave him credit to the extent of two or three dozen pieces of glass and a box of tin. This bit of information is contained in the Larkin account books in the Bancroft Library at the University of California.

We will borrow another quote from Mr. Cross which is of historic interest: "Wherever Montenegro may have lived earlier, on Feb. 18, 1849, he rented from Nathan Spear part of a furnished house located at the southwest corner of what is today Pearl, Alvarado and Polk streets and Munras avenue, and next door to Capt. Juan B. Cooper's house. He continued paying \$25 a month (or the equivalent in hides) until Spear began negotiating with Don Manuel Jimeno to sub-rent the house." This information is also in the Larkin documents.

On July 28, 1846, Alcalde Walter Colton wrote in his "Three Years in California," that there was no public table or hotel in all California, and, quoting Mr. Cross again, ". . . had the Washington been doing business at the time, right in his hometown, the alcalde would have certainly have known about it." Mr. Cross also discovered during his research that between July of 1844 and June 1846 Consul Larkin paid out several hundred dollars to various residents of Monterey for boarding distressed American seamen.

Colton also refers to a two story "hotel honored by the name Astor House." So, it appears that that house was still older than the Washington. Then again in the issue of the Californian on April 17, 1847 there appears to have been still an earlier place, the Monterey Hotel, for such a place was advertised as having been opened a month earlier than the Washington Hotel.

After this date Tresconi's name appears in connection with the Washington.

(To be continued.)