

CHAPTER IV

HALCYON DAYS

During the Mexican Period, most of the town of Monterey was located within a half-mile of the bay. Commerce and government focused on the water, while culture and residential life ranged along the few principal streets that stretched southward from the bay. Buildings of the Monterey Colonial style were scattered throughout the town, intermingled with older, more traditional, Hispanic structures. They were seemingly grouped with regard to their similar functions; civic, commercial and military buildings near the water, and residences farther inland. It is not town planning or the architecture itself that gave Monterey life, however. The built environment was the physical manifestation of a unique cultural atmosphere. What made the architecture significant were the people that inhabited the buildings and the activities they carried out within those walls. The vernacular significance of the style comes from the people's interaction with the architecture and what it, in turn, came to represent to them. The Monterey Colonial style fulfilled many and diverse purposes for Californians in Monterey, so its significance was great.

Being the colonial capital of California, Monterey was the home or regular haunt of an unusually large number of important people, nearly all of whom owned Monterey Colonial style houses. Aside from important businessmen like Larkin and Cooper, there were a multitude of government officials who built and lived in houses of this type, including José Rafael Gonzales, the administrator of the Custom House; José Estrada, the ranking officer at the Monterey Presidio; and Dr. James Stokes, Mayor of Monterey and a prominent physician. (Figure 29) Military leaders, such as Fremont and Castro, also used



FIGURE 29: The Stokes Adobe, owned by Dr. James Stokes. Photo by author.

Monterey Colonial style buildings. And furthermore, Monterey was simply full of affluent citizens, many of them patriarchs of well-established Mexican families. Don José Mariano Estrada and Don José

Amesti were two of these men, both of whom built large and elaborate Monterey Colonial style homes. Another notable Monterey Colonial homeowner was Gil Sanchez, who was reputedly one of the founders of Santa Clara University.¹ (Figure 30) There are many common factors among these historical figures; affluence, authority, leadership roles, and entrepreneurship. But why did those qualities necessarily draw their possessors to a certain style of architecture? What was it about the Monterey Colonial style that made powerful individuals wish to create and live in houses of this type?



FIGURE 30: Casa Sanchez, owned by Gil Sanchez. Photo by author.

The Monterey Colonial style originated in a single residential model, which quickly propagated the architectural type throughout Monterey. Though beautiful and unique, it is likely that many affluent families imitated the Larkin House prototype not for its aesthetics, but

for the prosperity and high style it represented. In this way, societal values promoted the style perhaps more than its actual physical characteristics and Monterey became filled with symbols of success, which also beautified the streetscape.

Government buildings were also built in the Monterey Colonial style; however, utilitarian buildings such as the Custom House could not have been concerned with aesthetics alone, nor with the bid to “keep up with the Larkins.” Perhaps political or economic commentary played a part in bringing the Monterey Colonial style into the vocabulary of civic structures. Perhaps consideration was being given to creating a harmonious architectural environment in the town, with civic structures acting as icons of the burgeoning community. It is interesting to note, however, that many of the important figures associated with Monterey Colonial style houses, also had something to do with Monterey Colonial style civic buildings. Like a signature, the style was used to denote a structure’s importance in both function and association with community leaders.

In a town that focused so strongly on commerce and proved itself a robust trade center, it is no surprise that Monterey’s commercial buildings were also commonly built in the Monterey Colonial style. In this case, again, the building was a symbol more than an object. The aesthetics of the building encouraged business within that building and

the Monterey Colonial style spoke of high quality and high society, enviable characteristics in both goods and services. With men like Larkin and Cooper conducting trade from these buildings, it is little wonder that a connection was increasingly strengthened between important names, style, and cultural significance.

Perhaps the penultimate idea that the Monterey Colonial style embodied was prosperity; not only monetarily, but also in quality of life and cultural richness. The dwelling places of private citizens, the hubs of governmental power, and the stages of commerce all strove to represent success and strength in the community and to the outside world. The architecture of the town was the signpost that said Monterey was a wealthy, growing, sophisticated and powerful town worthy of being the capital of California.

Life in Monterey Colonial Style Structures

The Monterey Colonial style originated with residential design. The primary intent of the Larkin House was to provide a home for the Larkin family and demonstrate the prosperity of the household to the surrounding community. It did just that, and soon affluent families in Monterey, Mexican and American alike, were imitating the style in their own homes.

In fact, the majority of Monterey Colonial style buildings were residences. For citizens of the town, prosperity and fashion were important aspects of life and one of the few ways to publicly display these things was through one's property. A large, prominently placed house designed in the latest style denoted that the family who owned it had both wealth and taste. It indicated and influenced their status as leading citizens in the town. (Figure 31)



FIGURE 31: Estrada Adobe, belonging to one of Monterey's elite families and prolific Monterey Colonial style builders. Source: O'Donnell, Mayo Hayes. *Monterey's Adobe Heritage*. (Monterey, California: Monterey Savings and Loan Association, 1965), 19.

The following discussions of three specific Monterey Colonial style houses are designed to show three distinct facets of Monterey society. They will discuss the cultural backgrounds of the homeowners, the unique features of each house, and the evolution of form and use

based on the cultural influences of each resident. By doing this, they will demonstrate that the Monterey Colonial style of architecture appealed to a broad cultural audience and helped unite Monterey into a culturally cohesive town.

