

CHAPTER V
THE MONTEREY COLONIAL STYLE TODAY

Preservation in Monterey

As one of California's oldest, and arguably most important cities historically and culturally, Monterey is certainly deserving of the local, state, and national communities' strongest preservation efforts. It has certainly been regarded as a place of special significance by those who knew it during the Mexican era. Thomas Larkin founded the Society of California Pioneers in 1856, which consisted of Americans who could claim residency in California prior to the American Conquest, and their descendants. Its initial roster included many of the names that have been identified and discussed in this study of the Monterey Colonial style. Though purely a nostalgic organization meant to commemorate the names and accomplishments of Americans in early California, it marked a definite interest in the history of the place and a desire to preserve (in memory, if not physically) the worthy qualities of old California.

Early architectural preservation in California was dominated largely by the Catholic Church, which invested its efforts in saving and restoring the Spanish missions that were a rich part of the Church's history. This movement was strongest from 1875 to 1925, however, the preservation movement in Monterey that began in 1896 was independent of any religious affiliation. Efforts began with a campaign by The Native Sons of the Golden West, a hereditary organization, to preserve the Monterey Custom House. As this was one of the oldest buildings in Monterey, dating from the Spanish period in California, it was logical that this building was the first addressed with an eye toward preserving history. After a monument had been placed to commemorate Commodore Sloat's landing at Monterey and the American conquest of California, it was deemed important that the Custom House, over which the first American flag had flown, be preserved. The Native Sons received control of the Custom House's lease in 1900 on the fifth anniversary of California's admission to the Union. They, in turn, gave the lease to the State of California, which appointed trustees and raised \$4,200 for repair and restoration efforts, as the building was in deteriorating condition.¹ By way of this action and with help from the Landmarks Club (now the California Historical Landmarks League), the Custom House became California's first official Historic Landmark.² (Figure 50)

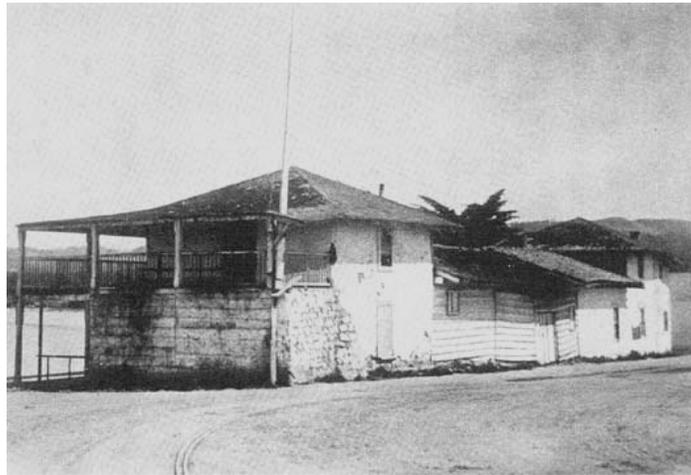


FIGURE 50: The Monterey Custom House, before restoration. Source: Hannaford, Donald R. and Revel Edwards. *Spanish Colonial or Adobe Architecture of California, 1800 – 1850*. (Stamford, CT: Architectural Book Publishing Company, Inc., 1931, 1990), 30.

Despite the good will of a few small groups such as the Native Sons, the majority of the historic adobe buildings in Monterey were in decline.

The remaining examples were being rapidly destroyed or unmercifully ‘restored’ and the survivors of the old families fast disappearing. The great migration to the west... and the over-imaginative zeal of enthusiastic Californians from Iowa had done much to spoil the simple dignity of this period of California.³

Yet there were many people, particularly those native to the area and of well-established California lineage, who wished to see the heritage of Monterey preserved.

