

## CHAPTER III

### THE MONTEREY COLONIAL STYLE

#### Mexican and American Design Influences

Long before Larkin's arrival in California, Father Junipero Serra can be duly credited for bringing the first permanent architectural influences to California. His missionary pursuits introduced Spanish influenced construction, in the form of the Franciscan missions, to the area. He enlisted the help of local natives to erect the adobe and tile edifices that are character defining features of the region today. They were built with a combination of Moorish and Roman aesthetics, and their designs were adapted to the environment and missionary needs in an altogether original style that came to be known as California Mission architecture.<sup>1</sup> Though the influence of the missions lent only cursory influence to the secular architectural styles in Monterey, the quality of regional uniqueness in form, materials, and construction set a precedent.

The missions were characterized by thick, buttressed walls, courtyards, arcades, tile roofs, towers and shaped and pierced belfries; all devised from Spanish forms that were familiar to the missionaries. (Figure 6) Early mission buildings were constructed of adobe bricks with

wood, earth and tule roofs. These rather fire-prone roofs later evolved to have tiled surfaces, however – a convention said to have arisen after the mission buildings at San Lu s Obispo were burned to the ground three times by hostile Indians.<sup>2</sup> In a region that experienced pronounced seismic activity and the uncertainties of native hostilities, the missions were fortresses almost as much as they were religious sanctuaries, thus they were built with thick sturdy walls that could fend off both earthquakes and attacks.



FIGURE 6: Royal Presidio Chapel, Monterey. Source: Fisher, Joy, Penny Postcards, available from <http://www.rootsweb.com/~usgenweb/special/ppcs/ppcs.html>, accessed 11 August 2004.

Presidios, the military fortresses of early California, were truly meant to defend against hostilities. Their architecture was dependent on practical reasons more than aesthetic ones, and they consisted of

staunch palisades and barracks made of adobe, stone and log construction, all covered by the typical red tile roofs.<sup>3</sup> They were visually compatible with neighboring pueblo communities, which were characterized by low, one-story adobe structures, with small barred windows. Their walls were usually whitewashed and the roofs consisted of clay tiles, or tule smeared with mud or asphalt material. They were modest and defensive dwellings, though those of the more elite citizens would often be more elaborate, particularly on the interior.<sup>4</sup> All California buildings of the Spanish period, however, including the missions, were constructed on the principal of survival, characterized by simplicity and strength.

When the Mexican period arrived in California, culture began to take precedence over subsistence in relation to architecture. Less concerned with hostilities from Indians or other parties, Mexican residences became slightly larger and more complex with fewer defensive elements, though it is noted that they were still “rude” structures in comparison to later American-influenced architecture.<sup>5</sup> With land available to private citizens and increasing emphasis placed on secular lifestyles, more domestic, commercial and civil architecture was allowed to take precedence over the traditional mission churches and military presidios.

Mexican adobes (the building type shared the name of the material it was made from) were long, low structures. (Figure 7) They were never more than one story high and were covered by flat, shed, or low-pitched gable roofs, typically clad in thatched brush or, after about 1830, clay tiles.<sup>6</sup> Comprising only a few rooms (if more than one), the interior spaces were arranged linearly and connected by long porches, called *portales* or *corredores*, that ran the length of the structure, providing a shaded passage with exterior access to each room. A loft or attic space often existed under the roof and was used as a sleeping area for the children of the household. It was accessed from the exterior of the house by a simple ladder.<sup>7</sup> Rooms were multi-purpose; used for sleeping, living, work, and other functions. Only the largest houses, owned by the wealthiest Mexicans had rooms dedicated specifically to use as parlors, chapels, or kitchens.

Most kitchens were located out of doors in small *jacales*, or open sided structures of wood and brush, next to the house. The danger of fire was not extreme in adobe structures, however it was preferred that the smells, heat and smoke associated with cooking were kept out of the living quarters. If needed, the interior of the building would be heated by an open brazier set on the floor of the main room. Floors consisted of packed dirt that was watered to create a hard surface and keep down dust. Windows had no glass, but were open and set with vertical wood

or iron bars. They might also be closed off by rawhide hung in the openings or stretched across frames that were then set into the openings. Doors were treated in much the same way.<sup>8</sup> On the whole, the Mexican household had a strong connection with the out-of-doors. Exterior space, in the form of patios, courtyards, and *portales*, was used as frequently as interior space and was seen as a valuable social arena for interaction with the rest of the household and the wider community.<sup>9</sup>



FIGURE 7: Vaqueros quarters; example of a traditional Mexican adobe. Source: Hannaford, Donald R. and Revel Edwards. *Spanish Colonial or Adobe Architecture of California, 1800 – 1850*. (Stamford, CT: Architectural Book Publishing Company, Inc., 1931, 1990), 57.

In *Two Years Before the Mast*, Richard Henry Dana, a merchant seaman from New England, gave an Anglo account of Monterey during his travels along the California coast in 1835. He described it as

the pleasantest and most civilized looking place in California... The houses here, as everywhere else in

California, are of one story, built of *adobes*... the floors are generally of earth, the windows grated and without glass; and the doors which are seldom shut, open directly into the common room, there being no entries... in Monterey nearly all the houses are whitewashed on the outside. The better houses, too, have red tiles upon the roofs. The common ones have two or three rooms which open into each other... They have no chimneys or fireplaces in the houses...and all their cooking is done in a small kitchen, separated from the house.<sup>10</sup>

Dana's account depicted Monterey at a time when the Monterey Colonial style of architecture was just emerging. The Custom House, which had existed for some time, but was rebuilt in 1842, would have greeted Dana with an evolutionary architectural presence that was unique in California. In his account, the seaman was likely describing the more traditional Mexican adobes that dominated the streetscapes, however, it is interesting to think that he may have been witness to a construction project on the town's main thoroughfare that would eventually become the Larkin house, the first truly Monterey Colonial style structure in all of California.

The Larkin house was the brainchild of Thomas O. Larkin, who would come to inhabit it, run a store out of it, and use it as government headquarters. Among his many other roles described in the previous chapter, Larkin was a builder. He was not a builder by trade, but by entrepreneurship and it is this fact that is integral to the topic of this study. Larkin is known as the father of the Monterey Colonial style and

the evolution of the style is integrally linked with various events in Larkin's life.

Before his arrival in California in 1832, Larkin spent his early life on the East Coast. Having grown up in both Charleston and Lynn, Massachusetts, in close proximity to Boston, he was no doubt familiar with the New England Colonial styles of the area. If not well versed in their more technical aspects, he was at least familiar with their aesthetics: formal symmetrical facades, classical details, red brick, clapboards, hipped roofs, and so on. (Figure 8)



FIGURE 8: Logan House, Pennsylvania; example of a typical New England Colonial house. Source: McAlester, Virginia and Lee. *A Field Guide to American Houses*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 149.

