

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

December 7, 1962

History Of An Adobe

Miss Frances Molera, the granddaughter of Capt. J. B. R. Cooper, builder of the Cooper-Molera Adobe at the intersection of Polk, Munras and Alvarado streets in Monterey, has provided us with valuable historic information on the main adobe building and the one-story adobe on Polk street next to the old barn.

This authentic information from Miss Molera, the owner, as it has passed on to her through her grandparents and her parents - first the late Capt. and Mrs. J.B.R. Cooper, the builders, and then her parents, the Andrew Moleras. Miss Molera now lives in San Francisco.

"The adobe was built in 1825 by Capt. J.B.R. Cooper for a store house. In later years it was sold to Mr. and Mrs. Manuel Diaz together, with the lot on which it was built, extending along Polk street to California street, (now Munras) with a width of about 65 feet next to the home of Capt. and Mrs. Cooper. Mrs. Diaz (Louisa Estrada) lived in her home, 505 California St., until a few years before she died.

"In 1900 my aunt bought the property from Mrs. Diaz and willed it to me. I do not know what the bricks were called, but they were made by hand from adobe soil taken near the property.

"In the early 1840's an opera company came to Monterey from Mexico. The leading singer or man's name was Maiquez and the company gave several operas in the building."

In going through this adobe a number of years ago, we found that at least one inside wall - the one facing the patio of the property - was of "pisa or tapia" instead of sun-dried bricks laid up dry with mud mortar. Tapia walls were formed by ramming or pounding stiff earth or clay between molds similar to the molds we now use in pouring cement. Both methods are common in Spanish countries. The old, now almost completely wrecked Dutton Hotel at Jolon in Southern Monterey County was constructed in this manner. In the Cooper Adobe, some Carmel stone also was used in the wall we noted.

The old Spanish jail was built in 1806, when Monterey was the governmental residence and chief military post of the province of Alta California. It was a sort of a

military prison, but afterward degenerated into a common jail, and as such being used for several years.

Some of the noted prisoners of California's early troublesome times were incarcerated between its substantial walls, it is reported.

The historical building stood at the back of the old Abrego store, almost surrounded by buildings of various kinds, and could only be seen from the alleyway by which it was entered. On this account it rarely was seen by tourists who were looking for the interesting places in the old Spanish capital.

The structure was a genuine adobe, its walls being made of the huge sun-baked blocks of adobe, after the primitive style, without the chalk rock blocks of clay that later experience taught the Montereyans to use for the first 6 or 8 feet of their adobe houses. The jail was a commodious, strongly built and comparatively comfortable prison.

Heavy Mexican tile was used for the roof, while great hand-hewn pine beams and joints fastened with rawhide thongs were used inside; substantial enough to have stood another hundred years.

Oct. 1, 1896, the picturesque old Spanish jail was torn down and the adobe used to fill the gulch on California street (now Munras). With its demolition passed another of the few remaining reminders of Monterey's position as the leading town in Alta California.

This information was found in a Monterey newspaper of Oct. 1, 1899.