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OLD LOBERO THEATER - SANTA BARBARA COUNTY

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OLD LOBERO THEATER

When José Lobero's enthusiasm for classical music inspired the citizens of Santa Barbara, to organize a group or community theater in 1872, thereby pioneering such a venture in California, he all unknowingly continued a tradition and added a new link to the long chain of pageantry and symbolic art of that region. He lived in a territory, whose history was rich in the production and appreciation of community drama. In honor and veneration of the past, its heroes, knaves and saints lived again. The same may be said of Santa Barbara; as Fr. Engelhardt wrote of the mission church there:[1]

> ...long before the Anglo-Saxon breed came you can see the tally of vanquished generations - the heavy boot of the conquistador; the sandaled feet of the padre; the high heel of a dainty Spanish-born lady; the bare horny sole of the Indian convert - each of them taking its tiny toll out of stone and mortar - each of them wearing away its infinitesimal mite....

Indian and early Spanish life, each with its distinctive culture, art and ceremonial religion played its part, long before the United States conquest which, in itself, is one of the world's most dramatic episodes.

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1. Charles Anthony Engelhardt (Father Zephyrin), Santa Barbara Mission, 454.

The California Indian everywhere, welcomed the first white men as friends, provided them with food and also entertained them with dance and chant. Like all primitive art, that of the native Indian was mystic with loosely defined religious connotations. Every season, planting, harvest, birth, death, the spirits controlling the elements, were invoked and each had its proper ceremonial. These tableaux were presented before the whole village, and in some manner taken part in by all.[2] The dancing, singing, and reciting were not mere social relaxation as exercised by the modern youth; rather they were the dramatic projections of a theme. The theme might be a plea, to the supernatural powers, and again it might be the honoring of the heroic dead, or expressing hospitality to welcome guests. Each actor had his or her prescribed costume, every part of which, had its conventionalized meaning. Every pattern of the dance, every chant and drumbeat their special part to tell. The performance was the natives' dramatic expression, played outdoors, the first community theater.

When Portolá's expedition traveled north in 1769, in search of Monterey Bay, everywhere it was met by natives, who offered food and entertainment. Luckily for history,

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2. Alice Fletcher, Indian Games and Dances With Native Songs, Introduction, also 3-9.

this expedition had a second diarist who, besides the friar, recorded the events of the long journey. Many, of the first priests, condemned mtive ceremonials as devil's dances. Miguel Costansó, the engineer for the expedition, became fascinated by the native arts and recorded his appreciation of them. On August 31, the expedition reached where Santa Barbara now stands. He writes:[3]

> We discovered an Indian village by the side of a moderately large pond surrounded by low hills.... They honored us with a dance, and it was the first place where we saw women dance. Two of these excelled the others; they had a bunch of flowers in their hands, and accompanied the dance with various graceful gestures and movements without getting out of time in their songs.
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> We called the place Rancheria del Baile de las Indias which meant the village of dancing maidens.

Unfortunately for the engineer, the place had already been named in honor of the martyred Saint Barbara, away back in 1602. However, that did not rob Costansó, of the pleasure of being the first white man, in California, to describe pageantry, variety and ballet, as performed by California Indians.

The early Spanish explorers, as well as the founders of California were Catholics, who came here under the

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3. Miguel Constansó, "Diary of Miguel Constansó," Academy of Pacific Coast History, II, 53.

express command of the King, to Christianize the country. Every expedition contained one or more priests or friars, who at every opportunity put up a bower to shelter a temporary altar. The officiating priest put on his church vestments, brought out the sacred symbols and utensils; he then chanted and said the mass for the benefit of the expedition's members, while the Indians watched as spectators. This, too, was religious drama. When the missions were founded, they became the center of community life and in most places in California were the only settlements. Twenty-one missions were founded in the state and but four towns or pueblos. The mission church, like the cathedral of the Mediaeval Age, was the social as well as the religious center for the people. On holy days, harvest season and whenever it was felt, by the Franciscan friar in charge of the mission to be an appropriate time for relaxation, morality plays and pageants were staged, for the purpose of teaching and entertaining Spaniard and Indian alike.

