

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Casa Gutierrez Damaged By Fire

"Soil can be conserved, forests replanted, substitutes found for exhausted mineral resources, but once destroyed, our historical sites and structures are forever lost to the nation. They are tangible reminders of our past; they are priceless treasures of the nation's wealth; they are irreplaceable, for although copies can be made, they never have the meaning of the originals," according to the printed statement for the National Council for Historic Sites and Buildings.

One of the very charming and historical smaller adobes – one in the proposed "Island of Adobes" – was badly burned May 10. It was occupied by the Sancho Panza Coffee Shop, facing both Calle Principal and Pacific Street. The adobe walls are still standing and we sincerely hope that action will be taken immediately to restore the structure. It is owned by the State of California. It may be that the Monterey Foundation and local residents might be able to assist in the important project.

In the early part of the 1940's the old adobe dwelling was to be sold for taxes and was threatened with destruction to make way for a modern building. A group of interested citizens, who make up the Monterey Foundation membership, bought the building and immediately started to restore it to its original appearance and made an example of Mexican architecture of the early Mexican period. The restoration was slow at times because of lack of funds, because of war years which intervened between the purchase time and the beginning of restoration repairs that were necessary, and lack of information necessary to make the restoration authentic. These items were all met and the little house was ready for the next chapter in its history.

It was interesting to Myron Oliver, who had given of his time, enthusiasm, and knowledge of restoration procedure, to study the various phases through which the structure had gone in the years since it was built by the first owner, assisted by Mexican or possibly Indian help.

All partitions in the house were of wood, but all the outside walls were of adobe. When the old floor was

removed from one of the back rooms, the original foundation of rock was discovered. It is supposed that once upon a time the adobe wall had fallen out and been replaced with wood. Also discovered was a door space and the original door made of cypress wood, which had been used as part of the paneling around the small room.

When the wooden partitions were removed in the front room of the three-room adobe and the white-washed adobe walls exposed, a complete gray line, with the exception of the north wall, showed that there had been a chair-rail around the room, a common thing in all adobe houses. When a party or a dance was given, the chairs were all lined up around the wall and the rail kept the clean white walls from being scratched by the chair backs.

The accepted reason for the lack of a chair rail on the north wall is that at one time this and the adjoining adobe were one. Later, the property probably was divided and an additional wall was built. That supposition also explained the lack of a sign that there had been no kitchen in the building in the early days. Early home owners in Monterey usually had an outdoor stove and an outbuilding for cooking.

Nailed to the inside wall of one of the wall boards when it was pulled off was a foot-long sample of the original chair-rail which, when tried, exactly fitted the width of the gray unpainted space left on the other three walls – left as though the workman thought that some day, someone might do a restoration there. Also, Mr. Oliver and workmen found indications that a stairway which led to the one-room second story was originally a part of the front room instead of the north room at the rear. This was changed in the restoration.

At long last, on July 27, 1950, the Gutierrez home was the scene of a reception for more than 100 members of the Monterey Foundation and the Monterey History and Art Assn. The adobe had been completely restored and was furnished for the showing with authentic furniture either loaned for the occasion or given outright to the organizations. At the rear of the adobe was planted a garden similar to those found in Monterey during the Spanish and Mexican regimes.

The building was restored with foundation funds by a committee headed by Myron Oliver and including the late Col. Charles H. Mason and this writer.

On June 30, 1954, the State of California was given title to Casa Gutierrez, 590 Calle Principal, another link that binds Monterey to California's historic past.

NOTE: The spelling for Gutierrez in the original article was corrected in this transcription.