

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

A strong case has been made for the cultural diversity found in Monterey Colonial style architecture. A glimpse of California's history has shown that multiple parties have been involved in shaping the region's cultural heritage; from the dominance of the Spanish and their Franciscan missions, to the rise of Mexican power and a turn towards secularization and trade, to the American conquest and the subsequent influx of Anglo settlers and American politics. Until the late 1840s, and the discovery of Gold in California, the region was unmistakably Hispanic in population, culture and government. It is important to recognize, however, that Americans had a strong foothold. Though few in number, their influence was great, as they were among the elite of society and held the reins of the economy. This was a position that gave them the ability to influence California society, from the way it conducted trade to the way it constructed buildings.

The influence they lent to architecture was derived directly from colonial archetypes in New England. They utilized the general forms and decorative detailing present in Eastern examples, however, the lack of familiar materials and abundance of native ones demanded an

integration of Hispanic methods and materials. The result was the distinctive architectural type that came to be known as the Monterey Colonial style: two story buildings, with broad hipped roofs, double verandas and New England Colonial millwork, built of adobe, timber and tile. It was a style that appealed to the nostalgia of Americans in a foreign land and Mexicans looking to make a statement of pride and prosperity about their settlement.

In discussing a few specific Monterey residents who built and inhabited Monterey Colonial style houses, it is apparent that Mexican and American influences became factors on a variety of levels. Through specific analysis of the Larkin House, Casa Soberanes, and the Cooper-Molera Adobe, one sees the range of cultural backgrounds that were drawn to the style. Appreciated as much by Mexicans as Americans, and also by families of mixed heritage, the Monterey Colonial style made a statement of individuality that had much to do with financial success, political power, and taste. It was thus determined that the Monterey Colonial style represented the ideal of prosperity, both for homeowners and for the community of Monterey.

It was also established that the symbolism embodied by Monterey Colonial style houses, was reflected in buildings of other uses, such as military and civic buildings, and commercial establishments. These were buildings that represented the intricate workings of Monterey

society. Public buildings of this sort worked to beautify and promote the city they served, which conveyed the symbolism of Monterey's prosperity not only to the local community, but to trading vessels and visiting dignitaries that then relayed that reputation to the rest of the world.

Though this study has addressed, at its broadest extent, the influences of culture on the Monterey Colonial style of architecture, there are sub-categories of this topic that create endless facets in the subject. Here, the idea of ethnic heritage and its influence on architectural style and construction methods has been the theme; however, other concepts like social class or kinship could have an equally strong impact. The latter, particularly, could provide extensive opportunities for discussion by addressing the Vallejo family alone; exploring the dissemination of the Monterey Colonial style through the bloodlines and marriage ties of that vaunted California family. The importance of the Monterey Colonial style can thus be reflected in multiple ways by taking multiple approaches to the interaction of people with the architecture they create.

Architecture embodies the ideals of a community and, in this way, assists in creating a unique sense of place. Because of the Monterey Colonial style of architecture, Monterey became known as a beautiful and important location. Though it no longer remains the capital of California, the dignity of that status seems to remain in the

place. For years, it has been romanticized for its picturesque seaside local and its distinctive buildings. It has been lauded for its rich history and vibrant cultural heritage. Because of these accounts that have been passed down and the great amount of physical history that still remains, Monterey is imbued with a great significance and commands much respect. This fact can be seen in the efforts that have and continue to be made toward preserving the historic fabric of the town, paying tribute to history with sympathetic new construction, and a constant endeavor to interpret the Monterey Colonial style buildings and the remarkable people who built and used them.

Though a few examples of the Monterey Colonial style lie beyond the borders of Monterey, the dominance of the style in that town and its relative scarcity elsewhere proves intriguing.

This acceptance of adobe as a basic building material by the Americans at Monterey, and the subsequent adaptation to New England architectural features by a number of influential Spanish-Mexicans, is a unique instance in California of an important compromise between competing colonial cultures... But outside of Monterey the Spanish-Mexicans proved stubborn colonials, and, with perhaps a dozen notable exceptions, they refused to accept the architectural compromise effected by the New Englanders and their Spanish-blooded relatives and business associates.¹

Perhaps it is testament to the progressiveness and prosperity of old Monterey, that it was only in that single town that such cultural melding could be achieved. In any case, it proves the extreme vernacular

character of the style. If the definition of vernacular means architecture of a specific time, in a specific place, and by a specific group of people, then the Monterey Colonial style is certainly that. With such a short period of significance and primarily restricted to a geographic area of less than a square mile, it is certainly an exacting element. The fact that it was also built not only by a small group of the population, but by a mix of two such disparate cultures, makes it outstanding as a vernacular type.

Notes:

¹ Kirker, Harold. *California's Architectural Frontier: Style and tradition in the nineteenth century*. (Salt Lake City, UT: Gibbs M. Smith, Inc., 1986), 18, 20.