In October 1821, Larkin left New England for the South. Already involved with mercantilism, he went to Wilmington, North

Carolina to establish himself as a businessman and met with variable success. While in the region, he traveled to Charleston, South Carolina as well. This city, so well known for its architecture, may have had a subliminal impact on Larkin's later building pursuits in the West.

Larkin kept a travel diary during his five-year stay in the South. Entitled "My Itinerary: U.S. America," it recorded Larkin's observations on southern economics and culture.<sup>11</sup> It is feasible to think that a certain amount of architectural observation may have also been entered in the diary. At least some attention to architecture is demonstrated in a comment about southern churches. Larkin noted that "they are unlike



FIGURE 9: Two-story piazza on the John Rutledge House, Charleston, South Carolina. Source: Club Photo, Albums, 2004, available from [members2.clubphoto.com](http://members2.clubphoto.com); accessed 11 August 2004.

any I have seen before. They look more like those old churches I have read of in the old country, dark and gigantic, gloomy to the extreme [sic]...”<sup>12</sup> Just as he noticed such characteristics in high architecture, Larkin could not have failed to notice the domestic architecture that surrounded him on a daily basis. The romantic two story piazzas, railed with iron balustrades, so popular in the antebellum South, were possibly the inspiration for the two story verandas that came to grace the façades of Larkin’s Monterey Colonial style buildings. (Figure 9)

The Monterey Colonial style verandas may have harkened back to the Spanish, as well. The 1573 Laws of the Indies was a decree that dictated town planning in Spanish colonies. It required that all buildings around a town’s square and on main streets be constructed with arcades along their facades to provide public sheltering places and enforce cohesiveness of community. Many times these arcades took multi-storied forms and the upper balconies were sometimes even cantilevered as is seen in the Monterey Colonial style. It is also noted that in the lumber-rich state of Michoacán, Mexico, and in the Spanish dominated Caribbean, houses with two-story verandas were common.<sup>13</sup> It may be that Larkin encountered such forms as he passed through Spanish-dominated areas on his journey to California, and, combined with his memory of Southern verandas and the Californio familiarity with

elaborate Spanish styles, the Monterey Colonial two-story veranda was derived.

Back in Wilmington, Larkin had been a property owner; a venture that was the beginning of what would later become a career in real estate investment and developing. In 1825, he purchased a small plantation that included a house, outbuildings, and stables on 280 acres of land.<sup>14</sup> No sources state that Larkin, himself, built the house or outbuildings; however, his concept of the Southern plantation may have later engendered a striking familiarity when encountering the Mexican ranchos in California. The grand plantation manor acting as the centerpiece of a self-sufficient property was an element that came to be reflected in the formality of the Larkin House. Though based in a relatively urban setting, its dominance of a town lot<sup>15</sup> with gardens and outbuildings made it the focus of Larkin's property, as well as the domestic centerpiece of Monterey itself.

After going bankrupt in North Carolina, Larkin traveled to Monterey with the intent to act as a clerk for his half-brother, John Cooper. Cooper was a sea captain who operated overseas trading ventures out of the port of Monterey and though his business was strong, his bookkeeping was in need of help. Ironically, Larkin took the job only out of serious need. He did not particularly want to journey to Mexican California, stating that he "had rather be under Uncle Sam than

in Mexico.”<sup>16</sup> Having met his future wife on the journey west, however, and seizing the opportunity for entrepreneurship in California, Larkin advanced from being a simple clerk, to being Monterey’s leading businessman and came to have a great affection for California.

On first arrival in Monterey, there were no inns or hotels to house travelers such as Larkin. Both he and Rachel Hobson Holmes, his future wife, were hospitably invited to stay with the Coopers in their traditional California home. Now better known as the Cooper-Molera complex, an icon of the Monterey Colonial style, the property at the time boasted a modest but very traditional one-story adobe house. Larkin either stayed in this building or in part of the shop and office building located next door.<sup>17</sup> In either case, this extended stay with the Coopers and a short rental of the Hartnell House (also a traditional Mexican adobe), gave Larkin great familiarity with the forms of native California architecture. This, combined with his earlier experiences in the South, would culminate in the styling of Larkin’s personal residence and influence the fashion of building in Monterey forever afterward.

### Materials and Construction

Just as the Monterey Colonial style is a *mélange* of Hispanic and Anglo stylistic traditions, so the materials used in the construction

of these buildings reflects the building practices of both cultures.

California building materials, and subsequent architectural style, were derived out of resourcefulness. Before the first sawmill was built near Santa Cruz in 1844, timbers were difficult to obtain and work. The earth itself proved more plentiful and efficient to make buildings from and so the use of adobe became prevalent and retained its popularity even when other materials became more abundant. The lack of skilled labor and tools lent to a very practical approach to building. Priests, Indians, and early settlers did not necessarily have the skills or knowledge to attempt complex construction, and so the California mission style possessed very frank forms that were born out of frugality and amateurishness, yet are valued as a regional attribute.<sup>18</sup>

The mud bricks that were used in the construction of the missions, Monterey Colonial style buildings, and almost any adobe structure to this day were made of local soil. It is a common misconception that a special type of adobe soil was used to form these bricks. Though it is true that the physical make up of the soil affected the quality of the building units, any soil with three of four integral ingredients would suffice for forming bricks. These ingredients included coarse aggregate for strength, fine aggregate to fill between the coarse aggregate, silt to act as a cement or binding agent, and clay as the plastic medium. Too much clay would cause adobe bricks to crack as they

dried, however, it was difficult to find a soil that is entirely inadequate for making adobe.<sup>19</sup>

Adobe bricks were traditionally a combination of soil, water and an organic ingredient, like straw or grass, that acted to bind the mud together. This also helped the bricks to shrink more uniformly as they dried. The combination was mixed by hand (or foot) and tamped into rectangular wood molds. The bricks were not dried in the molds, but "turned out" and held their shape due to their consistency. They were never kiln dried, but left to bake in the sun for several days before being turned on end and air-cured for up to four weeks.<sup>20</sup>

The mortar used to build adobe walls was the same type of mud used to make the bricks. It was often impregnated with small shards of tile or pottery to give it strength.<sup>21</sup> Mortar of this type was advantageous as it limited the number of different materials needed in a single construction project. It also meant that the bricks and the mortar joints, which were often up to 1" wide, had the same properties and the same responses to heat and moisture, thus making them less susceptible to spalling or mortar deterioration in the same way that other brick and mortar combinations are.<sup>22</sup>