The American Way: The Larkin House

It would be a misnomer to include the Larkin House only with other residential Monterey Colonial style structures, for the building can actually be classified as a government and commercial structure as well. Since its construction, it has served all these purposes, many contemporaneously. This is one more reason that the archetype for the Monterey Colonial style has such strong claim as a revolutionary and influential icon in California architectural history. (Figure 32) It is a trait to be kept in mind when discussing the vernacular significance that stemmed from the building's use.

The cultural drive behind the Larkin family was purely American. Both Thomas Larkin and his wife, Rachel, were American citizens who were born and raised in Massachusetts. This made them something of an oddity as a couple in Mexican California. In fact, Rachel Larkin was the first American woman to settle in California, and remained one of the rare few during her time in Monterey. (Figure 33) That is not to say that women were scarce; however, the majority of them

were Mexican. There was a greater quantity of American men, of course, but they tended to marry into Mexican families and, thus, many Monterey households were culturally mixed. This made the Larkin family thoroughly American and quite unique. It influenced the design and furnishing of their home as well. The Larkin House can likely be claimed to be the most Anglo of all the Monterey Colonial style houses.



FIGURE 32: The Larkin House. Source: *HABS inventory*, Library of Congress, Prints and Photograph Division, Washington, D.C., 1962.

Though Larkin was a powerful personality and his wife reputedly retiring, she may have had a large influence on the design of the Larkin House. The fact that a large portion of her dowry possibly went into its construction may have entitled her to some decisions about how the house should be designed, and she certainly would have chosen a familiar New England design over a foreign Hispanic configuration for her home. She was also never as fond of California as her husband was

and so Larkin may have tried to make her comfortable and content by surrounding her with a familiar setting; a house that would recall those New England Colonial edifices Rachel had lived in back east.² While men exerted their prowess through building, it was, at that time, a woman's duty to make a house a home, and Rachel Larkin would have had full jurisdiction over the interior of the Larkin House. American furniture was imported to outfit the house completely, and sources hint at what might have almost been an aversion to native products. One anecdote



FIGURE 33: Rachel Larkin. Source: 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), 45.

tells of Rachel Larkin hauling large pumpkins into the house from the garden to use as seats for guests before her American furniture had arrived.³ Once furnished, however, the house would have been most proper, with a formal entry, parlor and dining room on the first floor. It

is ironic to think that the Larkin's Hispanic neighbors would have had no reference to this Anglo institution of propriety and that the government agents, seamen and other Americans who visited them were likely not the type to pay heed to American domestic formality. Yet, the Larkin house provided that needed reference point for its inhabitants, and to all others provided an example of how successful people lived.

Larkin, himself, mirrored his wife's affection for all things American. Initially, he looked poorly on California and its Mexican citizens, but he soon grew to love the place and people. It might be speculated, however; that Larkin always felt like something of an outsider. He chose to retain that quality though, refusing to fully assimilate into Mexican society as so many other Americans had. By marrying Rachel, a fellow American, Larkin insured that his family would be Anglo. It also meant that any need for conversion to Catholicism in order to marry, was moot. He never adopted Mexican citizenship, himself, choosing instead to carry a *carta* issued by the Mexican government that could be renewed from year to year to keep his residency legal.⁴

Despite this resistance to assimilation, Larkin apparently had few qualms about adopting superficial Mexican customs. It is noted that he enjoyed the native dances he was introduced to in California and even supplemented his dress with traditional Mexican garb. William Thomes,

a sailor from Maine, described him as “a gentleman, who we supposed to be a Mexican, as he was dark and thin, a man of about forty years of age... with a slight stoop to his shoulders, dressed as a European, except that he has a brightly-colored serapa around his neck, and a broad-brimmed sombrero, with a silver cord, and two little silver tassels hanging down over the rim...”⁵ As with the man, so with his house. Built of adobe, the Larkin House possessed the superficial exterior trappings of a Mexican building, however the inside was entirely American. (Figure 34)



FIGURE 34: Interior of the Larkin House sala. Source: *HABS inventory*, Library of Congress, Prints and Photograph Division, Washington, D.C., May 1962.

It is noted that Larkin, of all the Americans living in Monterey, possessed the best knowledge and means to construct a house such as the Larkin House.⁶ Though he had a certain aversion to adobe as a

building material, he nevertheless recognized it as the most efficient and best adapted material available in the region. Though he bought most of his bricks from local manufacturers and used Indian labor to erect the building, Larkin made a few of the bricks for his own house,⁷ showing a willingness to learn the technique and become personally involved in the creation of his home and his new architectural style. It is likely that Larkin would have preferred a wood frame house, or even a brick house, like those he was familiar with; however, the materials he finally resorted to were, oddly enough, vague derivations of the two; heavy timber frame, rather than light wood frame, and adobe brick, rather than fired red brick.

