

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Comedy of Errors

"Here Lived the Californians" by Oscar Lewis is a disappointment. The disappointment is not in any way influenced by the value or the quality of the more than 100 photographs produced in the \$7.95 edition but because of the numerous mistakes we have discovered in the text and in the captions.

We think Mr. Lewis should visit Monterey and discover all the changes in ownership, the correct history, the names of our streets and print a second edition of this book which could be a valuable addition to any library of Californiana, but in its present form there are so many corrections to be made for Monterey alone that we are a bit sorry to have expended the \$7.95 to acquire it.

We are delighted to see that the Whaling Station was used as the illustration for the dust cover and also as the first photograph within the 265 pages of text and pictures featuring the various styles of architecture of the Golden State. It, and many of the other illustrations, are the artistic work of Lee Blaisdell of Monterey.

In Part One. "Spanish and Mexican Adobes," there is but one of Monterey's historic buildings, Casa Amesti. The author states that the house was built as a wedding gift for Don Jose Amesti's daughter, who married James McKinley. We and persons who have done some research into the history of this family and Casa Amesti, are certain that this statement is fiction. The McKinley home was located where the present Monterey Peninsula Herald building is now located. Don Jose and his wife lived in Casa Amesti on Polk for many years and raised their family there.

Lewis fails to relate that Frances Elkins died in 1953 or that she willed the house and its handsome furnishing to the National Trust for perpetual preservation. There is no mention of the fact that the old adobe is now the Old Capital Club, into whose custody it was placed by the National Trust for the Preservation of Historic Sites and Buildings.

In Part II. "The Coming of the Foreigners," four buildings are pictured: Larkin House, Colton Hall, California's First Theatre, and First Brick House. In introducing the history of the Larkin House Lewis states: "Singularly rich in historical lore associated with California's early days

is the Larkin House, the adobe which stands on the busy Monterey thoroughfare known in Spanish and Mexican Days as the Calle Principal and which now bears the prosaic title of Main Street."

We, in Monterey, know that Calle Principal has been known by its original name for a goodly number of years. If our memory serves us right it was during the presidency of Mrs. B. D. Mark Greene of the Monterey Women's Civic Club that the name was returned to the historic thoroughfare.

During a recital of the history of the Larkin House, Lewis writes this mistake: "Larkin's casa became headquarters of the conquerors (Americans) and remained so until, nearly a year later, they moved across town to El Cuartel, the adobe put by the Mexicans in the 1840s, which stands at the corner of Munras and Webster." The word "stands" should have read "stood," for it has been many years since "El Cuartel" disappeared from the Monterey scene. The site is at present occupied by a service station, a street, and another service station, the site of the city plaza.

Colton Hall should also have received a better review of its history from the author. He stated "Early In the present century, the property was leased to the state and a comprehensive program of restoration got under way." But fails to relate that at present Colton Hall is owned by the City of Monterey and that the upper story is a museum showing the Hall as it was in 1849. set up for the Constitutional Convention of that year, and the lower floor is occupied by the police department of the city. The state has no control over the building at present.

The First Theatre is charmingly shown in a photograph as it appears today, but the text relates: Today little theater groups both in Monterey and nearby Carmel frequently put on plays here . . . "The theater has been under the Denny-Watrous management since the reopening, sponsored by the Monterey History and Art Assn., June 3, 1937. Old time plays are produced there each weekend throughout the year

Now we come to the First Brick House on Decatur street. On two adjoining pages there are pictures of the Brick House and one of Rancho Nipomo, San Luis Obispo, but too had, the captions are under the wrong houses.

The Stevenson House is included in Part V, "Shrines and Showplaces." Most of the text for this historic shrine is

correct but Lewis fails to state the building is now a state historical monument open to the public under the direction of the Division of Beaches and Parks, as gift to California from Mrs. Edith van Anwerp and Mrs. Tobin Clark in 1941. He writes: . . . from time-to-time movements, sponsored by public-spirited local groups, have been launched to have it preserved as a permanent memorial to the gentle Scotch romancer who made it his abode.”