Many of the old religious plays came from Spain, brought first to Mexico, where they had been played for over two hundred years and were slowly changed and adapted, to the native scene and understanding.[4] From there, they were

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4. Nellie Van de Grift Sanchez, Spanish Arcadia, 309; Helen Elliott Bandini, History of California, 99; Elizabeth Temple Allison, Shakespeare on the San Francisco Stage, 1.

brought to California. Some plays were created by Mexicans and at least one, by a California missionary.

There were many mystery or religious plays. Perhaps most popular of all was Los Pastores; it describes the efforts of the shepherds, to go to the manger and worship the new born Jesus. Lucifer tries unsuccessfully to circumvent them. This play was presented from San Diego to Sonoma, and acting parts were taken by such prominent people, as Governor Pico and the Vallejos of Sonoma. These plays or ceremonies often started with a mass followed by processions and feasts, all together forming one continuous play or pageant. The play was given with all reverence, within or just without the church, after which it was often reproduced, not as a purely religious ceremony, but still using the same general theme. The second time interpolations were made; much buffoonery was introduced. It became the people's play and often went from rancho to rancho for several performances.[5]

Major Bell, who for many years lived in Santa Barbara, describes the feast of Corpus Christi, with its religious observances merging into the secular performance by the laity.[6] The betrayal by Judas Iscariot is the theme,

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5. For more information regarding Spanish-Californian theatricals: Sanchez, Spanish Arcadia, 308-309; R. M. Cole, Los Pastores; Donald Fay Robinson, Miracle Plays; Preface and Chapter IX; Bandini, History of California, 99.
6. Major Horace Bell, Reminiscences of a Ranger, 295-296.

after which the crowd celebrates with almost carnival spirit.

Perhaps no California city, in the 1870's, had a more romantic and colorful history, or a more peculiarly endowed and receptive citizenry for community theatricals than Santa Barbara. It had ample tradition and folklore from which to weave plots for pageantry and drama. Its history encompassed the period, from the arrival of Cabrillo's little caravel in 1542, first to sail past its coast, to the visit of Vizcaíno in 1602. One hundred and eighty years later it became a royal pueblo, and within another decade, a mission bearing the same name was founded, rich in lore and architectural beauty. Mexican sovereignty followed the fall of the Spanish rule. The unwarlike Indian, became the white man's burden bearer; the don stocked the hills with countless cattle; the Boston ship captain-trader brought staples and finery, and carried away the hides and tallow. Politics, civil war, drought, earthquake, pastoral life with a benevolent feudal pattern, was followed by conquest, the gold rush, subdivision of the great ranches, the influx of a heterogeneous population - all within eighty years, before José Lobero built his theater.

Exploration, wars, and pioneering furnished material for historic dramas. The mission, which dominated the community before its secularization, gave place and theme for morality plays. The story of Canon Perdido (Lost Cannon)

Street furnished material for comedy.[7] Nor did Santa Barbara lack material for sweet pathos in the traditional story of Apolinaria Lorenzana, whose lover died.[8] She took the vow without becoming a nun, and spent the rest of her life teaching and performing acts of mercy. She became the confidante of the lovelorn, friend of the sick and the poor. For over half a century she traveled between Santa Barbara and San Diego, comforting the "sorrows" of high and low. She planted the famous grapevine at Montecito, which grew to be the largest in the world. By the pious of California, she was reverently referred to as La Beata, the beatified.

The United States conquest furnished added scope, for bombastic heroics. Fremont, at the head of his California Battalion, composed in part of longhaired mountain men, dressed in buckskin and painted savages under Kit Carson, camped in Santa Barbara on his way south, in 1846.

In 1872, when José Lobero opened his theater, in Santa Barbara, over half his potential patrons were Spanish-Mexicans, by national origin and culture. From them and their traditions, naturally should have come many of the

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7. J. M. Guinn, "El Canon Perdido," Historical Society of Southern California Quarterly, V, 243-253.
8. Charles Howard Shinn, "Pioneer Spanish Families in California," Century Magazine, January 1891; H. H. Bancroft, History of California, II, 169; Mrs. Yda Addis Storke, A Memorial and Biographical History of Santa Barbara, 92.

themes for his plays and operas, many of the players and a large part of his patronage. Much of the pomp and chivalry of the early days, still clung to the Latin-Californians. Almost all could sing, or play some musical instrument. All loved pageantry in religion, in social affairs and even in their daily life. Every christening and marriage became a sort of community festival.[9] Sweethearts were serenaded with song and guitar. The routine of riding the range was made romantic. Horses were spirited. Saddles were engraved and silver-mounted. The rider's boots, hat and dress were picturesque as well as useful. Every relationship in life was softened with ceremonial politeness, which gave place and dignity to even the most humble, and definitely enhanced the sense of personality. Life was violent, healthy and extremely practical, but it was lived, as if the world were a stage. Yes, Santa Barbara had the traditions, the setting, players and audience at hand for community pageantry, musical and dramatic productions.