In 1931, the Monterey History and Art Association was founded and continues to be a major element in the town’s preservation and interpretation efforts today. It was supported by a number of wealthy local residents and established Monterey families, lead by Laura Bride

Powers, custodian of the Custom House. They united with a common concern for the threats they perceived to the many historic adobes in town. In 1938, they achieved the purchase of the Custom House by matching funds with the State of California, successfully raising \$20,000 to buy the building and thus ensuring its protection. The Larkin House was also purchased and gifted to the California Parks Commission in much the same way.

As these preservation efforts were being mounted, landscape architect Emerson Knight was hired to assess the area surrounding the Monterey waterfront. He developed a zoning ordinance, enacted in 1940, that dictated historically sensitive development and planning in Monterey.⁴ It advised that roads, walkways and green spaces be made integral parts of the city while the areas directly around historic structures be maintained. Though the ordinance could not enforce preservation, it recommended the future planning which made the National Historic Landmark District and the Monterey State Historic Park possibilities.⁵

In 1949, when the National Trust for Historic Preservation was established, many California preservation groups quickly joined forces to support and organize the National Trust's work in California. The Trust had particular influence in Monterey where, in 1953, Casa Amesti was one of the first properties it acquired nationally. (Figure 51) Casa

Amesti was treated as an adaptive reuse project and came to serve as the Old Capital Club, the income from which maintained and preserved the building without direct financial assistance from the National Trust.⁶



FIGURE 51: Casa Amesti, Source: O'Donnell, Mayo Hayes. *Monterey's Adobe Heritage*. (Monterey, California: Monterey Savings and Loan Association, 1965), 3.

Until the 1970s, the National Trust focused primarily on historic house museums, however, at that time it expanded and made a number of new acquisitions in California. In Monterey, the Cooper-Molera Adobe was willed to the Trust by Frances M. Molera. In 1972, this was only the twelfth historic property to come into the Trust's ownership. Rather than maintaining it, however, the Trust, through a newly developed program, leased the house to the California Department of Parks and Recreation. The lease was set for thirty-two years, but has been renewed to the present. California State Parks now serves the

National Trust's mission by restoring, maintaining and interpreting the property as a part of the Monterey State Historic Park.⁷

Monterey has succeeded in preserving more Mexican period adobe structures than any other city in California, with thirty-two National Register listed buildings and a National Historic Landmark District encompassing the downtown area. The Historic American Buildings Survey movement has also been strong in Monterey over the years. Over forty-six buildings in the town are recorded in drawings, photographs and textual records that are on file at the National Archives in Washington, D.C.⁸ At around the same time, other architects and historians, like Donald Hannaford and Revel Edwards, who are cited frequently in this study, were finding Monterey a fascinating enclave of early California architecture. No doubt, the Monterey Colonial style specifically struck the interest of many. There are multiple instances of photographic collections, measured drawings, and writings on the topic of early Monterey architecture that denote a recognition of its importance and have assisted in documenting and preserving these structures.

To preserve those historic buildings that still remain, the City of Monterey now implements the "H-Zone" ordinance, which provides jurisdiction in all matters pertaining to historic structures and zoning. The H-Zone strives to protect and preserve the exteriors, and occasionally interiors, of historically significant buildings. Monterey's

most important historic structures; those that rank alongside the Larkin House and Custom House, are designated in H-1 zoning. These have statewide, national, or international significance and may be declared as H-1 properties without the consent of the owner, in order to achieve that high level of protection. Extensive incentive programs are designed to support this jurisdiction, however. H-2 zoning is intended for historic buildings with a local significance that would not be widely recognized outside the Monterey Peninsula area. Though incentives for preservation are also awarded to H-2 ranked properties, the ultimate decision to maintain and preserve such structures lies with the property owner rather than the city.