Aside from the local materials, there was nothing very Hispanic about the Larkin house. As stated in the previous chapter, stepping through the front door was like leaving California and arriving in New England. The form of the house, the interior detailing, everything but the major construction materials, were essentially American. Starting from scratch, Larkin was able to create a house that represented a formally planned American home, customized to his needs. It did not rely on any existing, linear, one-story adobe, which might have restricted the arrangement of rooms as in other Monterey Colonial style houses. Instead, the Larkin house was allowed to achieve a perfect central hall plan, with flanking parlor and shop. There was no struggle to fit a stair

in where no stair was originally intended to go. (Figure 35) The house was essentially purpose-built, with the Monterey Colonial style already integrated and no adaptations required. It is noted that the double verandas may have recalled those on the Nahant Hotel and the Norfolk House; two inns in Boston that Larkin would have been familiar with.⁸ The Monterey Colonial style was, in all, a nostalgic design that represented New England architecture to Larkin and his family.



FIGURE 35: The formal central entry and stair hall of the Larkin House. Source: *HABS inventory*, Library of Congress, Prints and Photograph Division, Washington, D.C., May 1962.

Though Larkin lived in an American fashion, inside his very American home, there was something that stimulated the interest and admiration of all of Monterey; Americans and Mexicans alike. Perhaps it was the absolute uniqueness of design that they appreciated, but most certainly the values that that design represented were a driving factor.

Larkin, a wealthy, knowledgeable, and authoritative figure, could not only afford such a grand house, but was clever enough to have devised it in the first place. Certainly, that was a model for well-established Mexican families to compare themselves to, and to which newly arrived Americans could aspire. Larkin would have been pleased to know that they did, too. It was no secret that he took great pride in his house and the standard it set. He was known to have commissioned paintings of the Monterey landscape with his house featured prominently among the buildings in town. These paintings would have been distributed across the East Coast, showing more than just California what success Thomas Larkin had achieved.⁹ (Figure 36)



FIGURE 36: Drawing of Monterey in 1842, like one Larkin might have commissioned. The Larkin House is depicted at the left side of the scene. Source: McAlester, Virginia and Lee. *A Field Guide to America's Historic Neighborhoods and Museum Houses, The Western States*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1998), 119.

As Walter Colton reflected in his diary, “it is past midnight, and I have just come from the house of T.O. Larkin, Esq., where I left the youth, the beauty, the wisdom, and worth of Monterey.”¹⁰ Evidently, the first Monterey Colonial style house embodied these lofty ideals not only for its owner, but for all of Monterey.

The Mexican Way: Casa Soberanes

Today, Casa Soberanes appears to be a classic example of the Monterey Colonial style of architecture, however, it was not always so. The modest house began its life as a traditional Mexican adobe structure and elements of that basic one-story, linear design still underlie the current Monterey Colonial style appearance. In direct contrast to the residents of the Larkin House, Casa Soberanes was owned by a Mexican family during its period of significance. The building was constructed around 1842¹¹ by Don José Rafael Estrada, the ranking officer at the Presidio of Monterey during Mexican rule.

An important factor in the popularity of the Monterey Colonial style with Mexican homeowners was kinship.¹² Though the idea in having a stylish home was to promote the prosperity and power of native families, it was the wealth and influence of these families that actually encouraged the spread of the style through vast family networks. This includes the style’s proliferation throughout California, not in Monterey

alone. The Vallejo family was particularly prominent in relation to the architectural trend. Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo (Figure 37), last governor of California, was perhaps the most noteworthy member of the family. He was also a prolific builder, taking credit for his Monterey Colonial style Petaluma Adobe, among others. Yet he had many relations throughout California and not surprisingly many associated names are also connected to the construction of Monterey Colonial style buildings. Those with familial connections to Vallejo included Don José Alverado, builder of California's second Monterey Colonial style residence and son of a Vallejo woman; Don José Amesti, who married into the Vallejo family and built the elaborate Casa Amesti; and Rafael Estrada, himself, who was the nephew of Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo and builder of Casa Soberanes. This is to name only a few, though there were many more, even encompassing John Rogers Cooper and Thomas Larkin in the extended family circle. Not surprisingly, all of the names mentioned above were prominent in Monterey, holding either great wealth or important government titles.

Casa Soberanes actually bears the name of the second family to inhabit it. The Soberanes were also Mexican and bought the house from the Estradas around 1860. Their time in the house post-dates the Mexican period in California, however it is interesting to note that Señora Soberanes, the lady of the household, was the daughter of Don Ignacio



FIGURE 37: Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo, propagator of the Monterey Colonial style among the Mexican population. Source: <http://bancroft.berkeley.edu>

Vallejo, once again reinforcing the kinship bonds revolving around the Monterey Colonial style.

The original owner and builder's status probably helped him obtain the prime piece of land on which his house was located. Situated closer to the water than most other Monterey residences, the house was constructed on the slope of a hill and set well back from the street. This achieved a number of goals, both practical and luxurious. It broke the Mexican convention of situating houses at the street line, thus establishing the fact that the house was owned by forward thinking people. It set the house at a higher elevation to give it a sweeping view of the bay, a quality that alluded to both the owner's enjoyment of his surroundings and his connection and involvement with the community with regards to the commerce and other activities happening in the bay.