The confusion resulting from the conquest, of California by the United States, was further increased by the discovery of gold, in January 1848. Whole villages and regions were almost depopulated, by the wholesale exodus to the placer fields. Santa Barbara, far to the south of the

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9. Richard Henry Dana, Jr., Two Years Before the Mast ... 247, 405.

mines, suffered less in this respect than localities farther north, yet many men left. After the peak of the hysteria had passed, the staid old town received an influx of people, from almost every state in the union and representatives of almost every nation. This threatened to change the whole culture and social texture, of this typically Spanish-Mexican pueblo. The backwash from the mines brought a few successful miners with money to invest, but it also brought gamblers, shrewd moneylenders, criminals, and many others, who were rough, boisterous and untutored. Santa Barbara under Spain and later under Mexico, had heretofore maintained an atmosphere of refinement, social formalism, decorous behavior, and at the same time its people took their pleasures graciously.[10] The Latin-Californians were not entirely engulfed, but the new people with varied ideas and characteristics, confused the art atmosphere and left it without direction.

No longer were the mystery plays, or the music of the mission Indians, played before the devout Catholics, still a major portion, of the settlement. Fr. Duran's big music book, with its many colored notes, was laid away as a museum piece. The Anglo-Saxon men, homesick and starved for the company of women and children of their kind, grew

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10. Sanchez, California and Californians, 468; Walter A. Hawley, Early Days of Santa Barbara, 10; Bell, On the Old West Coast, 2.

sentimental over sad ballads and wildly cheered child prodigies. The rougher element wanted the so-called dance hall entertainment, of the mines and San Francisco. Bancroft says that the soldiers of Stevenson's regiment played minstrel acts, in Santa Barbara as well as in Monterey, as early as the fall of 1847. The "Spanish Company," composed mainly of native Mexican-Californians, presented old Spanish plays telling of the Moorish wars. It played up and down the coast and appeared in Santa Barbara, in October 1847.[11] "By 1851, there was scarcely a town of 1,000 inhabitants, without its hall for entertainment."[12] Music, opera and concerts unsupported by any other numbers, were dependent for support to a great extent upon the German and Hebrew audiences.[13] That perhaps partially explains José Lobero's financial failure at Santa Barbara years later. The town just did not have enough music-loving Germans and Jews, in the Seventies to support grand opera.[14] Professional entertainers dominated the old pueblo until the enthusiastic Lobero, touched with genius, marshalled the local talent into a group, determined to produce the best European instrumental and vocal music. He hoped to supplement, if not supplant, the variety bills of the

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11. Bancroft, History of California, VI, 243.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid., 245.
14. Ibid., VII, 712.

traveling theatrical companies.

The ninth census, of the United States, taken in 1860, gave Santa Barbara County a population of 2,224; the tenth, in 1870, 4,225. Less than two-thirds of these lived in the City of Santa Barbara. Over half the population was of Spanish-Mexican descent, and the men outnumbered the women at the rate of three to two. This number included 694 "foreigners" by which was meant newcomers, who were neither former Mexican citizens nor people from other sections of the United States. The people of this region were more cultured, dignified and socially refined, than any other settlement, of contemporary California.[15] It was this kind of community, which José Lobero chose as his home, and the scene for his business activities. He is reported to have opened a saloon in 1864, on the corner of Canon Perdido and State streets.[16]

Perhaps his dearest hope was, that here he would find expression, for his extraordinary range of talents. Very little is known, of the life of José Lobero, before he came to California. Previous to his arrival in Santa Barbara he had played his violin in the saloons of San Luis Obispo.[17]

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15. Sanchez, Spanish Arcadia.
16. Sophie Baylor, "Community Art Association," California Southland, 15, January 1925.
17. Michael James Phillips, History of Santa Barbara County, California, I.