Interpretation and Preservation

Today, California State Parks owns the majority of the original Monterey Colonial style structures still extant in Monterey and has organized them into a loose district known as the Monterey State Historic Park. As noted above, the park includes such structures as the Cooper-Molera Adobe and the Custom House, as well as the Larkin House, Casa Soberanes, and Pacific House. These are the most important and best promoted Monterey Colonial style buildings in Monterey, however, many other buildings of the type also exist and are primarily owned by the City

of Monterey or the Monterey History and Art Association. The Monterey Historic Park also maintains some buildings that are not of the Monterey Colonial style, such as California's First Theater and the Stevenson House. Though these do not contribute directly to this study of the Monterey Colonial style, they do lend an element of cultural and architectural context that enriches the inherent traits of the Monterey Colonial style buildings.

The Monterey Historic Park encompasses much of current downtown Monterey. Admirably, the historic buildings have not been relocated to serve the cohesiveness of the park, but sit in their original locations and are interspersed among more modern buildings of various styles and uses. In fact, the historic buildings are enhanced, in many cases, by their proximity to Monterey Revival style buildings that pay homage to the historic style and show further evolution of Monterey architecture. Thus, the city has a diverse collection of buildings, all of which compliment and contrast each other.

The fact that the buildings have not been relocated is one major credit toward their physical preservation. The buildings are generally kept in pristine condition, with all finishes and details well maintained. From all observations, the basic steps necessary to maintain historic adobe buildings have been taken, and should be approached as a comprehensive plan in the future care of these buildings. Both exterior

and interior walls are covered with liberal coats of plaster and whitewash, while all wood elements (including the interior timber framework elements) are painted or otherwise finished, which will protect them from rot and decay. (Figure 52) Few cracks are visible, and it is likely that they have been patched and concealed. Most historic adobe buildings experience severe cracking, which can affect the structural integrity of the walls, so it is important that this type of damage will continue to be monitored and addressed as necessary. Because the buildings are located in an urban setting the drainage around the structures is also positively addressed. Gutters and drains that are typical of city streets keep water from standing against the foundations and walls of these adobe structures, whose earthen composition is particularly susceptible to water erosion.

The roofs of the Monterey Colonial style buildings have likely experienced at least one replacement, in the cases of those structures with wood shingle roofs. Clay tile roofs, like those on the Custom House, appear to be original, but have a much longer duration than shingle roofs. Many of the houses were inhabited well into the twentieth century and due to this, roof care and replacement occurred on an individual basis, rather than as part of the maintenance regime of the Monterey State Historic Park. Despite this, roofs should continue to be regularly maintained. Identifying and repairing leaks should be a particular goal,

as water infiltration of the structure can lead to rotting of structural wood elements and erosion of the adobe walls. Positive roof drainage is only a minor issue in Monterey Colonial style buildings. They typically have simple roof forms with few valleys to create weak points, and they do not have the same problems as many traditional adobe buildings that have flat parapet roofs. The warm, dry California climate also means that truly severe, wet weather is of little consequence to the buildings of Monterey, though the broad overhanging eaves of the Monterey Colonial style ensure that water is conducted away from the walls of the structures, as was intended by their design. Therefore gutters, which were not original to the architecture, are not necessary to protect it in its historical state.

