

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Making Adobe Bricks

Harper's New Monthly Magazine of October, 1882, in an article on California reports on making of adobe bricks in Monterey. The article is well illustrated with drawings by Joe Strong, an artist of Old Monterey and a former son-in-law of Mrs. Robert Louis Stevenson. The drawings include small pictures of "A Bit of Old Monterey," "Cedars at Monterey," "From the Old Fort," "Old Del Monte Hotel," "The Chinese Fishing Quarters," "Whaling in Monterey," "Chinese Fish Drying House," and "The Day of San Carlos at Carmel Mission"

The author of the feature story writes: "The Travelers of my youth I recollect, had a fashion of talking glibly of adobe, without even explaining what adobe is. Let me not guilty any longer of the same fault." And he goes on to explain: "Adobe is a building material used in the same manner as brick. One adobe is about twice the size of an ordinary brick. It is baked in the sun and not in a kiln. Walls are made of great thickness of it in order that, even though the interior and outside crumble off, there may be a good deal left. Like a number of other things, it stands very well while it is not assailed: and in this climate it is supposed, with reason, that it will rarely be assailed by any violent extremes of temperature."

A few of the old houses in Monterey were well examined by the author for he writes of them as though he had really made a study of the architecture and the construction. "The typical adobe house of the best class is stuccoed and whitewashed. Large on the ground, two-stories in height, with verandas. Again it may be of one story, and has an indoor courtyard. It has green doors and shutters, and green turned posts in what we should now call Queen Anne style, and is a comfortable and home-like edifice to look at.

"One of them to which to I was taken to see the first piano ever introduced into California and to call upon a lady whose husband had made haste to sell out all at San Francisco and invest it here, in order to reap the prosperity thought to be waiting upon Monterey at an early date – has two old iron guns planted at posts at the corners. In front of the others are walks neatly made of the vertebrae of whales. The whales are taken by the Monterey Whaling Company, a band of hardy, weather-beaten men, chiefly Portuguese from the

Azores. They have a lookout station on the hill under the ruined fort, a barracks lower down, and pursue their avocation from the shore in boats, with plenty of adventure and no small profit."

The author was interested enough in Monterey to do a bit of research along the historical line, for he informs his readers in this paragraph "Monterey, which is now, even a county seat, was the Spanish capital of the province from the time it was first thought necessary to have a capital, after the landing here of Father Junipero and Don Gaspar Portola in 1770. It was next a Mexican capital, the first port, of entry, the scene of the first Constitutional Convention of the State, and an outfitting point for the southern mines. Money in those early days was so plentiful, as I have heard tell, that stores keepers hardly stopped to count it, but threw it under the counter by the bushel basketful. A secret belief in some ultimate revival and recovery prestige seems always to have survived in certain quarters corresponding, as it were to ancient cities of the world. Breakwaters are ambitiously talked about, to make the bay a harbor, and the town a shipping center, a rival to San Francisco" Sounds like 1959 doesn't it?