Lastly, the location of the house was ideal for good drainage and kept water from standing around the house or draining into it. This was an ever-important consideration when dealing with a building made of adobe bricks and Estrada chose the placement of his house well. As an added benefit, the house was fronted by a lush garden leading down to the street and was separated from the outside world by a wall and gate, which was always painted blue, thus earning Casa Soberanes the nickname “The House with the Blue Gate.” Quite picturesque, this walled garden harkened to the Anglo convention of building walls around the property, effectively creating a sense of privacy, comfortable enclosure, and separation of public and private space. Despite the unconventionality of its site, this walled garden maintained the property’s Hispanic references though by maintaining an important outdoor space. This concept was duplicated in both the Larkin house and the Cooper-Molera Adobe, showing that Mexican traditions remained and were instituted, especially on the exterior of Monterey Colonial style houses. (Figure 38)

The floor plan of Casa Soberanes is perhaps the aspect most reminiscent of its traditional Spanish roots. The house’s conversion to the Monterey Colonial style dates to circa 1850 and was a later example of the style, but a prime one nonetheless, particularly as it relates to the evolution from Spanish adobe to Monterey Colonial style house. For the



FIGURE 38: Casa Soberanes, front façade. Photo by author.

most part, Casa Soberanes retains its one room deep, linear plan. The large central room, exhibiting a characteristic raised floor served as the *sala*, while an auxiliary room was located off the south end. The stair hall is a particular novelty. What was once a third room at the north end of the *sala* was deftly converted to an entry and stair hall when the Monterey Colonial conversion took place. Since Casa Soberanes was once a one-story structure with a traditional sleeping attic under the roof, there would have been a set of exterior stairs leading to this space. When second floors and interior staircases became en vogue, the stair was moved into this north room. It is steeply pitched and tightly turned; obviously retrofitted to the space. A horizontal beam can be seen within the stairwell, spanning from the rear wall of the house to the front and

standing a few inches out from the north wall. It represents a portion of the timber frame structure that makes the second story possible and supports the cantilevered veranda. It is a system only found in Monterey Colonial style structures, but lacks a certain coordination, which speaks of the architectural change that Casa Sobranes experienced. (Figure 39)



FIGURE 39: Stair hall in Casa Soberanes. Source: *HABS inventory*, Library of Congress, Prints and Photograph Division, Washington, D.C., May 1962.

The stairway leads to the second floor, which is markedly more cramped than those found in the Larkin House. When the second floor was added to the house, the Estradas probably could not comprehend the idea of a full upper story. It is easy to recognize that they still thought of this space as a sleeping attic, though a rather glorified one. It had very low ceilings and small, interconnected rooms. One concession that

was made in favor of an upstairs hall was an extremely narrow passageway that was inserted under the roof at the rear of the house, over the kitchen lean-to. This allowed access between the end rooms without requiring passage through the room between, thus instilling an American ideal of privacy. (Figure 40)



FIGURE 40: Upstairs in Casa Soberanes, showing upper landing of stairs and small doorway into connecting passageway. Source: *HABS inventory*, Library of Congress, Prints and Photograph Division, Washington, D.C., May 1962.

The kitchen at the rear of the house was probably originally an outside cooking area, as was common in Hispanic households. It was enclosed by an L-shaped adobe wall, which sheltered it, but left it open to the air. When the house was converted to the Monterey Colonial style, this portion of the building was further enclosed and gave the impression of a lean-to addition; a form that is extremely common in East Coast

residential design, giving the Colonial Saltbox house its trademark shape. (Figure 41) One room of this addition became the dining room, while the other became a more complete, American-style kitchen. It gave the house a square, rather than linear, footprint and, with the second story and double veranda, gave the house its Monterey Colonial characteristics.

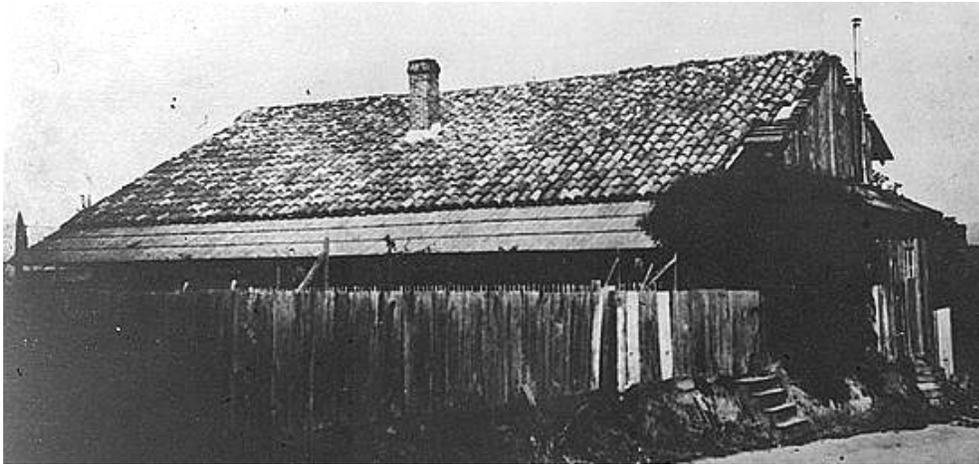


FIGURE 41: Casa Soberanes, rear elevation, showing lean-to structure that creates salt-box form. Source: *HABS inventory*, Library of Congress, Prints and Photograph Division, Washington, D.C., May 1962.