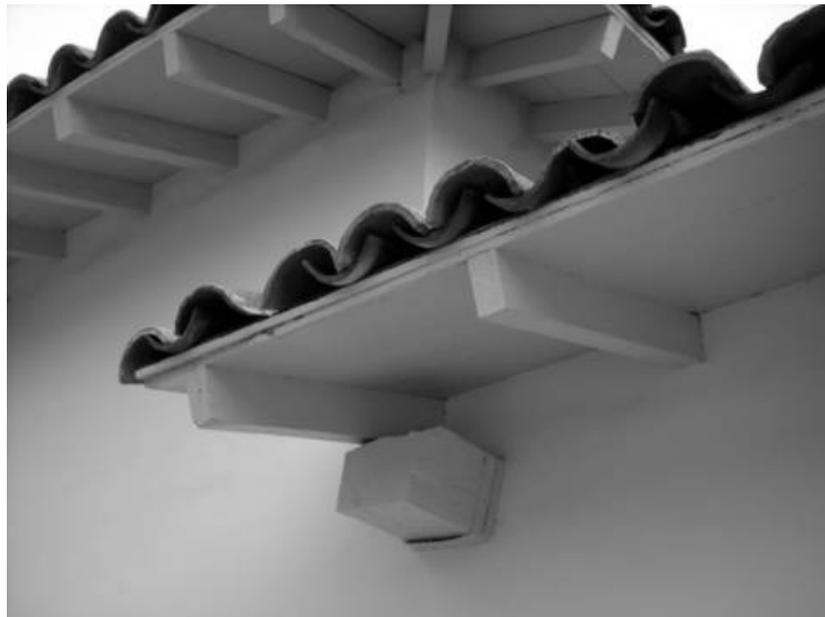


FIGURE 52: Eave detail, Custom House, showing good maintenance of structure and finishes. Photo by author.

The interiors of the Monterey State Historic Park structures have largely been returned to a historic appearance that reflects their period of significance. Of course, because they were in private ownership and inhabited in more modern times, certain elements have experienced change that is difficult to reverse. One example is a modern fireplace and hearth that was added to the north room of the Larkin house by one of Larkin's heirs, when the room (originally Larkin's shop) was converted into a dining room. On almost the opposite extreme, however; some elements, like an iron ceiling hook, were sensitively maintained by those same owners who wished to exhibit the history of their house and family. While it is serendipitous that such details have been preserved, it is unfortunate that modern additions remain. In some ways, elements like the hearth demonstrate the evolution of the building's architecture and use. In comparison to the importance of a single 30-year span in the building's history, however; the broader development of the architecture would seem to hold less significance than the more focused span of time that is associated with events and people that influenced the style. This then becomes a matter of interpretation, wherein the way the architecture is presented to visitors should be well structured and make definite differentiation between elements of different eras.

Interpretation of the Monterey State Historic Park and its buildings begins with walking tour maps (Figure 53), produced and

