

Monterey: History on the Half Shell

Monterey's history and heritage has many facets. The place itself is a mixture of nooks, coves, hills and woods, and spectacular views of Monterey Bay. It was California's first capital, a town steeped in traditions of adobe and fandango, and the sardine capital of the world. Its principal historical resort, the luxurious Hotel Del Monte, now the Naval Postgraduate School, was once known as the "Queen of American watering places." The people and communities who settled Monterey echo its varied land and seascape. Its diverse historic patterns are reflected in its cultural celebrations and a rich historical memory. Since Monterey's first residents, the Rumsien people encountered Spanish colonists two and half centuries ago, succeeding immigrants have brought distinctive and rich folkways. Each settled in a niche along the bay and wove their social and cultural patterns within the Monterey tapestry. Rumsien, Spanish, Mexican, British, French, Portuguese, Chinese, Italian, Japanese, Scandinavian, and many others settled to carve out a livelihood by the bay and upon its waters.

Monterey as a destination began with Spanish attempts to find a suitable Pacific port to protect and supply Spain's treasure-laden Manila galleons and a bold explorer who believed that pearls and gold must exist in California. This venture would result in the first European founding of *Monterrey* in 1602, although Sebastian Vizcaino's idealized descriptions of Monterey would lead subsequent colonizers to doubt him. Although Vizcaino failed to find pearls or, for that matter, gold, the port of Monterey became the capital of the Spanish and, later, Mexican province, -- the "pearl" of Alta California. As the official port and administrative gateway to the frontier province it would become the focus of the United States to take the capital if and when California were available to become an American possession. Monterey's history would prove that it held many and various treasures -- rich marine resources, from abalone to its fame as Sardine Capital of the World; the preservation of the its Spanish and Mexican past would celebrate Monterey as the Adobe Capital of California; and its wealth of international language schools would have it, in more recent times, designated the Language Capital of the World.

Before the European colonization, the Monterey area had been inhabited for over 3,000 years. Native Indian peoples inhabited the valleys and seaside. The Rumsien Ohlone people called the area near the Custom House, Shurista, and Presidio hill (on the American Presidio of Monterey overlooking its harbor), Hunnukul. They had lived, harvested abalone, mussels and fish from the sea and grains, acorns and seeds from meadows and hills, and hunted deer and other animals for thousand years before the first Spanish settlers. The Rumsien were the first abalone divers. Shell beads of abalone and Monterey shellfish were important items in the extensive commercial network extending east to Great Basin. It was the Rumsien knowledge of the environment that provided the early Spanish explorers the key to their survival leading to the colonization of Monterey region. As with many California Indian people, their encounter with the Spanish regime through American settlement would be devastating, yet their culture and people would survive and continue.

In November, 1542, Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo discovered the bay he named *la Bahía de los Pinos*, the Bay of Pines. He did not venture ashore. By the late 1500s, New Spain's concerns were focused on the Pacific, --in particular, the threat of English piracy against Spain's Manila galleons. With a view toward finding a port to protect and supply the galleons, the Viceroy of New Spain commissioned the ambitious Basque merchant Sebastian Vizcaino. In December 1602, Vizcaino affirmed the Spanish claim to California when he named the bay, the *Bahía de Monte Rey*, or Monterey Bay, in honor of the Viceroy, the *Conde de Monterrey* (Count of Monterrey), Spain.

The Rumsien people of Monterey would not see another European for 167 years. Vizcaino described a wondrous harbor and land place filled with numerous and vibrant native people and fabulous resources of timber for ship galleons, and more—an ideal port for the Manila galleons on their return to New Spain. That was not to be. Instead, it would not be until 1769 when the inspector general of New Spain, fearing the advancement of the Russians, would plan an expedition into the northwestern frontiers of New Spain--- California—to establish a military foothold—a presidio or fort—and a mission. Captain Gaspar de Portola' expedition moved northward to found Monterey, which he had at first failed to identify based on Vizcaino's description and his party's own faulty instruments. With a second expedition by land, and joined by Father Junipero Serra who came by sea, he founded Monterey near a giant oak tree above the beach on June 3, 1770. In 1774, the small, rudimentary presidio was named the capital of the Californias—both Alta and Baja, upper and lower. And, in 1778 it was named the capital of Spanish Alta California. In 1822, Monterey continued as the capital of the Mexican province of Alta California for most of the following years until the American takeover of Monterey on July 7, 1846, effectively ending Mexican rule of California.

