

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### Los Coches

Another old adobe at the southern end of the county may someday become another state historical landmark. Los Coches, 115-year-old example of early California architecture is the property of Miss Margaret Jacks of Monterey and Palo Alto who has expressed a wish that it be preserved for generations to come. It would certainly make a delightful roadside rest for the motoring public, with its oak-shaded picnic area, its closeness to Highway 101 and the Arroyo Seco road which connects, with the highway at the northeast corner of the old adobe property.

Not only for the reason that Los Coches is in Monterey County but because of the old name of Soberanes in Monterey's history, it is interesting to note that the old stage stop might be connected with De Anza and Portola. Jose Maria Soberanes was one of De Anza's soldiers, who, as he rode through the valley dreamed that someday he would return and become a ranchero.

Jose mustered out in 1795 and with his father-in-law, Joaquin Castro, received 8,446 acres in one of the first large grants in the Mission Soledad area. Young Soberanes worked hard to develop his holdings but died before he could prove title to all the land. His widow moved to Monterey and a few years later their son, Feliciano, took over in the valley. By 1841 other grants had given the family 22,000 acres, which in later years was again increased until there were 115,000 acres, including the San Lorenzo ranch to the south. Gradually these acres passed into other hands, but the name Soberanes still is well known along the River road in the Salinas Valley.

Rancho Los Coches ("the pigs") adobe was built about 1843 by William Richardson, whose wife was formerly Josefa Soberanes, to whom the 8.794 acres of Rancho Los Coches had been granted in 1841 by Gov. Juan B. Alvarado.

As time went on the old 1 1/2-story building turned from a family home into a stagecoach stop on the El Camino Real. In 1865, land values in the area were such that David Jacks acquired the property for \$3,535. It has been reported that generations of improperly recorded transfers of title had left the deed to Los Coches in such

shape that it was 1919 before Jack's family attorney could make the record absolute.

Between 1872 and 1886 the establishment saw its heyday. Construction of the railroad had ended at Soledad and there the transfer of passengers from stage to rail brought business. In 1898, during the development of the Fort Romie settlement nearby, many of the new families found temporary housing in the old adobe. At one time the place was known as Thomas Station; at another Oak Grove stage stop.

Robert Louis Stevenson wrote in the "Old Pacific Capital" this description of Pacific Grove, after coming upon a scene during one of his daily rambles over the Monterey Peninsula:

"One day - I shall never forget it - I had taken a trail that was new to me. After a while, the woods began to open, the sea to sound nearer at hand. I came upon a road and, to my surprise, a stile. A step or two further, and without leaving the woods, I found myself among trim houses. I walked through street after street, parallel and at right angles, paved with sward and dotted with trees, and each with its name posted at the corner, as in a real town.

"Facing down the main throughfare - Central Avenue it was ticketed - I saw an open-air temple, with benches and sounding-board, as though for an orchestra. The houses were tightly shuttered, there was no smoke, no sound but the waves, no moving thing. I have, never been in a place that seemed so dreamlike. Pompeii is all a-bustle with visitors, and its antiquity and strangeness deceive the imagination; but this town had plainly not been built above a year or two, and perhaps had been deserted overnight. Indeed, it was not so much like a deserted town as like a scene upon the stage by daylight, with no one upon the boards. The barking of a dog led me at last to a house still occupied, where a Scotch pastor and his wife pass the winter alone in this empty theater. The place was the 'Pacific Camp Grounds, the Christian Seaside Resort.' Thither, in the warm seasons, crowds come to enjoy life of teetotalism, religion, and filiation, which I am willing to think blameless and agreeable."

The Monterey History and Art Assn. has caused to be published copies of the "Old Pacific Capital," which may be had for a small charge at the Stevenson House. This charmingly written description of Monterey was first included in Stevenson's "Across the Plains, a Collection

of Memories and Essays.” It was first published in 1880, but It remains today masterpiece of description of the Monterey Peninsula that Stevenson knew.