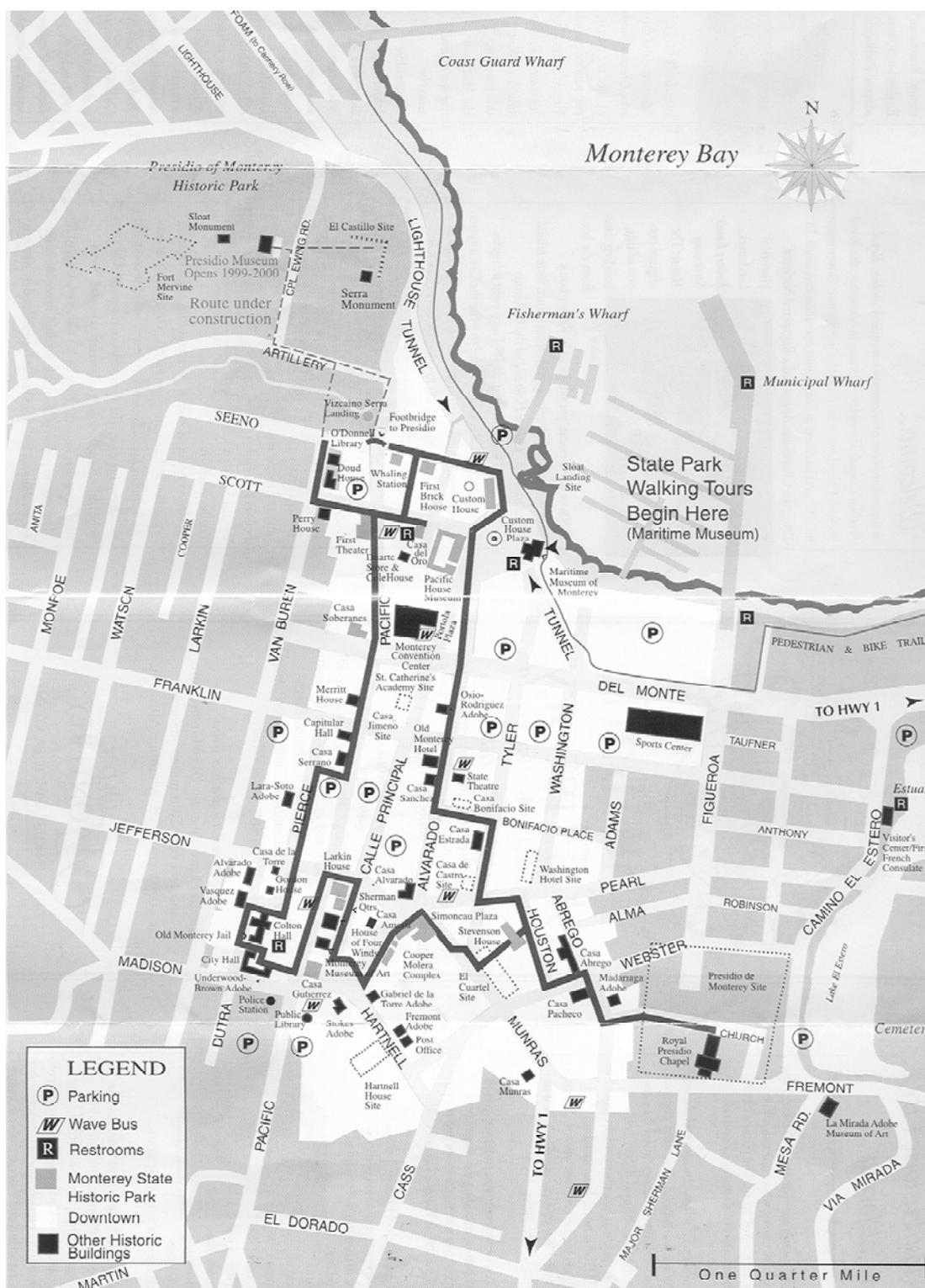


FIGURE 53: Monterey State Historic Park “Path of History” map. Source: California State Parks. *Exploring Old Monterey: The Path of History Walking Tour* (pamphlet/map), (Monterey, CA: California State Parks. 1998.)

distributed by California State Parks and Recreation. They direct visitors on a circuitous path through downtown Monterey that passes each historic building in turn. The heart of the Historic Park is located at Custom House Plaza. This open pedestrian space is located near the waterfront at the north end of Calle Principal, the main street of town. It is surrounded by Pacific House, the Custom House and the Maritime Museum of Monterey, which is housed in a modern building that sensitively mirrors some of the same architectural elements that are seen in Pacific House, across the plaza. (Figure 54)



FIGURE 54: Custom House Plaza, at the center of the Monterey State Historic Park.
Photo by author.

Within Pacific House, California State Parks has designed a visitors' center that interprets the cultural history of Monterey, as well as the architectural history of the various Monterey Colonial style structures that make up the park. Though the museum arrangement

within Pacific House largely obscures the original plan and circulation through the building's interior, a few preservation displays have been included to interpret the construction and architecture of Pacific House. Portions of dissected walls have been left exposed to demonstrate the adobe and wood construction, and the various layers of plaster that have been used to coat the walls over time. In one instance, some of the construction evolution is depicted at the corner of a door opening, where the height of the lintel is shown to have changed. Severed ends of the original lintel remain in the wall, while a newer lintel is seen installed at a higher level. Red brick infill surrounds the newer lintel, while adobe brick surrounds the rest of the door. (Figure 55) This sensitivity to interpreting the technical aspects of construction in the Monterey Colonial style are made more acceptable in this building where interpretation for the park as a whole is the main purpose. Pacific House remains basically intact, with little intrusive or irreversible alterations made in the name of interpretation. Meanwhile, the other historic buildings in the park are left to stand in near perfectly preserved states.

