

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

April 5, 1957

Monterey's First Piano

Elvira Abrego "covered" the Larkin House for the 1896 edition "Old Monterey", a short publication written by the pupils of the Monterey Public School in 1896 and published by the grandniece of Gen. Vallejo, a descendant of the builder and owner of Casa Abrego at Webster and Munras streets in Monterey, now the headquarters of a woman's club.

Young Miss Abrego wrote:

"A short distance below Colton Hall, on the corner of Main and Jefferson streets, is a large adobe building which has been standing there a great many years. The property on which this house is built, and that adjoining it, was granted to Thomas Oliver Larkin, American consul to California, by the City of Monterey, Jan. 29, 1835. Very soon after Mr. Larkin came into possession of the property, he built this spacious house, which is a two-story building, having adobe walls three feet thick, and a veranda extending around two sides, from which a very delightful view may be seen.

"A large orchard containing many varieties of fruit trees originally surrounded the house, and a few of them are still standing to remind us of the beauties of olden times."

We have related several times that it was Don Jose Abrego who ordered the first piano to be brought to Monterey, in 1841 Capt. 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 in a brigantine. He had three pianos on board. I bought one for \$600. He then sailed for San Francisco, where Gen. Vallejo purchased another and the third was sold to K. de Selis in Los Angeles." For many years Mrs. Frances Bolado Davis, a granddaughter of Abrego, had the Abrego piano in her ranch home at Tres Pinos. Several years ago, she presented it to the California Historical Society where it is now a treasured possession. It is a six octave one, made by Breitkopf and Hartel of Leipzig, and imported by Brauns and Faulkem of Baltimore.

Miss Abrego goes on to tell of the many gay assemblies that gathered under the Larkin roof and of the tiny upright piano which was in the Larkin House and was still there at the time she wrote her article for the

school paper. She also related that the Larkin store was in the outer corner of the house. "It was a famous resort in those days for men of all nationalities and all political beliefs; and Larkin, winning his way with all, hoped he might be the means of annexing California to the Union," the young historian wrote.

In describing the interior of the Larkin House Elvira Abrego wrote: "In one of the rooms of the lower floor there is an opening within the wall extending down to the foundation. This is closed by a heavy iron door about two feet square secured by a strong lock, and this was a place of safe deposit for jewelry, money and valuable papers in days when fire-proof safes were unknown in California."

The last paragraphs in this story of the Larkin House written by Elvira Abrego in 1896, recorded this bit of history: "In 1850 J. P. Leese, who had built the first house in Yerba Buena, came to Monterey, and as he was pleased with the Larkin House and its beautiful surroundings, he exchanged for it city property in San Francisco worth \$30,000. The wife of Leese was a sister of Gen. Vallejo, so highly esteemed and trusted by both the Americans and the Spanish throughout California. In this historic house Mrs. Leese reared her large family of sons and daughters, and many remember the happy days spent, under this roof, when, with true Spanish hospitality, the door was never closed against a friend nor a glad welcome refused. Only one now remains in the old home to treasure what is left of the valuable articles of furniture brought by her father from China and Japan, and the recollections which cluster tenderly around the old home."