Due to the dimensions of the bricks, adobe walls tended to be very thick and were traditionally no higher than two stories. Adobe buildings were commonly long and low. Because the brick walls were

load bearing, they had to be squat and stable to support the rest of the building and the roof structure. In the Monterey Colonial style, however, adobe walls were more than a story high. This was made possible by the wood framing integrated into the structure and the fact that the adobe walls tapered as they got higher. (Figure 10) A wall with a base three feet thick might taper to a thickness of only two feet at its top. This ensured a solid foundation for the upper story, a lighter load on the lower wall, and conveniently increased the amount of usable space on the second floor.<sup>23</sup> Along the top course of an adobe wall, it was common to lay long, large diameter logs or wood beams, called bond beams that tied the wall together at the top and added stability to the structure. In Monterey Colonial style buildings, this function was served by redwood timber framing. It assisted with seismic stability and acted as a plate on which the roof structure rested so that roof members did not place too much stress on any one point in the adobe wall.<sup>24</sup>

Flooring in the most primitive of adobe buildings simply consisted of packed dirt that was often watered to increase the hardness of the surface. (There are also accounts of experimentation with mixtures of ox blood, various oils, and other substances that were applied to the floors in an attempt to give them a hard and finished appearance.)<sup>25</sup> More sophisticated interiors, however, often included floors of tile, adobe brick, fired brick, or flagstones, called *lajas*. These

would have been laid directly on the earth floor, with no subflooring.<sup>26</sup>

Wood floors did not become popular until Anglo influence arrived in California and most Monterey Colonial style structures used it as a common flooring.



FIGURE 10: Adobe wall in the Monterey Custom House showing width and tapering from base to top. Photo by author.

The nature of the wall materials in adobe buildings demanded that some barrier between earth and adobe brick be present, so that rising moisture from the ground would not encourage the adobe to dissolve back into its original form. This rough foundation often came in the form of footings made of bricks, fieldstones, or cavity walls infilled with rubble stone, tile fragments, or seashells.<sup>27</sup> The “chalk rock”

prevalent around Monterey was used extensively for this application.

(Figure 11) However, with most materials, the structure of the foundation was quite loose and some attribute the seismic weakness of adobe structures not to the bricks themselves, but to the foundation on which they sat.<sup>28</sup>



FIGURE 11: Detail of chalk rock foundation under adobe wall. Photo by author.

One of the final treatments given to an adobe building was the wall coating. (Figure 12) Aside from giving the building a pleasing visual appearance, it was important to the integrity of the walls, as it was the primary defense against moisture infiltration. Though ambient moisture did not seriously affect the erosion rate of adobe walls, wind driven rain

did. The coating applied to the walls acted as a barrier against these elements.

Traditionally, a simple mud or lime plaster was used to coat both the interior and exterior surfaces of adobe walls. This was applied in two coats, the first coat having some straw content to minimize cracking. It was usually applied in a thick layer and scored to receive the finish coat that would be applied on top of it. The second coat would have been much finer and applied in a thin layer.<sup>29</sup> Mud plaster was a



FIGURE 12: Detail of plaster coating applied over adobe wall. Photo by author.

more forgiving material and bonded well with adobe walls because it was made of similar materials. Lime plaster was harder and more durable, but cracked and flaked away from the walls more easily. Both were often

whitewashed to seal the walls against moisture. This treatment had to be renewed yearly to maintain the wall.<sup>30</sup>

While adobe already dominated California's built environment, wood became a major factor in construction during the 1830s and 40s. The birth of the Monterey Colonial style resulted from the Larkins' need for a private dwelling, but it was supported by Larkin's business dealings in lumber. A sawmill in Long Creek, North Carolina had been Larkin's first experience with this industry. It had also been a direct cause of his bankruptcy and his subsequent move to California.<sup>31</sup> With new promise in colonial Mexico, however, Larkin soon pursued the lumber business once again.

It is noted that before Larkin's arrival, native and Hispanic architecture had relied very little on timber, let alone sawn lumber. They needed wood only for lintel pieces above doors and windows, and a few rough beams to support roofs and colonnades. The majority of construction relied on adobe bricks, so Californios had no need of lumber and had never taken advantage of the vast resources that the West offered.<sup>32</sup>

With a taste for business, Larkin contracted fellow foreigners to cut timber in the Santa Cruz mountains. The timber was transported to the beach at Santa Cruz where Larkin's sawmill was located and from there cut lumber was produced and shipped all along the California

coast and to Hawaii. A branch store, connected to Larkin's main store in Monterey, was established in Santa Cruz to handle the busy lumber trade that grew from Larkin's ventures. He was also able to sell wood shingles, which were a byproduct of the milling and an altogether new material in California building.<sup>33</sup>

Larkin's great prosperity in the lumber trade was diminished by rising competition in the mid-1840s, however, the great availability of the product made the Monterey Colonial style of architecture ever more prolific and engendered a critical change in construction. With massive redwood timbers providing heavy structural frames and long-spanning rafters, the construction of two story adobe structures was made possible. The large square posts and beams were put together in much the same manner used in traditional timber framing on the East Coast. Horizontal and vertical members were joined with pegs, spikes and various methods of joinery to create a sturdy skeleton. This solid frame supported the second floor and roof, and held the adobe wall elements upright from within. The adobe walls created an exterior envelope around this internal frame, and were tied to it by the horizontal members that pierced the walls, holding wood frame and adobe walls together. This framework is easily visible on the interior of some Monterey Colonial style structures, and is particularly apparent in the Custom House and the Fremont Adobe. (Figures 13 and 14)



FIGURES 13 & 14: Timber framework within adobe structures; Custom House (right), Fremont Headquarters (left). Photo by author.

Lumber was also used in roofs, which were made of a lighter framework that sat atop the heavy timber frame and adobe walls. Wide, projecting eaves were created by extending rafters and the roof was fitted with thin strips of skip sheathing. Wood shingles took the place of clay tiles and reduced the weight of roofs, allowing for greater complexity of roof plans and the ability to span larger interior spaces.<sup>34</sup>

Complex double verandas were made possible by the introduction of wood into construction as well. Their structure relied heavily on both vertical supporting posts and the strength of second floor joists, which projected through the adobe walls and sometimes cantilevered out approximately five to six feet to support decking for the upstairs veranda. (Figure 15)



FIGURE 15: Cantilevered veranda structure. Photo by author.

