

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Old Washington Hotel

There are several other historic facts about Monterey and the Washington Hotel which we are sure Ralph Herbert Cross, author of "Early Inns of California," would not mind our quoting in this Peninsula Diary. For if history is to be as correct as it can possibly be made to be, a great deal of research is necessary and a great deal of time spent in recording the findings. We are certain that all these important factors went into the production of Mr. Cross' book. If we have made only one mistake in marking the historic route in Monterey, that mistake concerning the Washington Hotel marker, should be corrected as soon as possible. Even if the hotel was not the first it was a very early one and can still be claimed as historic on a new marker.

After going into all the various published history of the old Washington, Mr. Cross, stating fact that on Dec. 13, 1954, description of the hotel which was torn down many years ago. We quote: "The place was built between 1848 and 1849. and while some additions were doubtless made later on, it is safe to say that by the fall of the latter year the building had taken its final shape; and that of a three-story house, something over 200 feet in length by 50 in width, with Tresconi's old narrow-fronted and gabled-roofed dwelling forming a low two-story wing running westward for about 100 feet from the hotel's southern end. The walls of both dwellings were of adobe, plastered over and white-washed; their roofs were of shingles, and it is reasonable to believe that the woodwork was painted white.

"The ground floor of the new building was taken up by the bar and billiard room, dining room and offices: a central outside stairway led from Washington street to a recessed veranda on the second floor, that gave access to a large salon that was used for balls and other public gatherings. No description is known to have survived of the interior appointments and furnishings, but these must have been in keeping with the reputation the place eventually acquired as Monterey's leading hotel."

The "Washington was probably opened for guests about the middle of September in 1849, and while "Tresconi doubtless presided at the inauguration ceremonies, he at once rented it to a former private in Col. J. D.

Stevenson's Regiment of New York Volunteers, for a consideration of \$1200 a month." The Constitutional Convention of California was in session at that time, and the new hotel was filled with the delegates from all parts of the new territory. These important historical persons paid as high as \$200 a month for a room.

We are not certain how long the first renter operated the Washington, but it is a recorded fact that on Dec. 13, 1854. Tresconi leased it to John M. O'Neill and James A. Cray for \$1025 a month. At the end of the lease period, it is probable, thinks Mr. Cross, that Tresconi took over the management, for he advertised the place on April 18, 1857, and offered his friends and the traveling public the added inducement of having both a bath house and the San Jose stage station on the premises.

This was the beginning of the flood tide of its fortunes, and for almost a quarter of a century the place was Monterey's most popular hostelry, to use Mr. Cross' description of the place. Then came the first Del Monte Hotel which opened in 1880, and the Washington became a gamblers' resort. By 1900 it was somewhat of a wreck and in the summer of 1914 the end came, "when the crumbling and bat-infested ruin" was torn down to make way for a more modern building.

We beg again to quote from Mr. Cross and repeat a paragraph from "The Early Inn of California": "In view of the fact that Monterey was the first seat of the American territorial government, and before that time the town was for a century California's Spanish and Mexican capital and the most important settlement in the country, the first hostelry might reasonably be expected to have made its appearance there. But it was not until a year after California's first honest-to-goodness hotel had been opened at Yerba Buena that there is a definite reference to such an establishment in Monterey."

This appears as the following editorial item in the Californian of April 17, 1847:

"Monterey Hotel — We have the pleasure to announce that our worthy friends Messrs. Tabor and Isabel have opened the above house on Main street in this city, and to assure visitors to the Capital that these gentlemen. and their good wives will do all in their power to make their house a 'home'."

The Astor House opened on Main street (now Calle Principal) near the old Custom House. After an

extremely short life, the proprietor and his wife
departed for the mines leaving Monterey without a
hotel of any kind.