Another concession to the interpretation of preservation efforts can be found in the Cooper-Molera adobe, where one of the first floor rooms in the house has been preserved in a partially dismantled and un-restored state. (Figure 56) The floor has been excavated, the walls stripped and the adobe structure exposed, while decorative elements like

the fireplace mantle have been left intact. In this room, metal X-bracing can also be observed on one wall, showing the efforts that have gone into maintaining and reinforcing the structure, particularly in regards to seismic issues. This shows California State Park's attention to the preservation of the Monterey Colonial style buildings in the park, which results in the high level of care and pristine condition they can be found in today.



FIGURES 55 & 56: Detail of wall dissection in Pacific House showing structural changes (left). Unrestored room in Cooper-Molera Adobe, illustrating preservation and interpretation methods used by California State Parks. Photos by author.

In its mission to interpret the history of these buildings for the public, California State Parks offers a guided walking tour of Old Monterey. In addition, Pacific House and the Custom House are open regularly to visitors. The Larkin House, Casa Soberanes, and the

Cooper-Molera Adobe are also open at specific times for guided tours, lead by California State Parks docents. The tours given by such guides attempt to relate the history and culture of Monterey. They do not focus intently on the architecture, however; and do not approach any technicalities of structure or preservation. They superficially acknowledge the merits of the Monterey Colonial style as they relate to the individuals who built and lived in specific buildings, but the full impact of the revolution enacted upon California architecture is not fully achieved.

Interpretation could be strengthened through the explanation of the architecture both structurally and stylistically. Culture and history already seems to be a strong focus of the Park's program and it could be argued that the discussion of subjects like stylistic influences from New England, Spain, and the South would add depth to that cultural understanding rather than detract from it. This in turn might lead to the discussion of physical elements in the architecture that come from different cultures. In the end, the true dichotomy of Monterey society and its subsequent homogenizing (in some part due to the built environment) would be more deftly achieved through the vehicle of the architecture. The fact that the physical evidence would be present for visitors to relate to would make the history that much more vibrant.

The Monterey Colonial Legacy

The Monterey Colonial style was wildly popular during its period of significance in Monterey. That period of significance was relatively short-lived, however, and by 1860 had largely declined, leaving its physical manifestation behind in the form of venerable façades.

Though its period of significance was short and its geographic location quite restricted, the Monterey Colonial Style came to represent California architecture in general. When not referring to the famed missions, the other architectural style most commonly referenced is the Monterey Colonial style, despite the fact that traditional Mexican adobe houses were far more numerous and spread generously throughout the region. Yet, when many people envision the common built environment of “Old California”, they think of the romanticized haciendas and ranchos, gracious buildings with ample verandas, spreading eaves, and mellow adobe walls. They think of the Monterey Colonial style house, set in a shaded garden with bougainvilleas climbing the walls, rather than what was, realistically, most common. That is, the long, low, humble adobe, often set on a dusty and sparsely vegetated hillside overlooking a spread of arid ranch land.

It was this romanticism and pastoral idealism that is depicted in the majority of early 20th century writing about California and its

architecture. This reflects the intrigue that Californians had at that time, particularly in the 1920s and 1930s, with recreating the richness of old Spanish California. It was a mixture of California's scenic beauty, rather luxurious lifestyle, and rich cultural history that directly resulted in the revival of the Monterey Colonial style, commonly called the Monterey Revival style. In a time when many traditional styles were being resurrected and reinterpreted all over the nation, it is no surprise that a style symbolic of California's romance would be revived as well. In this way, a style that once symbolized success and prosperity came to symbolize romance and luxury in its second life. The two ideals are linked by a common sense of personal fulfillment; however, the first had a survivalist overtone exhibited by pioneers in the rugged West, while the latter was an expression of enjoyment of the rewards reaped by descendants of those pioneers, or those who fancied themselves such.