Interior walls of Monterey Colonial style structures were primarily made of adobe, though in some instances partition walls made of vertical planks exist. They are recognizable by their marked thinness in comparison with the other walls of the house and may indicate later modifications to the interior plan, since adobe walls were not easily removed or inserted and plank walls could fulfill that need efficiently. In the Larkin house, the wall dividing the parlor, or *sala*, from the stair hall is representative of this convention.

Despite the proliferation of redwood timber, adobe brick was still considered the bulk of the building material used in a Monterey Colonial style structure; literally, because it resulted in massive forms, and because it made up nearly the entire outer envelope of the structure. As a native material, it was most economical and acceptable to use. For

Mexican citizens still clinging to tradition, it was a source of aesthetic familiarity in their housing and a material they were skilled in working with. It was also simply more compatible with the climate of California than any other material would have been. Its thermal properties kept buildings cool in the summer and warm in the winter, it had proven solid in an earthquake prone region, and it required little hired labor or expense of materials and equipment to produce.

Larkin, himself, did not initially favor adobe, because of its incompatibility with wet weather.<sup>35</sup> In an 1843 letter to Andrew Johnstone, he related that the “houses are much disfigured by having the south ends lumbered up with boards or brush to keep off the rain from the south. The rains are very heavy from November to March.” He continued, however, by describing the existing architecture of Monterey in a favorable tone:

The roofs are made of tiles something like a half tumbler length ways (without a bottom), or shingles. The walls of the houses are some 22” thick. Others are 33”, made of (Adobies) [*sic*] sun dried bricks, 22” long, 11” wide and 4” thick. When well made and under a good roof will last any time. I have seen them taken from a house 60 years to build another house with.... The houses when plastered and white washed make a very good appearance.<sup>36</sup>

Despite his dislike of the Mexicans’ jury-rigged rain protection, Larkin acknowledged the handsome appearance of adobe buildings and the innate strength of the bricks when they were protected from water.

For this reason, he devised a style in which the American affection for wood construction and California's wealth of coastal pine, fir, and redwood could be combined with native earth-building techniques to overcome the limitations of each and enhance the overall strength and beauty of local architecture.

### Forms: Exterior and Interior

Monterey Colonial style buildings “never pretended to be anything but what they were; there seems to be no effort to complicate their construction, but merely a simple handing-on from generation to generation, from both the New England and Spanish settlers, of well worn and tried traditions worked with the materials of the locality.”<sup>37</sup> Because of this, the forms of the style are quite pure and easy to recognize. Due in part to the materials from which they were constructed the forms of the Monterey Colonial style present an uncomplicated yet revolutionary shape.

In a land of sunshine, such as California, architecture was adapted to the wealth of warmth and light available. As a carry-over from building conventions in similar climates like Spain and Mexico, traditional Mexican adobes tended to be oriented lengthwise east to west. This ensured that light was received equally in every room along the

linear plan of the building throughout the day. In the winter months, this also meant that warmth would be absorbed by all rooms of the house as the sun traversed the sky in a more southerly arc. Patios and gardens were typically located to the south of the building and bordered by south-facing colonnades to catch optimal sunlight and warmth.<sup>38</sup>

As American design came to influence town planning and construction however, the Monterey Colonial style began to move away from these conventions. In colonial Monterey, economic and cultural focus was directed unwaveringly at the water. The bay, lying north of the town, influenced a prominent north to south orientation for streets and structures. The fact that Monterey Colonial style houses tended away from the linear designs of traditional adobes and were two stories high made environmental issues of light and warmth less prominent aspects in the directional orientation of the buildings. With the new forms of the Monterey Colonial style, some of the organic nature of California architecture was lost, but fashion was appreciated as its replacement.

Gardens and patios were still highly prized by both Mexicans and Americans alike; however, the Monterey Colonial style buildings did not tend to relate to their outdoor spaces as strongly as traditional Mexican adobes had. As with the Larkin House and Casa Amesti, gardens still tended to be placed to the south of the house, but were smaller and more private. They were sometimes surrounded by picket

fences, showing a strong tie to Anglo traditions. Other times they were enclosed by adobe walls that were topped by small “roofs” made of clay tile or wood shingle to help shed water from the top of the wall. This form called on Mexican traditions and visually tied the garden to the house by using the same materials.<sup>39</sup>

The Larkin House is lauded as the archetype of the Monterey Colonial style and can claim the distinction of achieving many “firsts” in California architecture. Its unique characteristic set the precedent for all other Monterey Colonial style buildings, which were essentially envious imitations. Though each succeeding building exhibits variations based primarily on the whims of the owner or builder, the typical Monterey Colonial building will possess a number of distinctive traits typical of the style.

The emblematic Monterey Colonial style house was two stories high and exhibited symmetry in its façade that is attributed to Georgian architecture of the East Coast. This was achieved through the presence of a centered entry door flanked by equal numbers of windows on each side. The front elevation, and perhaps one or more sides, was broken up by a two-story high double veranda, which spanned the width of the façade.

The double veranda took three basic forms, all equally represented throughout Monterey. (Figure 16) The first, and most basic,

