3/2/38.

Historic
Houses
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F23]

Monterey
Old Customs House Museum

Fairbanks, Harold W. California
N. York Macmillan
1903.

pp. 71-72.

Map. Monterey and Vicinity.

Monterey and Surroundings — Great historic interest centres about the town of Monterey, the old Mexican capital of California. The custom-house, from which Commodore Sloat hauled down the Mexican flag, is still standing. There are also other adobe buildings of historic interest. Here we see plainly the influence of physiography upon the growth of cities. Monterey, though founded before San Francisco, and for a time the capital and second city in importance, owing to its better

isolated position and lack of easy communication with the interior has felt but little the influences of those causes which made San Francisco a great city.

3/1/38

17 Hausler.

Berk Lib

Monterey
Larkin - Hausler.
Abrego - Soberanes

Elbredge, Zoeth Skinner History of California.
Vol. 3.

p 278

It was not learned until June 1st that congress had adjourned without taking any action to provide either a territorial or other government for California, and on June 3d Riley issued his proclamation calling a convention. . . .

p 279

The proclamation thus ignored the delegates already selected, if not elected by the meetings held at San José, San Francisco, Sacramento, and other places; insisted on the observation of laws already in force, and asked for the election of certain officers known only to those laws; and for reasons it was received with disfavor in some quarters.

p 282. Elections were held in all the districts on August 1st and the delegates began to arrive in Monterey on the day appointed for the assembling of the convention. The town was but poorly provided to entertain them. There was nothing like a hotel, nor very much resembling a restaurant in it. Its twelve or fifteen hundred inhabitants were hospitably inclined, as they had ever been, though few could entertain strangers for the month or more that the convention was likely to be in session, without serious inconvenience. The houses of Thomas O. Larkin, late United States Consul, Don José Abrego, who had been treasurer when Pio Pico was governor, and Don José Soberanes, were the most commodious in town, and as comfortably provided as any in the territory; but the Californians

3/1/38

19

Bank Lib
[Ref. C
979.4
E L24h
V 3]

Monterey
Larkin - Abrego -
Soberanes - Houses
and others.

Eldredge, Zoeth Skinner History of California.
Vol. 3.

p 282 Cont'd

were noted for having large families,# and even those whose houses were largest, had but little room unoccupied. The home of Doña Augustias Jimeno, that daughter of Captain José de la Guerra of Santa Barbara whose beauty and varied accomplishments Dana had praised so enthusiastically a dozen years earlier, was the center of attractions. She was now about thirty-five years of age, and had a daughter almost or perhaps quite as attractive as herself. Bayard Taylor says her house was regularly given up, in great part, to the American

Officers who visited the fort, and they were always welcome guests at her table. Were the leading members of the convention, both American and Spanish, more frequent visitors. Mr Larkin made a point of taking one member to lunch and one to dinner with him every day while the convention sat, although his wife was an invalid.

Foot note.

One man was pointed out to Bayard Taylor in Monterey, as the father of thirty-six-children, and Mr. Hartnell, who was translator for the convention, twenty one.

Señor Abrego frequently invited a number of guests for an evening. His home held a piano - the only one, apparently, in town - and one evening when Bayard Taylor was of the company, he heard a lady from Sydney, Australia,

21

3/11/38

Hausler

Berk. Lib

Monterey
Larkin - Abrigo
and others.

Eldredge, Zoeth Skinner History of California.
vol. 3

p 283.

play Non Fiu Mesta with a great deal of taste.

Everybody attending the convention, whether as delegates or otherwise - except a very few who had come by ship - had come to Monterey on horseback, and had brought their baskets or Mexican serapes, rolled in which they had slept under the trees on the way, and could, if need be, sleep in the open while they remained. ... Bayard Taylor, who arrived about the middle of the session, found opportunity to spread his blanket on the floor of the quarter master's warehouse, an acquaintance

furnishing that privilege, but he soon withdrew to the friendly shadow of a pine tree on Point Pinos, where his slumbers were less disturbed by crawling pests. It is quite possible, and indeed almost certain, that some of the constitution makers took their rest amid similar surroundings, at least for a time after reaching the capital. It was not necessary to do so during the whole session, for Taylor says that during his stay of four weeks, "several houses were built, half a dozen stores opened and four hotels established, one of which was kept by a Chinaman." The first hotel to be ready had no roof on it when the first of the delegates appeared. It was built by an Italian tinsmith who had arrived only four years earlier with no capital. He had borrowed a few sheets of tin, or obtained them on credit, and began the manufacture of tin cups.