The Estradas worked to achieve the American look on the interior of their home as well; however, many Mexican conventions remained, resulting in an unmistakably Hispanic ambiance. The *sala* floor, for instance, is paved in clay tiles, rather than the wood floors seen in the houses with more American influence. The floor was probably originally made of packed dirt, however; so even the tiles were a mark of progressiveness. Rough-hewn beams are still exposed on the ceilings,

representing the construction methods that went into building traditional Mexican adobes, rather than the sawn timbers and planks of the American influenced structures. The elaborate fireplace mantel and chair rail that decorate the *sala* are purely Anglo, however they are some of the only architectural details that reference the American love of decoration. (See figure 25) The remainder of the house retains a certain rustic flavor that sets it apart from the American influenced Monterey Colonial style houses. It is elegant, yet still very obviously Hispanic, showing that the original form of the house and the owner's cultural background played a large part in how the Monterey Colonial style was translated into this particular building.

The Californian Way: The Cooper-Molera Adobe

The Cooper-Molera Adobe complex (actually a small grouping of buildings on property located near the center of town) demonstrates how the Monterey Colonial style served a combination of the Mexican and American heritages that were discussed as separate entities in the previous sections. Though it did not truly demonstrate the traits of a Monterey Colonial style building until quite late in its history of additions and modifications, its history was rich with the amalgamation of both cultures. (Figures 42 and 43) This versatility of its mixed heritage is evidenced in the bi-cultural identity of the Cooper-Molera Adobe's first

owners, the building's physical evolution, and its occupation by two different families (one American and the other Mexican) during the building's period of significance.



FIGURES 42 & 43: Cooper-Molera Adobe. Front elevation (left) and southeast elevation (right), Photos by author.

As a merchant and sea captain who had grown up in both England and Massachusetts, John (the Baptist) Rogers Cooper, the builder and owner of the Cooper-Molera Adobe, had a strong Anglo cultural background as well as influential American business backing. (Figure 44) The first nine years of Cooper's life were spent in Alderney, in the English Channel Islands, and after his father's death, he moved to America with his mother. She was remarried to Thomas Larkin Sr. and was the mother of Thomas Oliver Larkin, thus making Thomas Oliver Larkin and John Cooper half-brothers. Cooper went to sea with his uncle to pursue trade in China at the age of fourteen. Larkin would have been only three years old at this time, so it is unlikely that the two shared a very close bond; however, they would come to influence each

other greatly as adults. Cooper became the captain of his own ship, the *Rover*, and in 1823, sailed to Monterey.¹³ He settled in the California capital, before many Americans had come to the area, and used the port as his hub for trading throughout the Pacific. He also raised cattle, hunted otter, and conducted retail business in the area.¹⁴



FIGURE 44: Juan Bautista Rogers Cooper. Source: 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), 35.

Though his ties to America remained strong through business, Cooper adapted socially to fit the Mexican climate of California. Unlike his half-brother, Cooper fully embraced the Hispanic culture around him. On his first visit to Monterey in 1823, he met fourteen-year-old Encarnacion Vallejo, who was the daughter of the *sargento distinguido* of the troops in Monterey and the sister of Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo, the last governor of Alta California.¹⁵ (She was also the sister of Prudenciana Amesti and

aunt to Juan Bautista Alverado.)¹⁶ Though they waited until 1827, when Encarnacion turned eighteen, to marry, Cooper must have absorbed a good deal of Mexican influence from his future bride, her family, and his surroundings. By marrying into such an influential Californio family, Cooper essentially became a Californio himself. He came to be known as Juan Bautista Rogers Cooper, using the Spanish translation of his name. He converted to Catholicism in order to marry Encarnacion and became an official Mexican citizen soon after that. By doing so, he made himself eligible to obtain land grants and at one point owned as much as 150,000 acres¹⁷, including property that encompassed Big Sur.

Cooper's most important property, however, was the family home in Monterey. Now called the Cooper-Molera Adobe (incorporating the name of later owner, Frances Molera, Cooper's granddaughter), the house is an elaborate example of the Monterey Colonial style. It was not always so, however, and its pronounced Mexican heritage is evidenced in the humble adobe it once was. Like Casa Soberanes, the Cooper-Molera Adobe started as a traditional Mexican adobe, linear in plan and only one story high. It was known as the Munras adobe.¹⁸ Some sources claim that Cooper built this original portion of the house for his family in 1830, though others speculate that an extant adobe was purchased by Cooper around this time and later embellished.¹⁹ Realistically, the Coopers

made so many additions and modifications to their house over time that the original adobe is only a small element now enveloped by a much larger and more elaborate house.



FIGURE 45: Southwest view of the Cooper-Molera Adobe complex, showing Monterey Colonial style house on the left and the one story Diaz house on the right. Photo by author.

A major element in the mixed cultural heritage of the building and its surroundings was the result of a subdivision of the property that took place in 1833. (Figure 45) At this time, Cooper's business ventures had put him in debt to an American entrepreneur by the name of John Jones. To settle this debt, Cooper divided his property, physically splitting the house into two separate buildings with courtyards behind. Cooper kept the L-shaped dwelling portion of his house, and gave what was apparently a more utilitarian portion of the structure, perhaps what was originally intended to be a shop, to Jones. Jones also received a

rudimentary warehouse at the rear of the property as a part of the bargain and, in turn, leased both structures and the lot to renters. In 1845, however; Manuel and Luisa Estrada Diaz, prosperous Mexican citizens, purchased the property from Jones and became the Cooper's next door neighbors. Separated by a *zaguán*, or wide gate and passageway leading back to the courtyards, the two houses became counterparts to each other, complimentary and yet demonstrative of the differing Mexican and American ways of life.