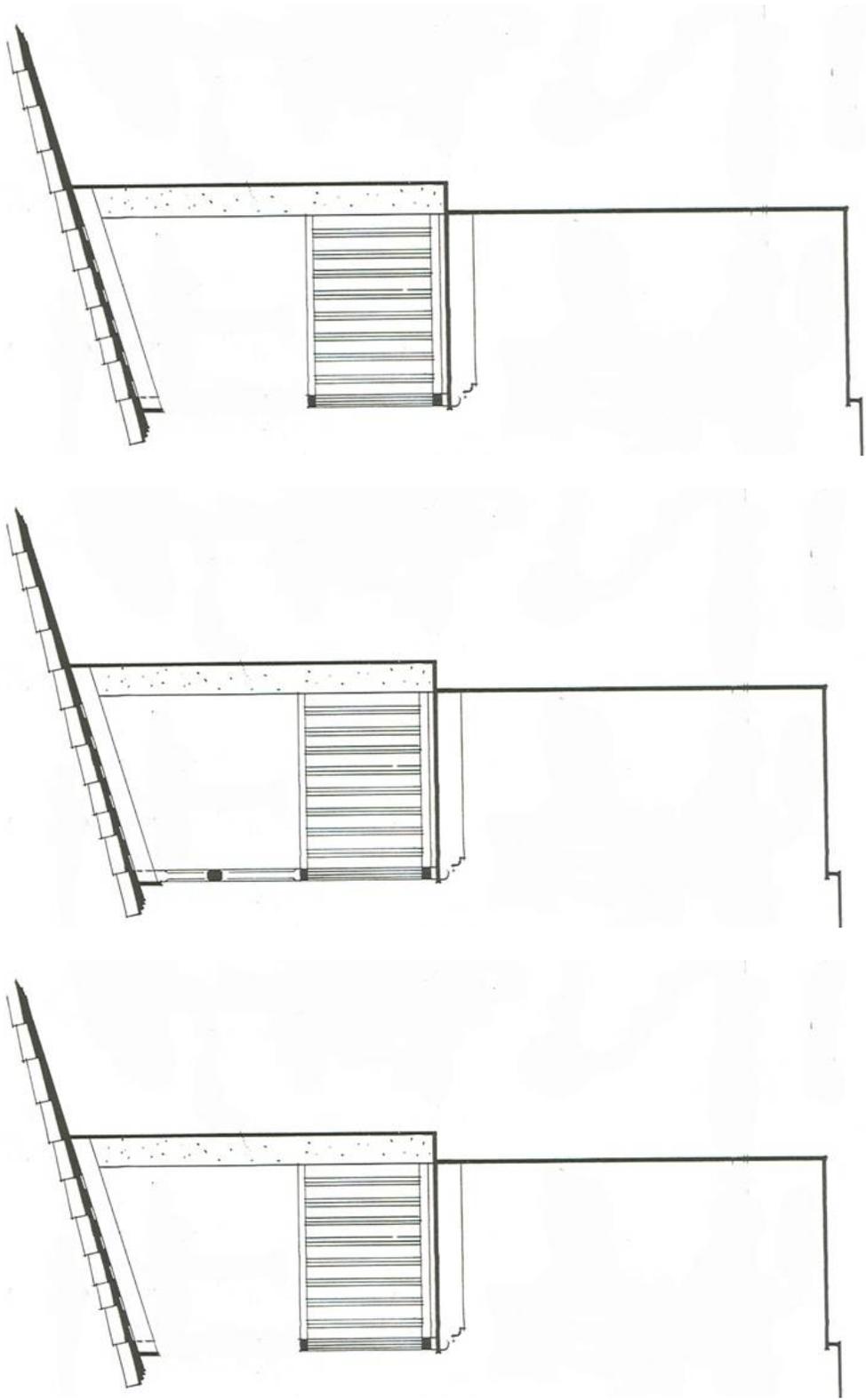


FIGURE 16: The three types of Monterey Colonial style verandas. From left to right: type 1, with supporting posts between both levels; type 2, with supporting posts only on the second story level; and type 3, with no supporting posts. Source: Hannaford, Donald R. and Revel Edwards. *Spanish Colonial or Adobe Architecture of California, 1800 - 1850*. (Stamford, CT: Architectural Book Publishing Company, Inc., 1931, 1990), 88.

consisted of a lower story veranda overhung by an upper story balcony, which in turn was overhung by the wide projecting eaves of the roof. Between each of these levels were vertical posts, giving the double veranda thorough support from the ground to the roofline. This type of veranda is represented in the Larkin House.

A more advanced form of the double veranda can be observed on Casa Amesti. This probably took more technological dexterity as it required the cantilevering of the second story balcony, which relied heavily on the massive beams of the second floor to hold its weight without posts to support it from below. There were, however, posts between the decking and overhanging roof.

The third type of double veranda, lacked supporting posts altogether. It is noted that this was often a result of later non-historic retrofitting, however, original verandas of the type did exist in colonial Monterey. The type, with both a cantilevered balcony and roof, is exemplified on Casa Soberanes. Regardless of the type of double veranda, almost all were enclosed at each end by vertical boards or latticework, which served to provide shelter from the wind and some amount of privacy.<sup>40</sup> (Figure 17)

Roofs on Monterey Colonial structures had hipped configurations for the most part, though some had side-facing gable roofs. Due to the presence of second story verandas on one or more



FIGURE 17: Enclosed end on double veranda. Source: Hannaford, Donald R. and Revel Edwards. *Spanish Colonial or Adobe Architecture of California, 1800 – 1850*. (Stamford, CT: Architectural Book Publishing Company, Inc., 1931, 1990.), 8.

sides of the buildings, the eaves often took on a flared appearance as the roof pitch broke and became shallower to extend out over the veranda. There are also some unusual instances where the eaves bend downward at the corner, as seen on the Monterey Custom House. This seems to be an attempt to maintain the main slope of the roof over an area where no veranda is present and yet make it meet the shallower slope of the eaves over the veranda. (Figure 18)

The interior plan of the typical Monterey Colonial style house was a direct derivation of New England colonial forms, but was revolutionary when compared to that of traditional adobes in California. Modeled after the Anglo central hall, double pile plan, the interior layout



FIGURE 18: Bent eave on the Monterey Custom House. Photo by author.

of the Monterey Colonial style exhibited the same symmetry as the exterior. (Figure 19)

Entering through the front door, a central hall would provide the formal entry and reception area for the house. (Figure 20) This hall would typically be the location of the stairs to the second floor, particularly in later Monterey Colonial style houses or those with strong Anglo influence. Earlier or heavily Hispanic influenced houses had exterior stairs leading from the lower veranda to the upper veranda, providing exterior access to all upstairs rooms. This followed the convention of the exterior stair leading to the attic sleeping loft, as was typical in Mexican adobes. Often these exterior stairs were later moved

to the interior of the house following trends in fashion and convenience.<sup>41</sup>

