

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

February 18, 1959

### **Monterey's Alvarado Adobe**

We are often asked the history of the old adobe at the corner of Alvarado and Pearl streets known as the La Porte building, and so after some research, and some personal knowledge with the additional help of the Monterey Public Library we are able to construct a reasonable amount of authentic information concerning the structure.

Date compiled by the WPA History Survey in 1937, from an interview with W.W. James, a pioneer resident and one-time postmaster, and from the files of the Monterey Assessors' office, the following was written:

"Located on the N.W. corner of Alvarado and Pearl streets, is an adobe building in good state of preservation, at present known as the La Porte building as being assessed to Gov. Alvarado for a value of \$6,000. In 1874, La Porte Brothers purchased the building, and added a frame second story, naming it La Porte Hall. The adobe is now often called the Burns building for the reason that Viola La Porte married the late Edward Burns, and inherited the property. Viola Burns preceded her husband in death and the building passed into the hands of her children who still own it.

"Originally the structure was a one-story adobe with a lean-to. A small addition on the second floor, some historians relate, was used as the office of Don Juan Bautista Alvarado, the first native-born California governor under the Mexican rule, from 1836 to 1842. On the lower floor a flourishing saloon and gambling business was conducted by Mauricio Gonzales. There was a high adobe wall surrounding the lots in the rear of the building and here were staged Mexican acrobatic and gymnastic acts, the audience being seated on crude board tiers somewhat resembling the circus seats of the present day."

In 1936 the building was completely renovated and upper floor made into an attractive auditorium. We remember attending a number of musical events held there under the sponsorship of Miss Margaret Lial, who was owner-operator of a music store on the ground floor.

In 1949 the Native Sons of the Golden West and the California Centennial Commission placed a plaque upon the building, noting it as the headquarters of Gov.

Alvarado, as part of the Centennial celebration of the anniversary of the drafting and signing of the California Constitution by the delegates to the First Constitutional Convention, held in Monterey's Colton Hall.

On March 31, 1941, the Monterey Peninsula Herald reported: "A leaking roof was the cause late last night of a cave-in in the front wall of an old adobe building at 497 Alvarado St. The story and a half structure is a fine example of early California architecture and is thought to be more than 130 years old."

Gov. Alvarado was born in Monterey on St. Valentine's Day, 1809, the son of Gen. Don Francisco Alvarado and grandson of Gen. Limon, renowned conqueror of Lower California. He was tutored by Pablo de Sola the cultured governor of Alta California at the time of the transition from Spanish to Mexican rule, an opportunity which developed his love of books and rare intellect.

Alvarado's mother was Josefa Vallejo, sister of Gen. Mariano G. Vallejo, one of the most distinguished and influential men of Mexican California.

When Alvarado became governor of California the total population numbered less than 150, including such well-known citizens as W.E.P. Hartnell, Thomas Oliver Larkin, Alfred Robinson, James Alexander Forbes, Abel Stearns, Jacob Leese, and later John Bidwell, John A. Sutter and W.D.M. Howard.

About 1845 Alvarado was chosen by a great majority as representative to the Mexican congress from California; but the ensuing war, with its blockade of ports, prevented him from appearing at his new post.

Juan Alvarado was governor of California for six years. After the American occupation he retired to his country home at San Pablo, where he quietly resided for many years. He died July 13, 1882.

June 1, 1954, it was officially announced that the Alvarado Adobe House in San Pablo, a historic monument and one of the four oldest structures in the Bay Area, was being torn down for the expansion of a nearby motel. The building was constructed in the 1820's.

It had been built by the Castro family, who was given the land grant for the San Pablo Rancho by the King of Spain. Later it became the home of Gov. Alvarado. The news reports carried the statement at that time that the only buildings in the Bay area of greater age are the Mission Dolores, the Presidio Officers Club in the San

Francisco Presidio and Mission San Jose de Guadalupe near Niles. We hope this tragedy will never happen to "our" Alvarado Adobe in Monterey.