The Monterey Revival style spread farther than its archetype and can be found throughout the West and into the South, including Texas and Missouri. It exhibits many of the same traits as the Monterey Colonial style, including a two-story form with a low-pitched gable or hipped roof, and the trademark double verandas. (Figures 57 and 58) A certain sense of modern interpretation marks the revival style, however. Though cantilevered verandas were occasionally found in the Monterey Colonial style and were technically feasible, they were even more popular

in the Monterey Revival style, where both the veranda deck and roof would be cantilevered and free of any supporting posts. In some ways, this created cleaner lines that represented modernity, however, when historical – or what may, at the time, have been termed quaint, rustic or picturesque – emphasis was desired the revival style too, would often be fitted with porch posts. These would sometimes be turned or adorned with decorative brackets, which the true Monterey Colonial style would not have exhibited.



FIGURE 57: Monterey Revival style house in Long Beach, California. Photo by author.

The Monterey Revival style was rarely made of adobe and wood frame as the Monterey Colonial style was. These were primitive materials that could be easily and affordably replaced by wood platform framing or sometimes brick construction. As a result, exterior walls exhibited more diverse finishes. Lap siding became prevalent in the Monterey Revival

style, and often first and second stories would be differentiated from each other by different types of siding. Wood over brick was a popular combination. As in the Monterey Colonial style, paired windows and doors, were common. Shutters were also a typical decorative feature, though they were aesthetic rather than functional.⁹



FIGURE 58: Monterey Revival style house in Long Beach, California. Photo by author.

In its entirety, the Monterey Revival style prevailed from about 1925 through the 1950s. It is noted, however, that earlier forms of the style, those built from 1925 to 1940, seemed to favor the Hispanic influences seen in the Monterey Colonial style and duplicated these most readily, while later Monterey Revival style buildings emphasize the New England Colonial traits instead.¹⁰

In Monterey today, many Monterey Revival style buildings can be seen lining the streets. A certain exception must be made in dating

these structures, however, for the overriding sense of history and architectural context in the city seems to have separated itself from the evolution of trends in building. In most regions, the Monterey Revival style may have lasted for a couple of decades during the mid 20th century, however, in Monterey, itself, it persists and continues to be popular today. Both modern houses and commercial buildings have been built in the Monterey Revival style, and though they are easily differentiated from the historic buildings they imitate, the important purpose of their style is fulfilled. They recall the rich history of the town in which they stand and keep alive a stylistic tradition that is indicative of two cultures that came together in Monterey and are represented strongly to this day. They recall the symbolism that Monterey Colonial style buildings possessed and enforce a sense of prosperity and sentiment of pride in Monterey. (Figures 59 and 60)

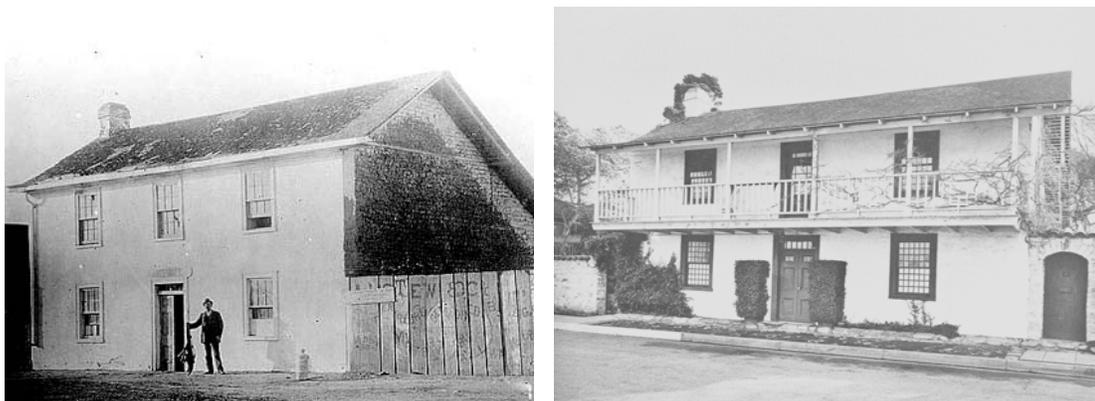


FIGURES 59& 60: Monterey Revival style commercial buildings in Monterey. Photos by author.