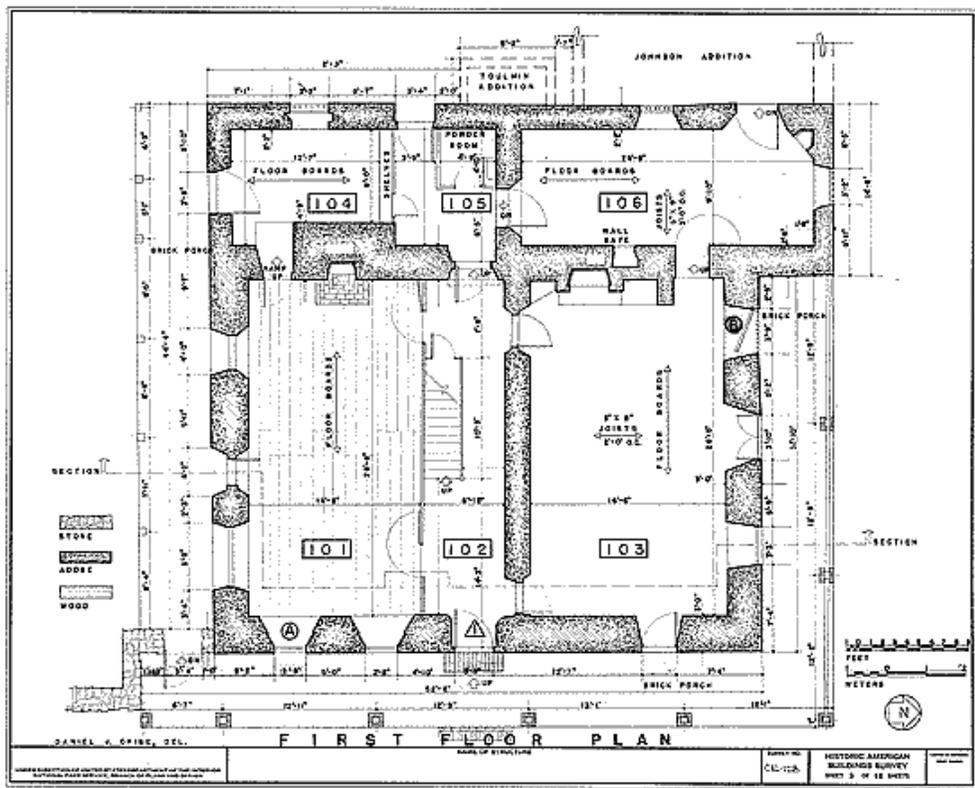


FIGURE 19: Floor plan of the Larkin House; a typical central hall plan in the Monterey Colonial style. Source: *HABS inventory*, Library of Congress, Prints and Photograph Division, Washington, D.C., May 1962.



FIGURE 20: Formal entry and central stair hall of Casa Amesti. Source: *HABS inventory*, Library of Congress, Prints and Photograph Division, Washington, D.C., 1962.

On the first floor, the central or stair hall was usually flanked by a parlor or *sala* and a dining room. The *sala* was an interesting convention, as it was a melding point of Anglo and Hispanic culture. It was essentially a ballroom, or a large space used for dancing and socializing. The Mexican love of dancing and fiestas (combined with the Anglo custom of balls and soirées) inspired an architectural response in the form of interior space dedicated to these activities. The *sala* was typically a large room, perhaps two rooms deep, furnished in a very formal way, with a fireplace at one end. The floors were made of wood to provide a prime dance floor.<sup>42</sup>

The kitchen in the Monterey Colonial style house was incorporated into the main building, rather than being housed in a separate structure or out of doors. The New England Colonial convention of wood lean-tos added to the rear of houses was a natural accommodation for such domestic functions. As seen on the Whaling Station and Stokes Adobe, board and batten portions enlarge the main block of the adobe building and contain utilitarian spaces.<sup>43</sup> (Figure 21)

The second floor was primarily comprised of private spaces such as bedrooms, though it is of interest to note that the Cooper-Molera Adobe possesses a *sala* and music room on the second floor. Due to the tapering of the adobe walls, which got thinner the higher they rose, the second floor was often larger in area by up to a foot around the edge of

each room. Bedrooms tended to open off of a small landing or hall at the top of the stairs and intercommunicated with one another.

All spaces within the Monterey Colonial style structure were described as comfortably sized with “satisfying” proportions.<sup>44</sup>

Compared



FIGURE 21: Wood frame lean-to on the rear elevation of the Whaling Station. Source: Photo by author.

to today’s standards they are just that; intimate, yet surprisingly spacious considering the trends of the era and the building materials used.

### Exterior Detailing and Interior Design

The elements that worked to refine the bold forms of the Monterey Colonial style were, like timber framing, verandas, and central

hall plans, Anglo influences applied to Hispanic underpinnings. It was in the architectural details, furnishings, and accoutrements that fashion truly came to light. Monterey Colonial style structures were, on a finer scale, set apart from traditional Mexican structures by the builder's attention to carefully chosen ornament.

Other forms of western architecture that followed relied heavily on mass production and railroad transport to bring affordable fashion to the frontier. The architectural details of the Monterey Colonial style, however, were crafted in Monterey, in a relatively primitive locale far from any center of Anglo industry or fashion. Ships that came into Monterey Bay did not bring imported architectural ornaments, but craftsmen in the form of their own ship's carpenters and shipwrights. While in port, these craftsmen were frequently hired to exercise their skills in more refined practices than honing spars or repairing hulls. It is by their hands that many fireplace mantles, window surrounds, and other millwork were created and installed in Monterey Colonial style buildings. Their work was influenced by what they were familiar with in their American home ports and the schematics were based on memories of Anglo forms and aesthetics. Perhaps it was this effort to create unique details and the desire for American familiarity that enforced the pioneering spirit behind the Monterey Colonial style. Details and

furnishing made simple buildings into homes and instilled culture in the architecture of Monterey.

The shipwrights' rougher work included such elements as exterior roof and wall cladding. Where as adobe and clay tile had dominated architecture up until the 1830s, wood shingles (sometimes in the form of hand-riven shakes) and clapboards became popular with the Monterey Colonial style. As well as appealing to New England tastes, wood shingle roofs had advantages over tile roofs in that they reduced the weight placed on the building structure and were more cost effective. In fact, instances of homeowners selling the tiles from their roofs, or tiles actually being stolen off roofs and put up for sale, are common. Because of this, tile roofs were often changed out for shingle roofs. Roofs sometimes incorporated both materials, with tile cladding the portions of roof over the main structure and wood shingles cladding the portions over the verandas. This reduced weight on the more flimsy parts of the structure and contributed to a more affordable roof.<sup>45</sup>

The plaster of exterior walls was occasionally scored to give the building the look of ashlar masonry construction. This practice may have appealed strongly to the American convention of artifice in design and related to the Greek Revival practice of scoring exterior walls. It may have also related to similar practices derived from Renaissance Spain,

however. In this case, and many others, the two cultures had coincidentally similar traditions.<sup>46</sup>

Wood siding, typically in the form of V-notch lap siding, was sometimes used on Monterey Colonial style structures. A good example, featuring drop channel siding, can be seen on the Fremont Adobe. The use of wood siding was fairly rare, however. It was a solution to rain erosion on adobe walls in places where verandas did not provide protective cover. The siding was applied directly over the adobe walls and perhaps held in place by corner boards attached to the underlying wood framing. (Figure 22)



FIGURE 22: Corner detail of Fremont Adobe, showing clapboard siding. Photo by author.

