

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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The Allen House

Before 1923 the Allen House, the first frame house erected in Monterey, stood near the site of El Cuartel. After that year it was torn down and a service station now occupies the location.

In 1896, when the Monterey Public School published a booklet entitled "Sketches of Leading Places of Interest in Monterey," Ruby Hickman, the young daughter of John Hickman, the principal, either chose or was assigned to write an article on The Allen House. She reported that the old house had been built in July 1849, along with six other houses, all of which have disappeared.

Miss Hickman writes: "It is a frame house, and was not built of California lumber, but framed in Obertown, England, on the River Devon. The same family that brought it over from England still owns it. It has been rented to many people, but its ownership has never changed. The vessel which brought them across was the Elizabeth Starbuck of Nantucket. They were nine months on the voyage, mainly due to the fault of the captain, who was a 'very, very bad man,' as Mrs. Allen expressed it, and once, when intoxicated threatened to throw them all overboard.

"The family brought with them on this vessel all the animals and fowls of the farmyard, and provisions enough to last for two years. The landing of the Allen family at Monterey was an accident. Their vessel through some cause began to leak as they came near Monterey harbor, so they landed here. The vessel was afterward condemned and built into a wharf."

T. R. Watson, an early resident of Monterey, procured a great deal of the old wood from the Allen House and with it made picture frames and other souvenirs which he sold to the tourists who visited Monterey. I have before me one of his frames with a photograph of the "First Frame Building in California", mounted on a piece of the ironwood used in the building. Watson's description of the historic house as reviewed on a printed sheet glued to the back of the frame relates that in 1923, "the house was said to be the most photographed house in the world," and "has been the center of much of the romance of our early California history."

Watson also writes: "Built in 1840 by Timothy Bushton, whose descendants were still living in the house when the picture was taken. In 1923, nearly a century later, it was torn down by J. C. Anthony. The lumber, of which this is a piece, is Australian Ironwood, shipped by sailing vessel from Sidney." So, we are not sure in our mind who is correct, whether the wood came from England or Australia, but it seems Mrs. Allen should have known for she was a descendant of the original builder.

Our school reporter, Ruby Hickman, reports that the old house of 12 rooms is large and rambling. Every room had a fireplace in it and that the inside is as cozy as one could desire, but from the outside it does not seem possible that anyone could live there. Mrs. Allen told Ruby many thrilling tales about what she had seen from her windows." On awaking one morning, in the days of '49, she saw two men lying dead in front of her house.

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