That he was born in Italy, he did not deny, but he had no desire to return, to his homeland. Genoa was mentioned and once, when he was in a convivial mood he boasted of having "played in the Court orchestra, for the King of Italy." According to the custom of the Italians, Lobero wore a full beard in imitation of their heroes of liberation - Garibaldi, Victor Emmanuel II and his dashing soldier-son, later King Humbert. In youth this beard was "glossy" and "black as a raven," but in later years it turned as "white as snow."[18]

José entered into the life of the community with a joyous vim. His saloon was gay with music of voice and violin. It soon became a popular rendezvous of the vaqueros,[19] whom he regaled with fact and fantasy. The greenhorn, as the newcomer and tenderfoot was then called, was solemnly assured, that the mountains surrounding Santa Barbara, were rich in gold waiting to be extracted by all, who had the energy to prospect them.

Lobero became rich through real estate speculations.[20] His wealth, brilliant personality, coupled with his proficiency in music, soon opened for him the doors of the best homes. He could play many instruments well, but

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18. Phillips, History of Santa Barbara County, California, I.
19. Baylor, "Community Art Association," California Southland, 15, January 1925.
20. John R. Southworth, Santa Barbara and Montecito, 126.

he was at his best, on the violin. He could also sing, leading roles in opera.

Taking advantage of the natural aptitude, of the Mexican-Americans untutored in music, as well as of local talent, he soon organized an orchestra and a band, which played at funerals, weddings and festivities. Rehearsals, during this period, were held in the famous Aguirre adobe, built in 1842. This was one, of the most elaborate and expensively furnished adobes, of the time. Its owner, José Antonio Aguirre, merchant and shipowner, had long since moved to a huge ranch near San Diego.

But training and leading an orchestra and band, did not long content the gifted Lobero. A born impresario, he assembled the cast, took part, wrote, directed and produced plays and operas - all for the love of doing. Costumes and stage-sets were made under his supervision. Many of the first performances were given in the town's only auditorium, in the Sebastopol School.

Information regarding this remarkable character is meager. As to his personality, enough has survived the intervening years to picture a man of tremendous energy; a person, who fell into the spirit of the boisterous unrestrained youth, brought by the gold rush. But Lobero never for a moment lost his innate gallantry or good manners, which made him a welcome guest in the <u>salas</u> of the old aristocratic

homes. He enjoyed life, whether mingling with rough cowmen in his tavern, or dancing like a Carrillo in a ballroom. Mrs. Freyer recalls this period, and some of its personalities with a nostalgic warmth, which is contagious when she speaks of Jose:[21]

> Here was Lobero, the Genoese, with sketch-book on arm and pencil poised in readiness to fling a caricature upon the paper; springing to swing open the high gates of the Cota house to welcome the stagecoach bringing his wife's brother-in-law back from a journey. How merrily Lobero dashed down the absurdities of the homecoming! I wish I might have the luck to find that very sketch, vanished like everything else which came from his versatile mind.

But making money, having a lot of fun, furnishing entertainment in the school auditorium did not fulfil his dream. He visioned a fine opera house for this isolated community of 3,000 people, still unconnected by railroad with the rest of the state. Santa Barbara had no "place of amusement - only a little open plaza on State Street, where dances were held on Fiesta days and where strolling players stopped for a week ... and gave their variety shows under the open sky."[22] The dynamic Lobero was determined to remedy that.

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21. Elizabeth Sanderson Freyer, "A Flower From the Bouquet of Don Luis," Santa Barbara Gardener, March 1923, 1-2 of the Supplement.
22. Baylor, "Community Arts Association," California Southland, 15, January 1925.

Santa Barbara should have a place where art and pleasure lovers could sing, play, dance, present dramas and operas. He was ready to back the idea with all his ready cash, and invited help from kindred spirits. His enthusiasm spread through the town. The rich stockman, W. W. Hollister, was one of José's patrons and the heaviest contributor.[23] Many other interested friends subscribed, and later performed on the stage or vociferously applauded as members of the audience.

