

May 3 1963

An Old Ivy-Covered Adobe Wall Basks Again In Monterey's Sun

It has been a delightful and satisfying experience to see some restoration and beautification going on in the Old Town rather than destruction.

We have observed the improvement and restoration of the old wall at the rear of Casa Amesti facing Calle Principal. This lovely old wall of adobe brick had been so completely covered with ivy these many years that few people living today had ever viewed its beauty. The ivy also was becoming very destructive to the wall, growing into the adobe, underneath it, over it and anywhere else it could extend its root system and growth.

The wall was given a coating of whitewash as it was when built, probably 100 or more years ago, and is the object of admiration to all who pass that way.

We thank the members of the Old Capital Club for their foresight and timely restoration before the old wall was completely destroyed, for there are certainly too few of these old adobe walls left in Monterey to remind us of the Spanish and Mexican days in the Old Town.

While no specific events of history are connected with the Casa Amesti, the building, as it stands, is a significant monument recording a typical Monterey two-story town house of the Mexican capital of Alta California and of the transitional period of the development of the town into an American community.

The original owner of the property was Don Jose Amesti, a Spanish Basque from Catalonia. Amesti came to Monterey in 1822 and two years later married Prudenciana Vallejo, daughter of Don Ignacio Vicente Vallejo. Don Jose Amesti, an even-tempered man gained respect and considerable financial standing in the Monterey community. He also owned Rancho de las Corralitos in the eastern part of Santa Cruz County, the site of lumbering activity as early as 1835.

In August of 1833 it is recorded in the Register of the City of Monterey that the "ayuntamiento" (town government) had granted to Amesti a "soler" (building site) 30 "varas" (approximately an English yard) in each direction. In February of 1834 in the same register it is recorded that Prudenciana Vallejo de Amesti was granted a solar of 40 varas in each direction, adjoining

and broadside to that of Juan Cooper, on which she had constructed a house:

At this writing, according to a Historic Building Survey, it is impossible to establish the date when the house reached the form it has today. From letters it is known to have been a two-storied adobe in 1855. It is likely that it was constructed as a one-story adobe with usable attic space, but with the spacing of the windows south of the stair hall and the existence of an interior stairway on it, lead to conclude that the southern portion of the building is of later construction than 1834. A 1842 lithograph by Larkin shows the Amesti as a one and one-half story structure with five openings on the east wall ground story and three openings in the attic story without balcony.

The Vallejo family was friendly with the foreigners of Mexican Monterey. Two daughters married men of-English descent, John Cooper and Jacob Leese, and were friends of the American consul and merchant, Thomas O. Larkin. No doubt the mixture of American and Mexican ideas of construction account for the distinction of the colonial Monterey architecture, leading examples of which are the Larkin House, the Cooper House, Casa Soberanes and Casa Amesti.

The additions and restoration work done by Frances Adler Elkins in 1919 did nothing to detract from the graciousness of this well-preserved building. Casa Amesti remained in the Amesti family until sold to S. J. Duckworth in 1912, with subsequent purchase by Mr. and Mrs. Felton Elkins in 1918.

Frances Elkins, a professional decorator, restored the structure and used it as a private residence, furnishing the house with fine examples of 18th and 19th Century objects and furniture. It was bequeathed in this condition to the National Trust for Historic Preservation in 1953. The building is maintained by a private club, The Old Capital Club.

We asked Manuel Real, who restored the wall after removing the ivy coverage, about what he thought would be the age of the old adobe wall. He replied that he was quite sure that the wall and old hand-made tile was as old as the house itself which would make it 108 years of age.