

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Old Scenes of Merriment

While Commodore Jones was in Monterey, many balls were given in his honor by Larkin and others. On one occasion Thomas Oliver Larkin asked Jose Abrego if he might borrow his piano about which we have told you in previous issues of the Diary. This piano and a full-length mirror were prized possessions of Abrego. The piano is now in the museum of the California Historical Society in San Francisco and we once saw the mirror in the home of the late Mrs. Bolado Davis at Tres Pinos.

The piano was one of three brought to California by Captain Stephen Smith in 1843. One was sold to Eulogio de Cells in San Pedro and the third to M. G. Vallejo of Sani Francisco. Abrego obliged Larkin and loaned him his piano for one of the gay parties given in the Larkin, house but suggested that a piano would not be of much use since no one knew how to play it. But, according to Bancroft, to the surprise of all, the boy Pedro Estrada succeeded in playing the instrument, although he had never touched one before. After this occasion it was suggested to send the boy to Mexico to be educated in music, but the advice of David Spence prevailed, who thought a carpenter would more useful than a musician.

Now that the Casa Abrego, at the corner of Abrego and Webster Sts., is being acquired by the Monterey Foundation it is interesting to note some of the historical facts surrounding the adobe building and the family who occupied it in the early days of Monterey.

Jose Abrego came to California in 1834 and died here in 1878 at the age of 65 years. He married Josefa Estrada, the daughter of Jose Raimundo Estrada. Her mother was first married to Jose F. Alvarado and became the mother of Gov. Juan Bautista Alvarado. After Jose's death she married Jose Raimundo Estrada.

In the Custom House is a fine piece of beautiful embroidery work done by Dona Josefa Abrego and also a handsome silk shawl which she once wore to balls in Monterey. These were gifts from her granddaughter, Mrs. Bolado Davis, to the museum. She learned her embroidery work from the nuns in a convent in Mexico. She had accompanied her husband on a trip to the neighboring country and stayed at the convent while he was busy with his business.

Jose Abrego took the contract for construction of the Quartel (**Cuartel**)—the Mexican government building and barracks that stood on the former location of Monterey's Chamber of Commerce building. Mexicans later used the Quartel (**Cuartel**) as the headquarters for the military occupation then as the first public school building, the first library, and for a while as the meetinghouse for the Methodist Episcopal Church. The first newspaper in California was also published in the Quartel (**Cuartel**).

Mrs. Bolado Davis wrote an account of the family history which had been told to her by her grandmother, a few years before her death, in which she tells that Jose Abrego, the builder of the Casa Abrego, "owned a large tract of land called La Huerta de Rey (Orchard of the King) of which Del Monte was originally a part, and also general merchandise store. The family home consisted of a square block, built of adobe, around two large patios, one of flowers and trees of surprising loveliness the perfume of which still lingers in my memory. There was a second patio of orchards and a run for chickens and ducks. The old casa had 20 windows and doors down the front, ending in a large store house and the store. Only a small portion of it still stands.

"To this home my grandmother came as a bride. She was idolized by her husband who showered her with the loveliest things that could be purchased from incoming ships that arrived in Monterey from the Orient.

"My grandfather came on the French sloop of war Natalia, which was the vessel that took Napoleon from the Island of Elba and was later wrecked in Monterey Bay. Being a great admirer of Napoleon, he had planks from the vessel used in building the ceiling of his ballroom, which was frequently the scene of balls and receptions in which the American uniforms added no small part in the beauty and elegance of the scene."