

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Parties in the Parlor

In the old Abrego adobe house on the corner of Abrego and Webster streets in Monterey was one of the first pianos brought to California in the early days. A paper on the inside of it, written "by Don Jose had the following Inscription:

"in 1841 Captain Stephen Smith arrived with his vessel in Monterey, and I engaged him to bring me a piano on his next trip to the country. In March 1842, he returned to this city in a brigantine. He had three pianos on board. I bought this one from him for \$600. He then sailed for San Francisco, where General Vallejo purchased another of the pianos and the third was sold at Los Angeles to K. de Cells."

For many years the Abrego piano was in the possession of Mrs. Frances Bolado Davis, a granddaughter of Abrego, at her ranch at Tres Pinos near Hollister. A few years ago, Mrs. Davis presented it to the California Historical society where it can be seen in their San Francisco headquarters. The piano is a six octave one, made by Breitkopt and Hartel of Leipzig, and imported by Brauns and Faulkem of Baltimore.

The Abrego home was the scene of many social gatherings in the early days—and up until the time of Mrs. Abrego's death in the 1890's, the most prominent and distinguished visitors to Monterey were entertained there. Bayard Taylor, the California historian, who visited Monterey in 1849 and attended the Constitutional Convention in Colton Hall, was entertained there, and wrote in his El Dorado:

"I attended an evening party at the home of Senor Jose Abrego which was as lively and agreeable as any occasion of the kind could be. There was a piano in the parlor on which a lady from Sidney, Australia, played with a great deal of taste. Two American gentlemen gave us a few choice duets on flutes and the entertainment closed with a Spanish quadrille, in which the little son of Senor Abrego figured to the general admiration."

The most distinguishing feature of this adobe is the 12-foot ceilings with paneling in all the front rooms, and the three pair of teakwood doors.'

On the map of 1849 the house is shown, in 1851 it was assessed to Abrego for a value of \$200. In 1855, it was

assessed for \$400. Senor Abrego was also the owner of several other adobe buildings in Monterey, one of which stood on the northwest corner of Scott and Olivier streets, opposite the Casa de Oro according to the map issued in 1848. At that date there was not assessment against the property, the first being in 1851 for the sum of \$800. In 1855 Abrego, was assessed \$1,300 for the improvements. The building at Scott and Olivier was torn down many years ago.

Senor Jose Abrego died in 1878, at the age of 65 years. His wife, Josefa Estrada survived him with six of their children. The two daughters married, one was the wife of Judge Webb of Salinas and the other married J. Bolado of San Francisco. A son married the daughter of Jacob P. Leese of Monterey.

In the Old Custom House museum are many historical items which once belonged to the Abrego family, including another piano given by Edward Abrego, the grandson of Don Jose Abrego. There are also handsome samples of the handwork of Mrs. Abrego, family pictures, and clothing.