

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **Kitchens of Old**

I went through the Stevenson House on Houston street again recently, an experience which I always thoroughly enjoy. There are two exhibit rooms which are perhaps my favorites – the old kitchen and the children's room.

I well remember an interview I once had with the late Mrs. Emma Ambrosia, who as a child lived in the Boronda adobe, now the home of Dr. and Mrs. Mast Wolfson.

She remembered that there was a cooking area behind the house with a beehive-shaped oven. Just beside it and below on the hillside was a barbecue area. There was also a large iron stove.

In front of the stove was a large iron door which could be opened and the grate pulled out a short distance. Onto this grate the coals were raked and the meat was put on the old spit which is now on display in the Stevenson House. The spit with the meat on it was placed across the opening of the stove just the right height above the coals.

Meat was never fried in the old days, Mrs. Ambrosia remembered. It was either broiled over the hot coals or cooked in stews in the old iron pots, one of which was given to the History and Art Assn. by Mrs. Ambrosia in 1949. Each part of the cooking area at the Boronda Adobe was used for the preparation of certain foods.

The oven, built of stone, mortar and bricks, was for baking bread. The iron stove was used for quick cooking and general use – boiling water, for instance. The barbecue pit was for the famous barbecues and also for items that required long, slow cooking in the old iron pots.

Mrs. Ambrosia recalled that as a child it was her job to stir slowly for hours the mixture of milk and sugar that was put into the small, old brass kettle, which is in the display of old cooking utensils. Long cooking over low heat in the barbecue pit turned it into dulce (candy) that was so loved by the children.

Gifts to the History and Art Assn. and now on loan to the Stevenson House also came from Mr. and Mrs. Myron Oliver. In the old kitchen are an ancient sausage maker of wood and tin, an old wooden and tin foot

warmer with the pan inside for the hot coals; and an apple peeler.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries the peeling of many bushels of apples each harvest time to prepare them for winter storage in the form of dried apples was no small task for a New England family.

Consequently the true Yankee's inventive genius brought forth the apple parer, the first handmade model of which was made of wood, in the form of a pronged stick with hands to turn it, mounted on a straddle-board. The apple was forced on to the prongs, the handle turned and a knife applied to the apple, which as it revolved was pared. The one given by the Olivers answers this description

Recently the New York Historical Museum exhibited a collection of early American apple peelers, presented by Charles Larned Robinson. The collection totaled 28 items and was augmented by eight additional ones in the society's collection. We have one in Monterey!