The proliferation of relatively large windows in an adobe structure was made possible by the wood frame of the structure. Because of this, windows were able to follow Eastern precedents and, if

compared to the average window in a 19<sup>th</sup> century New England house, would likely be indistinguishable. They were almost always double hung windows in wood sashes with multiple panes of glass in each sash, usually in a six-over-six configuration, but also often in twelve-over-twelve or 24-over-24 arrangements.<sup>47</sup> Glass itself was a new advent brought to California by Americans and they used it prolifically in their Monterey Colonial style houses. The dimensions of each pane of glass measured 8"x10" on average and they were separated by delicate muntins that were typically 7/16" wide and never wider than a half inch.<sup>48</sup> The thin windows set in thick adobe walls naturally created a deep well on the interior; however, windows were always installed flush with the exterior of the wall and were sometimes surrounded by decorative trim that included hoods, skirts, and fluted surrounds. Exterior shutters were common and were made of wood with a louvered or paneled design. They were secured by iron shutter dogs anchored in the adobe walls. (Figure 23)

Exterior doors often came in pairs, each door being quite narrow and together accommodating the approximate width of an average door. This convention was seen in Mexican architecture as well, and may have been a carryover. The doors were made of wood and paneled, sometimes having panes of glass in the upper portions. They were secured from within by a variety of locks, bolts, and a wooden bar

that lowered across the face of the doors to fit into iron brackets on each jamb.<sup>49</sup> The doors often had fanlights or glass transoms over them, showing a continuation of New England Colonial tradition. Sidelights were unheard, of however.<sup>50</sup>

Other exterior detailing was minimal, but it is pertinent to note a few details that show a strong classical influence in the Monterey Colonial style. The posts that supported verandas often became the



FIGURE 23: Window on the Cooper-Molera Adobe, showing exterior panel shutters. Photo by author.

subjects of such ornamentation and it is common to see square posts with chamfered edges, a convention in both American and Hispanic design. The porch posts lacked traditional Mexican *zapatas*, or carved wooden brackets at their tops, as was seen in traditional adobes, but here Mexican design made a concession to American design and some

posts drew on the neoclassical orders of Anglo influence and had small moldings around their tops representative of capitals. Casa Amesti exhibits such traits as well as additional flourishes in the delicate dentil work under the eaves over the veranda. (Figure 24) Though some sources note an “absence of needless ornament,”<sup>51</sup> it may be more appropriate to think of it as minimal ornament discerningly selected to have the greatest visual effect. It is obvious that the Monterey Colonial style appealed to a broad range of builders and owners, some of whom could afford extra embellishment for their homes. This trait is displayed even more strongly on the interiors of these buildings.



FIGURE 24: Veranda detail showing dentils under eaves, Casa Amesti. Photo by author.

Earth toned adobe walls and tile or rough shake roofs may have caused the Monterey Colonial style to blend pleasingly with the built

environment and Monterey streetscape; however, once past the threshold, the influence of American fashion took dominance. A physical transition occurred from the outside in. One gradually left colonial Mexico upon entering a Monterey Colonial style building and arrived in an American setting. On their interiors, Monterey Colonial style houses were far removed from Mexican adobes. If not for the notable mass of the walls, the rooms might be indistinguishable from those in a modest brick New England Colonial house. (Figure 25)



FIGURE 25: Example of Monterey Colonial interior; sala of Casa Soberanes. Source: *HABS inventory*, Library of Congress, Prints and Photograph Division, Washington, D.C., 1962.

The interior walls themselves did create some character defining features within a Monterey Colonial structure. Because of their thickness, window and door openings were quite deep, having to pierce up to three feet of adobe brick. Because windows and doors were

mounted flush with the exterior surface of the wall, as described earlier, this meant that the entirety of the deep bay was open to the interior. In the case of windows, this created many opportunities for their use as window seats or display areas. The sides of the wells were usually splayed approximately ten inches on all sides, except the sill, and were often paneled with wood to create a finished appearance. Just as windows had exterior shutters, they often had interior shutters as well. These were usually paneled, rather than louvered, and were mounted within the window well so that in some ingenious circumstances they doubled as decorative paneling for the sides of the window wells when open.<sup>52</sup> (Figure 26)



FIGURE 26: Window interior, showing paneling and shutters. Source: *HABS inventory*, Library of Congress, Prints and Photograph Division, Washington, D.C., 1962.

It was not necessary for interior doors to be as wide or sturdy

as exterior doors. They varied in design, but typically consisted of wood panel doors, which were considered far more decorative and fashionable than plank doors like those that would have been used in traditional adobes. The doors in Monterey Colonial style buildings also varied in size, with common dimensions ranging between 5 feet, 9 inches high and 6 feet, but never higher. Simple surface hinges in wrought or cast iron were used on interior doors.

As mentioned earlier, the concept of wood floors arrived with the Americans and was quickly put to use in Monterey Colonial style buildings. Not only did it present a more formal interior appearance, it cut down on dust in the house and provided the perfect surface for dancing in the *sala*. In fact, the floor in the *sala* was usually raised up to 6" above the rest of the floors in the house.<sup>53</sup> This may have been a subtle comment on the importance of the room that was the focus of public activity in the house. Even houses without wood floors would often have a raised floor level in the *sala*, and it and the other floors in the house would be covered in clay tiles. This was a convention of earlier and more frugal Monterey Colonial style structures.

The floors of the second story were made of wood as well, which was critical due to the structural system that supported it. Made of wide, hand-hewn, pine planks, the floor rested on hewn joists that tied into the wood structural framing. The underside of these floors were

typically left exposed and, thus, acted as the ceiling surface for the first story rooms.<sup>54</sup> The ceilings of the second story consisted of a similar system, though the wide boards were affixed to the underside of the roof beams, since no floor decking was required above. They often had beaded joints for a more finished appearance. Plaster ceilings were almost unheard of, due to the difficulty in obtaining lath.<sup>55</sup>

Interior walls were often plastered and whitewashed in much the same fashion as the exterior walls, leaving the natural texture and appearance of the adobe exposed. In rooms that were more formal and in wealthier residences, however, walls might be papered.<sup>56</sup> In this case, it is likely that fashionable prints were purchased from manufacturers on the East Coast and brought to California by merchant ship.

Color, while not dominant in the Monterey Colonial style, was definitely considered as an element of design and was based on fashion more than tradition. The use of muted tones fit nicely with the subtlety and simplicity of the architectural type and blended with the earthy surroundings of California. Exteriors were very neutral, with walls that were simply whitewashed. Rough woodwork and major elements like verandas were painted white or cream, soft green, warm grey or pale pink. Trim would be slightly bolder in colors like grey, brown, or various shades of green. It was often simply painted to match the walls. Interior colors reflected those of the exterior almost directly. It was common to

see walls painted simple tones of white (if not papered), while ceilings were typically white, light olive green, warm grey, or soft blue. Woodwork and interior trim would be painted to contrast and was white, cream, or a pale grey green. The only exception was the fireplace mantel, which could have similar colors to the woodwork, but was most often painted matte black.<sup>57</sup> This had the convenient purpose of hiding soot that rose from the firebox.