The Diaz house, having much the same appearance now as it did during the family's habitation, was entered through a set of double doors off the street that lead directly into a large *sala*. There were no interior hallways, and only a couple small rooms off the main living space. Furnishings were sparse and interior finishes were modest, consisting of plastered interior walls, wood floors and exposed beams for the ceiling.²⁰

When the Gold Rush happened, in 1849, the political and economic power of elite Mexicans in California declined. The United States became increasingly dominant and with so many Americans flooding into the region, Mexican culture was overwhelmed. The Diaz family experienced this decline of their fortunes and power and resorted to building and running a small store on their property. It was attached to the Diaz adobe and was largely in keeping with its architectural forms.

The business was not very prosperous, however, and in 1867, Manuel Diaz died. His widow and family were able to maintain residence in the house and rented out the attached shop, thus providing themselves with a meager living. They remained in ownership until 1900, and due to this long possession of the property, managed to preserve the early Hispanic character of the house.²¹ Due to this, it still remains an effective traditional Mexican compliment to the Coopers' Monterey Colonial style house next door.

It is likely that the original form of the Cooper's house was very close to that of the Diaz house. In fact, they were a single building at one time, and have become so again, in a sense. This evolution is apparent in a single portion of wall where the two houses now conjoin. Behind a door in the southeast wall of the bedroom of the Diaz House, a solid wall of adobe bricks covers what was once a passage into the other portion of the original adobe. When Cooper divided his property and bisected the house, a carriageway was created between the two halves of the building, leading into the back courtyard. The door in question may have then opened onto this carriageway as an exterior entry. Around the 1850s, however, with the American economy booming and Cooper quite prosperous from the sale of some of his land, a general enlargement and elaboration of the Coopers' house was undertaken. The northwestern wall of the building was moved out to abut the neighboring wall of the

Diaz House, thus incorporating the *zaguán* and carriageway into the Cooper House. The adobe wall now seen through the door in the Diaz bedroom, is the exterior wall of what became the Cooper's entry hall. Once a passageway for carriages entering the courtyard, it became the interior reception space and stair hall for a progressive American style dwelling. Once more, the two houses were joined, though now differing greatly from one another in architectural appearance.

At the time of the Coopers' remodeling, a second story was added to the house, thus qualifying it as a true Monterey Colonial style building. It was surrounded by a cantilevered veranda of the second type, which was enclosed by glazing on the southwest side. As with the Larkin House, the Cooper-Molera Adobe adopted an American emphasis on the interior. The existing Mexican adobe form limited the possibility of a central hall plan, however, the American custom of having a dedicated entry space (contrary to the Hispanic custom of entering the *sala* directly off the street) was achieved through the conversion of the carriageway into a stair hall. The remainder of the interior spaces, a parlor and two downstairs bedrooms, were housed within the existing rooms of the adobe, while a dining room was built into the corner of the L-shaped plan. This ultimately gave the building the symmetrical foursquare plan reminiscent of a double pile plan.

The interior design of the house was indicative of the mid-nineteenth century Victorian styles that inspired it. Elaborate woodwork carpeting and wallpaper were imported from New England and installed in the house. The original doors onto the street were converted to deep-welled windows, enforcing the convention of a single entry to the house and providing the parlor and front room with gracious windows. The house's furnishings consisted of a variety of pieces that reflected the variety of architectural influences. The Coopers owned furniture from New England, decorative pieces from Mexico, and porcelain and other accessories from the Orient.²² In the entry hall, the wood stair with decorative turned balusters shows a strong East Coast influence. It is especially interesting to note the small abalone shell "mortgage button" set into the top of the newel post. This denoted that the mortgage on the property had been paid in full. It was a distinctly New England custom.

Though the evolution of the structure demonstrates a mixture of Mexican and American influences, it may not fully prove the vernacular significance of the building. The character of the owner speaks volumes however. In accounts, Cooper is presented rather unconventionally. He was a mariner and a merchant, pragmatic, if not exactly expert in the details of running a business. His house did not become the high style icon that it is until much later than its neighbors and this points to a certain unconcern that Cooper had for the prevailing

fashion and society. This unconventionality may have set him apart from the cultural atmosphere of old Monterey, but at the same time may have sped his way to where he ended up. Obviously, a man who threw his American customs and belief system aside to marry into Californio society was not one who vested great importance in tradition. Yet he embraced a new tradition, and with it in mind, built a house that stands as a testament to that mixed heritage.

Government and Military in Monterey Colonial Style Structures

As the capital of California, Monterey was one of the most developed settlements in the region and had all the amenities typical of a colonial capital, including a strong governmental and military presence. In fact, the first establishment in Monterey, aside from the Franciscan Mission of San Carlos de Borromeo, was the military presidio.