There was also a unique half-breed of the Monterey Colonial style that resulted between the period of significance and the revival of the style. It could be viewed as a continuation of the Monterey Colonial style, because it involved the conversion of many preexisting buildings of other architectural types; however, it occurred well after the style's period of significance, which sets the development apart from the original movement.

One example of this intermediary following is found in the Whaling Station. This building was constructed circa 1850 by Englishman, David Wight, and was used as headquarters for the Monterey Whaling Company¹¹ or possibly as a boarding house for Portuguese whalers who worked out of Monterey.¹² The building was a two story, salt-box shaped, adobe structure from its initial construction, but did not possess the characteristic veranda element of the Monterey Colonial style. (Figure 61) This was not added until after 1879 and possibly not until 1903¹³, placing the stylistic conversion at a time when neither the Monterey Colonial style, nor the Monterey Revival style were prominent. (Figure 62)

Another building of this type is the Vasquez Adobe (Figure 63), which appears to be an authentic Monterey Colonial style residence. It was originally, however; a one-story adobe house belonging to Delores Vasquez, the sister of a notorious Monterey bandit. It remained such



FIGURES 61 & 62: The Whaling Station. Left: In 1879 as a simple two-story adobe. Right: After conversion to the Monterey Colonial style. Sources: *HABS inventory*, Library of Congress, Prints and Photograph Division, Washington, D.C., May 1962./ O'Donnell, Mayo Hayes. *Monterey's Adobe Heritage*. (Monterey, California: Monterey Savings and Loan Association, 1965.)

until many years later when Louis W. Hill, the son of a famous railroad baron, bought the property and added the second story and verandas to create a Monterey Colonial style building.¹⁴ This would have occurred after 1900, most likely, thus making the Vasquez Adobe another Monterey building that paid tribute to the Monterey Colonial style without any influence from any popular trends of the time.

Both these examples show a continuation of the Monterey Colonial type throughout history from the mid-1800s to the present day; however, there are definite differentiations and variations as the timeline progresses. This denotes a continued appreciation of the Monterey Colonial aesthetics, but enforces a strict period of significance for the original manifestation of the style.



FIGURE 63: Vasquez Adobe, a continuation of the Monterey Colonial style. Source: O'Donnell, Mayo Hayes. *Monterey's Adobe Heritage*. Monterey, California: Monterey Savings and Loan Association, 1965.

Notes:

¹ Hata, Nadine Ishitani, *The Historic Preservation Movement in California, 1940-1976*. (USA: California Department of Parks and Recreation/Office of Historic Preservation, 1992.) 5.

² Office of Historic Preservation, California Department of Parks and Recreation, *California Historical Landmarks*. (California Department of Parks and Recreation: Sacramento, CA, 1990), xi.

³ Hannaford, Donald R. and Revel Edwards, *Spanish Colonial or Adobe Architecture of California, 1800 – 1850*. (Stamford, CT: Architectural Book Publishing Company, Inc., 1931, 1990), i.

⁴ Hata, 25-26.

⁵ Ibid., 266.

⁶ Ibid., 108.

⁷ Ibid., 246.

⁸ City of Monterey, City Planning, July 12 2004, available from <http://www.monterey.org/commdevelop/planning/historic.html>; accessed July 14 2004.

⁹ McAlester, Virginia and Lee, *A Field Guide to American Houses*. (Alfred A. Knopf: New York, 2003), 431.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Koue, A. Louis. *HABS inventory, CAL-144: (Old) Whaling Station*, Library of Congress, Prints and Photograph Division, Washington, D.C. 20540, May 1962.

¹² O'Donnell, Mayo Hayes. *Monterey's Adobe Heritage*. (Monterey, California: Monterey Savings and Loan Association, 1965), 2.

¹³ Koue.

¹⁴ O'Donnell, 4.