FIGURE 27: Fireplace, showing carved woodwork. Source: *HABS inventory*, Library of Congress, Prints and Photograph Division, Washington, D.C., 1962.

Mantles and interior woodwork best demonstrate the skillful craftsmanship of the ship's carpenters that were hired to make them. Fireplaces in Monterey Colonial style structures were rudimentary, since they were built into staunch adobe walls. They often had small square fireboxes and small raised hearths of adobe. Despite this, they were

surrounded by very ornate wood mantelpieces. (Figure 27) These were often graced with turned spindle ornaments, complex moldings, carved floral motifs, and brackets, all hand made of wood, sometimes integrated with plaster. Other interior trim consisted of baseboards and ceiling moldings. In Casa Amesti, the ceiling in the *sala* is adorned with a molding of classical dentils that encircle the room, while other buildings boast ornate cornices. (Figure 28) These sorts of fine trim continue around window and door openings, and can sometimes even be found as chair rails.



FIGURE 28: Casa Amesti sala, showing classical dentil molding and trim. Source: *HABS inventory*, Library of Congress, Prints and Photograph Division, Washington, D.C., 1962.

Architecture of the Monterey Colonial style was set in a Mexican world. It developed in a town that had been and continued to be almost

entirely Hispanic. Spanish was spoken on the streets, the town was run by Mexican officials, the citizens were almost entirely Mexican and Catholic; living in traditional adobes and worshipping at the old Spanish mission. Yet, American merchants and their families managed to make a place for themselves in this foreign culture through architecture.

Alternatively, the Mexicans found great economic, political, and social prosperity in their dealings with the Americans and this enabled them to build more elaborately and fashionably as well. With each culture demonstrating its architectural heritage and sharing that of others, a melting pot of style resulted. Every Monterey Colonial style house was different and design relied entirely on the owner, however, all demonstrated a continuance of American and Mexican traditions in a single building type.

It could be said that the Monterey Colonial style was the result of American design forced onto traditional Mexican forms and that this foretold the coming of American dominance and political control in California. It is more important to think of the Monterey Colonial style strictly in its unique time and place, however. Its heyday was short-lived, but while it prospered, it gained significance for being a cooperation of cultures, not dominance of one over another. Mexican and American influences came together to create a single cultural icon that represents an important historic period in Monterey. The Monterey

Colonial style of architecture was the result of unified efforts from both Mexicans and Americans in a way that politics and economics never were. Created not by Americans or Mexicans, but by a mixed society of Californians, the Monterey Colonial style was, poignantly, a style for California alone.

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Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Sanchez, Nellie Van de Grift. *Spanish Arcadia*. (Los Angeles: Powell Publishing Company, 1929), 87.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 338.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Kirker, Harold. *California's Architectural Frontier: Style and tradition in the nineteenth century*. (Salt Lake City, UT: Gibbs M. Smith, Inc., 1986), 10.

<sup>6</sup> Brak, Mark L. *Domestic Architecture in Hispanic California, The Monterey Style Reconsidered*. Edited by Thomas Carter and Bernard L. Herman. Vol.4, *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture*. (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1991), 164.

<sup>7</sup> From tour of Casa Soberanes given by California State Parks docent. 3/26/04.

<sup>8</sup> Kirker, 11-13.

<sup>9</sup> Brak, 165.

<sup>10</sup> Dana, Richard Henry. *Two Year Before the Mast*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1911), 99-100.

<sup>11</sup> Hague, Harlan and David J. Langum. *Thomas O. Larkin: A Life of Patriotism and Profit in Old California*. (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), 25-27.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>13</sup> Brak, 166, 169.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 24.

<sup>15</sup> According to a petition dated January 29, 1835, this lot was thirty-four *varas* wide and fifty *varas* deep. It cost Larkin \$16 in fees to procure this lot from the town council. A *vara* measures slightly less than a yard. (Hague, 47.)

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>18</sup> Richman, 90.

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<sup>19</sup> McHenry, Paul Graham. *Adobe and Rammed Earth Buildings: design and construction*. (New York : John Wiley & Sons, c1984), 47.

<sup>20</sup> National Parks Service. *Preservation Brief #5: Preservation of Historic Adobe Buildings*. Washington, DC: Dept. of the Interior, National Park Service, Preservation Assistance Division, 1978.

<sup>21</sup> Hannaford, Donald R. and Revel Edwards, *Spanish Colonial or Adobe Architecture of California, 1800 – 1850*. (Stamford, CT: Architectural Book Publishing Company, Inc., 1931, 1990), ii.

<sup>22</sup> National Parks Service.

<sup>23</sup> Hannaford, ii.

<sup>24</sup> Tibbets, Joe M. *The Earthbuilder's Encyclopedia*. Bosque, (NM: Southwest Solaradobe School, 1989), 25-29, 140-41.

<sup>25</sup> From tour of Casa Soberanes given by California State Parks docent. 3/26/04.

<sup>26</sup> National Parks Service.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Hannaford, ii.

<sup>29</sup> McHenry, 123.

<sup>30</sup> National Parks Service.

<sup>31</sup> Hague, 30.

<sup>32</sup> Underhill, Reuben L. *From Cowhides to Golden Fleece: A narrative of California, 1832-1858, based upon unpublished correspondence of Thomas Oliver Larkin, trader, developer, promoter, and only American Consul*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1939), 52.

<sup>33</sup> Hague, 62.

<sup>34</sup> Underhill, 53, 55.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>36</sup> Larkin, Thomas O., "The Larkin papers; personal, business, and official correspondence of Thomas Oliver Larkin, merchant and United States consul in California," Edited by George P. Hammond. (Berkeley, Published for the Bancroft Library by the University of California Press, 1951-68), vol. II, 19-20.

<sup>37</sup> Hannaford, i.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., iv.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., ii.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, iv.

<sup>43</sup> Kirker, 19.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., iii.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Brak, 166.

<sup>47</sup> Kirker, 19.

<sup>48</sup> Hannaford notes the proportions of windows as being “exquisitely proportioned” and “feminine in their daintiness.” Hannaford, iii.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., iii-iv.

<sup>50</sup> Kirker, 19.

<sup>51</sup> Hannaford, iv.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., iii.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, iv.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, iii.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, iv.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., iii.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., iv.