(23) Historic Houses

Berk Lib
[Ref. e
979.4
EL24h
v111]

Monterey
Larkin + Abrego -
Soleranes - and others.

Eldredge, Zoeth Skinner History of California.
Vol. 3.

p 284.

which had sold readily and at good profit, particularly after the gold discovery. He was now rated as worth $ 50,000 and his hotel, as soon as it was habitable, rented for $1,200 per month. It was call the Washington House, and was kept by an ex private in the Stevenson regiment. Some of his guests paid as much as $ 200 per month for single rooms.

Several restaurants sprang up during the convention. Their proprietors were for the most part Mexicans and the cooks Indians. They furnished meals at $1 each. The variety of dishes supplied was not large but the

but the quantity was abundant. Usually, according to Taylor, "there was an olla of boiled beef with cucumbers and corn, an asado of beef and red pepper, a guisado of beef and potatoes, and two or three cups of execrable coffee." . . .

On Saturday, September 1st, the day appointed for beginning the session, only ten delegates had arrived, but on Monday a quorum was present and the preliminary work of the convention began.

It assembled in that new stone building which Reverend Walter Colton, the first American alcalde in California had erected by using "the labor of convicts, the taxes on rum, and the banks of the gamblers." The lower story was divided into school

25

3/11/38 BEG.

Historic Houses
Monterey
Larkin + Abrego -
Sobranes +

Eldredge, Zoeth Skinner History of California
Vol. 3.

p 284 Cont'd

rooms and above them was a hall thirty by sixty feet in size designed for public meetings. Across this a temporary railing had been thrown which divided the members from the spectators. Inside this railing the members were seated at four long tables, while the presiding officer occupied a rostrum at the further end, over which were suspended two American flags, and what Bayard Taylor described as "an extraordinary picture of Washington, evidently the work of a native artist." Light was furnished for the evening sessions,

which were held with some regularity, by tallow candles held in candle-sticks - one or two of which are preserved in the museum at Golden Gate Park - and in chandeliers of no very elaborate construction. A door in the middle of the hall opened on a small square balcony supported by four pillars, to which the members occasionally retired to get a breath of fresh air and enjoy the view of the harbor.

. . . .

p285 Six of the forty-eight members were native Californians, and three others though born abroad had lived a long time, in California, married California wives, spoke the Spanish language like natives, and did not readily understand English. Abel Stearns, an American, had

27

3/1/38

Historic Houses Monterey

Bank Lib

Ref. C
979.4
E L24h
V 3

Larkin - Abrego -
Sobranes and others

Eldredge, Zoeth Skinner History of California
Vol. 3

p 286 Cont'd

been in the country twenty years, Hugo Reid, a Scotchman, sixteen years, Thomas O. Larkin, also an American, sixteen years, and John A. Sutter, a Swiss, ten years.

Stearns and Reid had California wives. . . . . .

p 290.

As several members of the convention, particularly among those from the south, were Spaniards and Mexicans, and did not readily understand English, it was voted to employ an interpreter and translator for their benefit, and W. E. P. Hartnell was chosen for the

position. William G. Marcy, a son of the late secretary of war, and recently an assistant in the quartermaster's department in Monterey, was chosen secretary, with Caleb Lyon and J. G. Field as his assistants. J. Ross Browne was employed as reporter. A sergeant-at-arms and a doorkeeper were also chosen.

p 294

California was the most valuable part of the territory acquired as the result of the war.

. . . .

p377 A series of acts providing for the incorporation of cities and towns was passed and special charters were granted to San Francisco, Sacramento, Los Angeles, San José Monterey, Santa Barbara, San Diego, Sonoma, and Benicia.

p 379.

Congress had extended the revenue laws over the state by the act

19

3/1/38

Historic Houses Monterey
Berk Lib Larkin - Abrego -
[Ref. e 979.4 E L 24 h v. 3] Soberanes and others.

Eldredge, Zoeth Skinner History of California.
Vol. 3

p379 Cont'd

of March 3, 1849,

although it had passed no act for the benefit of its people. They were now required to pay taxes from which they got, and were to get, no benefit until congress could take further action. San Francisco had been made a port of entry; Monterey, San Diego and "Rio Colorado" ports of delivery. James Collier had been appointed collector, and he had arrived and established his office in November. Riley had turned over all that remained of the civil fund to the general government, and the only resource of the state was in taxes or in loans.