The old Sebastopol School, which had an auditorium, and which for many years was known as the biggest adobe hall in California, was acquired. He extended the back of the adobe building to include a large stage; at the entrance, he built a "pretentious foyer of frame structure, the interior of which was never completed."[24] José was promoter, architect, and construction superintendent. The Theatrical Guide for 1907,[25] says this stage had an opening of thirty-six feet, a depth of forty feet and was over thirty feet in height. The auditorium was given a width of seventy feet. Its seating capacity was listed as 970 in 1907, which is less than it was supposed to hold in 1872. Lobero built a horseshoe

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23. State Department of Natural Resources and the State Park Commission in Coöperation With the State Chamber of Commerce, Report No. 25, February 14, 1940.
24. Baylor, "Community Arts Association," California Southland, 15, January 1925.
25. Julius Cahn, Julius Cahn's Theater Guide, 1907, 324.

shaped balcony with pew-like seats. Its tiny proscenium boxes "gave only a partial view of the stage."[26] However, as a theater and a cooperative venture, it was an outstanding innovation in California, and was perhaps the first community theater, in the country.

There is disagreement as to the class of entertainment, which was enjoyed on the opening night. One says it was a grand ball held on February 22, 1872.[27] Another says it was a year later, and that the ball, at ten dollars a ticket, preceded the opera by twenty-four hours.[28] A third version is that the opening was made with the famous opera performance.[29] All agree in essential details, as to the musical program. Libretto and score were written and composed by Lobero. He trained and directed the orchestra, painted the stage scenery, acted as stage manager, and to climax his numerous duties, he sang the leading role! The cast was local talent, and this fact, more than the ownership of the theater was what gave rise to the present impression, that the old Lobero was a community theater, in the modern conception of the term. It differed, however, in that title to the property was in José's

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26. Baylor, "Community Arts Association," California Southland, 15, January 1925.
27. State Department of Natural Resources and the State Park Commission in Cooperation With the State Chamber of Commerce, Report No. 25, February 14, 1940.
28. Phillips, History of Santa Barbara County, I.
29. Baylor, op. cit.

name, and the programs and personnel were chosen exclusively by him and not by an art-minded group.

Although a variety of entertainment took place in the theater, and although for many years it was the center of Santa Barbara social life, Lobero lost control of the theater and ceased to take any part in its program. The facts are hazy. Collapse of real estate booms in Santa Barbara, and a falling off of patronage at his tavern, may have contributed to his failure to retain control of the opera house, in which he was heavily involved financially.

Following his eclipse, until his tragic death, the dirth of information regarding his last years, leaves them in a haze of obscurity. The story presents pictures of sudden and pathetic contrast. In one, the man dominates the dedication of the theater with a "gala" opening; the other, following in a few short years - semioblivion. Just how long, the vivacious son of Italy continued to direct the theater, accessible material does not indicate. Possibly for a few years he "continued to write, rehearse and produce plays. He acted in some of them himself, and always he drilled the excellent orchestra."[30] Lobero was never able to pay for the theater and it slipped through his hands.[31]

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30. Phillips, History of Santa Barbara County, I.
31. Baylor, "Community Arts Association," California Southland, 15, January 1925.

The building was renamed the Santa Barbara Opera House, not because it was devoted to the rendition of opera, but because in those decades, theatrical buildings were supposed to gain in fashionable exclusiveness, by such nomenclature. "It became the social center ... of the community, where many fine amateur plays were given, brilliant balls and elaborate bazars, as well as an occasional worthy road show ... and barn-storming company" appeared on its pages.[32]

The traditions, of the pioneer Spanish-Mexican families were renewed in 1890, when the Mediaeval morality play, Los Pastores, was elaborately presented. The play was produced under the direction of Enrique Ximeno and Frank (Francisco) Gutierrez. The singers were coached by another descendant of the old California families, Señora Dolores, (generally called Lola) wife of Señor José Antonio Carrillo.[33]

During the great 1886 Centennial Celebration of the founding of Santa Barbara Mission, another one of those "grand balls" was given to exclusive Santa Barbara society, at the theater which was:[34]

> decorated with perfect taste and without stint of embellishment. The balcony front was draped in Spanish colors

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32. Baylor, "Community Arts Association," California Southland, 15, January 1925.
33. Phillips, History of Santa Barbara County, I.
34. Ibid.

> of red and yellow, corresponding to the whole tone of the city. The columns and supports were trimmed with cypress, pepper and evergreen, while mingled Spanish and American colors made additionally bright the gay and festive scene.... In addition to the regular waltz and square dance, several old Spanish dances like El Son, the Jarabe, La Jota, and Sombrero Blanco were given.