Associated with the presidio and located on the west side of town was a building known as El Cuartel, which served as barracks for married soldiers and their families. (Figure 46) It was a long, two-story Monterey Colonial style structure, that took much the same form as the Pacific House or various houses lining the main streets of Monterey. It was demolished in 1910; however, it served diverse military and civic uses before its demise. In 1846, it was taken over by American forces

and used as headquarters by Richard B. Mason, Military Governor of California. William Tecumseh Sherman also operated out of El Cuartel and Kit Carson brought messages there from Washington DC. Later, California's first newspaper was published in the building.²³



FIGURE 46: El Cuartel, military barracks. Source: *HABS inventory*, Library of Congress, Prints and Photograph Division, Washington, D.C., May 1962.

The Custom House was the most prominent government building in Monterey. Located at the heart of the town, it had been in existence long before the Monterey Colonial style came into fashion and therefore held a well-established place in the town. Built in 1814, during the Spanish period, it originally consisted of what equated to a small, one-story, single (or possibly two) room adobe hut that housed both goods and soldiers. When the Mexican regime came to dominate the town, the Custom House was enlarged. It is believed that the central, single story portion consisting of a long open room attached to the south elevation of the building, was added around 1822. It is likely that over

the following twenty years, the south portion was added, though it was originally only one story high. The Monterey Colonial style eventually influenced the design of the Custom House when, in 1841 to 1842, a second story was added to the north and south portions of the structure and the signature double verandas and portico wrapped the side of the building that faced the bay.²⁴

Historically, the Custom House represented the seat of Mexican, and prior to that, Spanish, power. (Figure 47) It was not only a building from which to regulate trade and maritime relations, but a council hall for matters of state. It served as a social center as well, for when vessels anchored in Monterey Bay, the Custom House was used as a festival hall for the reception of commissioned officers. *Baile Grandes* would be held where the citizens of Monterey would mingle with visiting foreigners.²⁵



FIGURE 47: The Monterey Custom House. Photo by author.

As mentioned before, the Larkin House also served a civic and military function for some time. It was the de facto capital building of California before a structure dedicated solely to that purpose was built. Larkin, being the first United States Consul from 1843 to 1848, used the house as his consulate and conducted a great deal of business on behalf of the American government from the location. It also, at one time, housed the office of Walter Colton, the first American *alcalde*, or mayor, of Monterey. Later it was used as the headquarters for the American military governor of California, and served as a base of operations for Kearny, Mason, and Sherman. It was undoubtedly used as the venue for some very important civic functions, including both business and social events.



FIGURE 48: The Fremont Adobe, once used as military headquarters by General Fremont. Photo by author.

Another headquarters building was the Fremont Adobe (Figure 48), which was used as the military headquarters of General Fremont during his time in Monterey, from 1846 to 1847. The building was owned by Dr. James Stokes after 1851, who also owned the Stokes Adobe just across Hartnell Street, and may have later been used by General Castro, again for military purposes.

Through these Monterey Colonial style civic and military buildings, one sees another facet of the diverse uses that these structures had and the key roll that they played in the town of Monterey. Though prosperity might not have been the primary symbolism intended by these buildings, a general commentary on the power and prowess of the town was. Through Monterey Colonial style buildings used for civic and military purposes, a sense of success was still the projected ideal.

Commercialism in Monterey Colonial Style Structures

Though the Spanish colonization of California included aspects of military and religion, the essential purpose of the effort and the underlying force behind most colonization efforts, is economic. Monterey was no different. The military was involved in the settlement to protect the assets of the colony, while the missions were established to convert

the natives and, in an indirect way, lay claim to an available labor force and the natural resources held by the indigenous people.

These were the most basic motivations, however, as the colony grew, the economic systems became more complex and entrepreneurship came to the fore. The American merchants that arrived from the East Coast, men like Thomas Larkin and John Rogers Cooper, became a driving force in California. They acted as middlemen between the East and West, serving the businesses of America and the people of California. Their vehicles for doing this were ships and shops.

In Monterey, where a thriving town existed, business and trade were the driving forces behind every day life. Not only were residents supported on the money they could earn through their business dealings, but they required other people's ventures to provide them with the basic needs of living. One venue where such an exchange took place was in retail stores. Many of these commercial establishments were owned by the town's preeminent merchant, Thomas Larkin; however, many other citizens also operated shops.

After expanding the Custom House and building the neighboring wharf, Larkin had a particular enthusiasm for real estate and development. He bought a number of lots around the Custom House and built small shops, including a bakeshop, which he then rented out to fellow merchants.²⁶ Part of this real estate was a large lot,

measuring 283 x 275 feet, across from the Custom House. Purchased for \$400, it was in a prime commercial setting and became one of Monterey's most important business blocks.²⁷

It is unknown what style of architecture these many shops were built in and most no longer exist; however, some of Larkin's larger commercial structures were of the Monterey Colonial type. In addition, many establishments built by other proprietors were likely modeled after Larkin's examples, the most prominent of which was located in the ground floor of his own house.

