

Peninsula Diary May Hayes O'Donnell

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Early Projects

There is in the Bancroft Library at the University of California in Berkeley a valuable and historical document which "concerns the project for the construction of the Casa Consistorial (town hall) and jail at Monterey, California, in the year 1834."

This original document was acquired by purchase of the late Thomas Wayne Norris from the estate of the late Jo Mora and later sold to the Bancroft Library by his widow, now a resident of San Francisco. Mr. Norris was the president of the Monterey History and Art Assn. at the time of his death, May 14, 1952.

The document has a goodly number of pages, the paper of which is brown with age. It is entirely written in longhand in the Spanish language in beautiful penmanship.

The first two leaves read as follows:

"Since the premises of the jails of this presidio are too limited and hardly offer any comfort to the military criminals, and since in them are also housed the criminals from the ordinary jurisdiction, it may easily happen that through their continuous association in such kind of habitation the bad germs (humores) may propagate with the consequence that a contagion may take place among the unfortunate delinquents, and since the laws provide that a very special care be taken about the salubrity of these places, it therefore becomes necessary that the illustrious City Council should take the necessary measure in order that a jail may be built...for the purpose of housing the criminals in the ordinary jurisdiction.

"I manifest it to Your Lordship, who may refer it to the indicated corporations so that the desired action may be effected."

It is signed by Jose Figueroa, Governor of California—
"Dio y Libertad. Mayo 31 de 1833."

Further on, a document signed by Jose Maria Maldonado says that the project has been referred to the proper committee for action.

On the initial leaf the first estimate of expenses is given, but this project includes not only the jail which had been requested by Figueroa, but also the complete housing for the municipal council.

Juan Bautista Cooper calls attention to the fact that such a large sum may cause delay in the execution of the project and that it might be wiser to limit the project to just the jail requested by Figueroa.

On the third leaf the signature of Jose Figueroa appears again in a statement to the effect that he has consulted his secretary, Capt. Augustin Zamorano, whose scientific knowledge had been useful in certain corrections and improvements on the projected building.

Mention was made of the fact that the capital of the territory was expected to be moved from Monterey to Los Angeles and hence the housing for the Territorial Committee should not be included in the plan.

In following pages, as well as in the final plans (in color), the project which was approved included not only the jail but also the city hall. The final approval is dated July 31, 1834, and is signed by Jose Carrillo and Jose Maria Maldonado. On the last page of the document the following statement appears:

"On the 23rd day of February of the year 1835 the foundation of the jail was begun, which are the same ones marked in the plan with the numbers 2, 7, 13, and 10. And on the second day of March of the same year, at four o'clock in the afternoon, the Mayor, Mr. David E. Spence, placed the first stone in the room marked No. 10 in the plan and in the corner, which faces to the northeast."

No signature appears on the last statement.

The above translations and report were executed by Raoul J. Fajardo at Stanford University.

Jose Maria Maldonado was secretary to David Spence, the alcalde. Capt. Zamorano established the earliest California printing press in Monterey. He came to Monterey in 1825 as executive secretary of the territory of Alta California and served 11 years as second administrative officer.