Following the construction of the Potter Theater, the old opera house was not patronized and gradually fell into disuse. Leo Carrillo says, that the last performance given in the "Old Lobero," as it is still remembered, was about 1905.[35] The Theater Guide, however, lists the building as an active show house as late as 1907.

During all these events, the picturesque Lobero lived on, and much of the glamour of his personality remained. His personally directed band made its last appearance, in the "middle of the eighties, when it played at the funeral of Angela Carrillo." Financial reverses followed in rapid succession, until even his saloon was taken away from him. He worried about a $2,000 mortgage on the theater held by Lenora Mola. Early in the 1890's he was bankrupt, in abject poverty. The theater was turned over by his creditors, to the management of Herb Rodgers; only one benevolent kindness is recorded in their favor: "They let him live in his adobe

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35. Phillips, History of Santa Barbara County, I.

house."[36] He sank into obscurity. His hair and whiskers whitened and his old age was made unbearable by illness. During the last few days of his life, he was wont to saunter out from his home dressed in a long duster and wearing a sun helmet on his head.[37]

> People noticed him one day taking a long, slow walk. He went to the beach and back beyond the Arlington Hotel, nodding to the buildings and stopping once in awhile to peer unseeingly, in sad reverie.
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> Two days later, he sent his wife away on an errand, and during her absence, shot himself....

Commencing in the early eighties, the American manner of living gradually won ascendancy over the leisurely and dignified Spanish way. The newly-rich of that period, knew no other way of emphasizing their recently established position and superior social status, than by an extravagant display of wealth. It was America's most blatant and vulgar era.

Small wonder, that Lobero's art languished and that his theatrical venture failed, in an atmosphere, where the average theater goer did not know William Shakespeare from Richard Wagner. José's spirit still flamed, but found little to feed its fire in the new age. Advancing years, poverty,

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36. Phillips, History of Santa Barbara County, I.
37. Ibid.

sorrow and corroding disappointment dampened his will to continue the struggle. His genius was unable to endure the sterility of unproductiveness. He did not wait for the grim reaper, to choose the time of his coming; José anticipated him. A later and more appreciative generation, recognized his contribution to community music and drama, on October 9, 1939 the location of the Old Lobero Theater was made California State Landmark No. 361.

For a decade or more there was no theater or building in Santa Barbara, which could be classed as a center of community coöperative art. Following the example of Pasadena in 1918, a little group of Santa Barbara people organized in 1920 and produced one-act plays. These were given wherever facilities were available, generally in some school auditorium.

A more ambitious and a much broader program, of community expression was visualized, by the art-minded people of the city, which now had almost thirty thousand citizens, proud of the town's history, its beautiful surroundings and its climate. The Community Arts Association was organized in 1922.[38] Among its many subdivisions was the Drama Branch, which encouraged local talent and enthused those, who already had made a start in that line. The Carnegie Foundation

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38. California Southland, March 1923, 10; September 1923, 14; and January 1925, 15, 31.

donated $125,000 to the Arts Association, to be paid in five equal annual instalments. While this contribution was not more than partially available to the Drama Branch, it gave new impetus and courage to the local actors, who at once started the promotion of a local theater. An independent corporation was formed and its stock was sold, to the art enthusiasts of Santa Barbara. . As many of the stock purchasers transferred their holdings, to the Arts Association. It became the largest single stockholder in the new theater corporation.[39]

In the meantime, the proposed theater was only one unit in a program of reëstablishing streets and buildings of Santa Barbara, which should reflect the architecture and culture of Hispanic-California. Starting with the Old de la Guerra Adobe, as the initial building, sketches were drawn for what later became a "Street in Spain," now known as El Paseo. Its complete name is El Paseo de la Guerra. The abandoned Santa Barbara Opera House, (Old Lobero Theater), still stood at 33 Canon Perdido Street, and was included in the other end of the proposed Spanish street. It was purchased with the intention of rehabilitating the historic structure.[40]

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39. Baylor, "Community Arts Association," California Southland, 31, January 1925.
40. "El Paseo, Santa Barbara's Pathway to Beauty," California Southland, 18, March 1926.

The organizing genius, of the proposed Spanish town was Bernhard Hoffmann. James Osbourne Craig, architect, drew preliminary sketches of the buildings,which were to comprise El Paseo, but before he could prepare finished plans and specifications, he died. His widow continued to advise Mr. Hoffmann and his committee, but the detailed architectural work, for many of the buildings, was done by Carlton W. Winslow.