In fact, the Larkin House may have originally been intended more as a store than as a residence. Larkin's original plan was to run his first business from the lower floor, while housing his family on the second; a very common arrangement in large metropolitan areas. It is possible that the central stair hall did not exist at first and that two large rooms, set side by side, would have been used for storage and retail space. This arrangement was short-lived however, and the store was eventually restricted to the north room of the lower story. A trap door was cut through the ceiling and merchandise was stored in the Larkin's bedroom, above. One may wonder how Mrs. Larkin felt about this arrangement; however, she may have been assuaged by having jurisdiction over a formal parlor downstairs. A wood plank partition wall was installed to the south of the central stairs, thus creating the stair

hall and enforcing the formal plan. The north half of the house came to be dominated by Larkin's retail pursuits. A secondary set of doors was installed in the east wall to provide an entrance for the shop and the interior of the north room was fitted with ceiling hooks, storage places, and various retail related conveniences.

Though the Larkin store was essentially a home business, the grandeur of the home in which it was located likely gave the shop some respectability. Its close, literally physical, connection to the Larkin residence also instilled a strong association with the proprietor, who was known to be shrewd, reliable and successful as a businessman.

Aside from retail establishments, commercial service-oriented establishments were also housed in Monterey Colonial style structures. One such building was the Pacific House, located just south of the Custom House. (Figure 49) With an ideal location near the water, it was the preeminent hostelry in town, serving as a large inn with a tavern located on the first floor. Thus, it did business in both food and lodging.

The long, linear plan of the Pacific House did not conform to the typical configuration of a Monterey Colonial style building; however, it was well suited to serving as a hotel structure with many rooms. It met convention by having a central entry, which likely served the tavern, though the stair to the second floor may not have been located in this "central hall." (The only stair is now located at the south end of the



FIGURE 49: Pacific House, originally used as a tavern and inn. Photo by author.

building, though it is not certain whether this was the original location.)

The second floor, though heavily modified, would have had a common hall with small rooms located off it. This matched the American ideal of private bedrooms, rather than the Mexican convention of interconnecting rooms. It made the structure much more suitable to individual boarders, in the way that a communal, residence-type structure would not.

The Pacific House was a progressive lodging facility, fit for serving the many visitors who came through the gateway of Monterey Bay. It, the Larkin House, and the many other commercial establishments around Monterey helped contribute to the vital economy and bustling commerce that took place in the town. They not only played a practical part in the prosperity and success of the town, but, like the other Monterey Colonial style buildings discussed previously,

supported the symbolism imbued by the architectural style. They beautified the Monterey streetscape, leaving a lasting impression of Monterey's importance on any visitor.

Notes:

¹ O'Donnell, Mayo Hayes, *Monterey's Adobe Heritage*. (Monterey, California: Monterey Savings and Loan Association, 1965), 12.

² McAlester, Virginia and Lee, *A Field Guide to America's Historic Neighborhoods and Museum Houses, The Western States*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1998), 119.

³ Kirker, Harold, "The Larkin House Revisited." *California Historical Quarterly*, LXV (1986), 30.

⁴ Parker, Robert J., "A Chapter in the Early Life of Thomas Oliver Larkin." *California Historical Quarterly*, XVI (December 1937), 5.

⁵ Kirker, Harold, "The Larkin House Revisited", 32.

⁶ Ibid., 30.

⁷ Parker, Robert J., "The Building of the Larkin House." *California Historical Quarterly* XVI (December 1937), 323.

⁸ Kirker, Harold, "The Larkin House Revisited", 32.

⁹ Ibid., 29.

¹⁰ Ibid., 31.

¹¹ 1842 is the most precise construction date available for Casa Soberanes. (From tour of Casa Soberanes given by California State Parks docent. 3/26/04.) Other sources (McAlester and O'Donnell) quote circa 1840s and 1830 respectively.

¹² Ibid., 32.

¹³ McAlester, 120.

¹⁴ 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), 34.

¹⁵ McAlester, 120.

¹⁶ Fink, Augusta, *The Cooper-Molera Adobes* (pamphlet), Carmel, CA: The Carmel-by-the-Sea Garden Club.

¹⁷ Koue, A. Lewis, *HABS inventory, CAL-125: Cooper House*, Library of Congress, Prints and Photograph Division, Washington, D.C. 20540, May 1962.

¹⁸ Fink.

¹⁹ McAlester (119) states that the house was built by Cooper, himself, while a California State Parks sponsored tour of the Cooper-Molera Adobe related that the original adobe on the site was in existence before Cooper purchased the property. (From tour of Cooper-Molera Adobe, given by California State Parks docent, 3/26/04)

²⁰ McAlester, 121.

²¹ Ibid., 120.

²² Fink.

²³ Koue, A. Lewis, *HABS inventory, CA-1168: El Cuartel*, Library of Congress, Prints and Photograph Division, Washington, D.C. 20540, 1962.

²⁴ The architectural evolution of the Custom House is a subject of debate. Multiple sources list diverse dates of additions and describe portions of the building in divergent manners. The progression described herein is the author's best estimate of the building's growth based on the most logical dates from the following sources: Koue, A. Lewis, *HABS inventory, CAL-133: Custom House*, Library of Congress, Prints and Photograph Division, Washington, D.C. 20540, 1962; California State Parks interpretive material, Hawthorne, Hildegard, *Romantic Cities of California*. New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1939), 164; Hague, 62; and Kirker, 13.

²⁵ 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), 56.

²⁶ Ibid, 56.

²⁷ Ibid., 126-127.