Engineers condemned the old Lobero frame and adobe theater as unsafe. It was wrecked and on the foundations, the new building was erected at a cost of $200,000. The architect was George Washington Smith.[41] The New Lobero Theater, as it was named, seats only 630, less than the building promoted by the enthusiastic Jose Lobero in 1872. It is of modified Spanish design, with red tile roof and warm buff walls. The ceiling is richly decorated, in Spanish colors of red, green and gold.[42] The stage is seventy-five feet wide, thirty-five feet deep and sixty feet high. There are commodious and richly decorated rooms, for actors and directors. The structure was completed and ready, for its first production, in August 1924.

Simultaneously with the construction of the theater, other buildings sprang up along El Paseo. The rehearsing at the theater, for its première inspired the idea of a city-

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41. Ellen Leech, "Old Spanish Days," California Southland, 14, September 1924.
42. Baylor, California Southland, 31, January 1925.

wide celebration. The community enthusiastically arranged for a four-day festival, which was to follow the opening of the theater. That festival, since annually repeated, has come to be known as "Old Spanish Days Fiesta." Preparations are begun weeks in advance. Men grow beards representative of the period, and all dress for the occasion in colorful costumes. Pageants, representing historic incidents and life of the romantic past, are enacted in El Paseo or in the new Santa Barbara Bowl. This full moon August festival has earned a justified national reputation, and people from all parts of California, as well as from distant sections of the United States, come to witness the beautiful spectacle.

On August 4, 1924 the Drama group of the Community Arts Association, under the direction of Miss Nina Morse, presented the satirical comedy, The Beggar on Horseback, written by Marc Connelly and George S. Kaufman. It ran to full houses for two whole weeks.[43] The initial success has been repeated again and again in the succeeding years. Speaking of the amateur players of Santa Barbara and Pasadena, Sheldon Cheney, says in reference to the construction of the two beautiful theaters that: "nothing could better indicate to the world the position they have assumed in the life of their respective cities than these extraordinary fine

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43. California Southland, August 1924.

homes."[44] After recounting the early hard struggles he continues, "now they have emerged as permanent foundations for the advancement of creative dramatic art." He then remarks on the type of play produced: "They lean to...typical Broadway" plays, "along with their Shakespeare, Shaw and O'Neill." Since Cheney wrote the above, plays, written by local people like Joaquin Murietta by Dr. C. C. Park, have been staged.[45]

The stage director, technicians and most of the actors are local residents chosen largely from the art groups and the schools, including the Santa Barbara College. Visiting artists often take the leading roles. Many of these are full-time professionals, who are finding an outlet for their talents outside of the commercial theater, being engaged by widely separated group or community dramatic organizations.[46] Occasionally outside production managers have been brought in. An exception to this is the outstanding success, as a producer, of Charles H. Meredeth, member of the faculty of Santa Barbara College.[47] In the same way, talent to design and make costumes and scenery has been found among the townspeople. The theater remains an institution for the encouragement of resident amateurs, players, directors, managers and technicians.

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44. Sheldon Cheney, The Art Theater, 81-82.
45. Theater Magazine, December 1928.
46. California Southland, 14, March 1925.
47. Little Theater Monthly, 153, February 1929.

Until 1937, the New Lobero Theater was owned by the corporation formed for its financing and management. That year title was passed to private parties, who stage commercial productions and lease the playhouse to private companies or corporations. However, provisions have been made for periodic use of the theater by the Drama Branch, local women's clubs and other community organizations.[48]

If José Lobero could return to his old haunts in Santa Barbara, he would find in place of the schoolhouse theater, a pretentious structure of Spanish design bearing the name, New Lobero Theater. He would find a plaque stating that here is the location, where José Lobero built and managed the first community theater in California. It was his vision and initiative that started a nation-wide activity, which forms a monument more impressive than the marble statues of many national heroes. His first effort was followed by the Santa Barbara Opera Company, group theatricals, the Drama Branch of the local Community Arts Association, the New Lobero Theater, the annual Fiesta, and the pageants in the Santa Barbara Bowl - all a late appreciation of community effort and coöperative talent for which Lobero laid the cornerstone almost seventy years ago.

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48. Federal Writers' Project, California: A Guide to the Golden State, 307.

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