The more immediate threat for the frontier outpost was not to come from Russia, but from Argentina, newly liberated from Spain. In 1818, the French born Hipolito Bouchard sailed into Monterey Bay and mounted a land and sea attack on the small garrison protecting the harbor at El Castillo (located on today's Lower Presidio Historic Park) and on the Royal Presidio (site of historic Royal Presidio Chapel), the only land-sea battle on the American Pacific Coast. The Bouchard attack on Monterey did not win any converts to rebellion against Spain. Instead, it forced the governor and the Montereyños to flee for safety inland. Finding little to plunder, the revolutionaries burned the presidio and departed.

With the Royal Presidio rebuilt and the El Castillo refortified, it was only four years later that Mexico declared its independence from Spain, making California a part of the new Mexican empire. With the secularization of the missions, the Californios, the descendants of the original Spanish colonists, secured vast land grants and expanded the cattle and hide trade. The official Custom House at Monterey opened to foreign ships, transforming the old Spanish provincial capital into an international port. English, Irish, Scots, French and American merchants and ship captains settled in Monterey, adopted the Californio's lifestyle, language and religion. Along with native Californios, they created a new merchant and ranchero class whose town houses and stores lined Alvarado Street to the Custom House. Although never a true Californio, Thomas O. Larkin, the one and only Consul from the United States to Alta California, would become one of the wealthiest entrepreneurs of pioneer California. He would build the Monterey's first pier, establish storehouses, initiate a new Monterey Style architecture and, as "confidential agent," work for the peaceful transfer of California to the United States.

While commerce expanded in the 1830s and 1840s, political unrest also grew as Californio leaders sought for more local autonomy from Mexico. A steady slate of rebellions against the governors of California from Mexico City eventually culminated in the appointment of Juan Bautista Alvarado, a Monterey native, to the governorship. With international trade, the riches and opportunities of not only Monterey, but California, became known to the outside world. Starting with the visits of La Perouse's French scientific expedition in 1786, followed by Vancouver's visit to Monterey in 1792, news of California as a treasure to be sought spread far and wide.

In 1842, Commodore Thomas ap Catesby Jones mistakenly seized Monterey for the United States. All was forgiven, although nervously, by the Monterey officials and Jones' ships sailed quietly away. Then in July 1846, Commodore John Drake Sloat's troops officially raised the American flag over the Custom House, setting the stage for California to become part of the United States. Sloat established the first American fort in California to protect the harbor. Following American takeover, the Army established a military government until a civilian government could be formed. The military governor at Monterey retained the Mexican *alcalde* (a combination of mayor, judge and administrator) system of municipal administration of districts, including the capital at Monterey. Appointed, later elected, Naval chaplain Walter Colton became the American *alcalde* of Monterey. A native of New England, he adapted American customs to the military capital. He impaneled the first jury in California, co-founded the first newspaper in California, was one of the founders of the first public library in California, and raised funds (mainly from gambling and liquor taxes and property sales) to build Colton Hall, the first and largest public building in California, as a town hall and school. In 1849, the new building became the site of the convention to establish a constitution for American California.

Despite the creation of a bilingual, progressive constitution, the attainment of statehood, and the establishment of the first legislature, law and justice failed in California. Shortly after gold was discovered near his mill in 1848, John Sutter sent an envoy to Monterey to confirm his property and verify the gold. Lt. William Tecumseh Sherman confirmed the gold, not the land. News of the gold discovery spread quickly. The Gold Rush was on. Gold fever brought California---- Monterey was not immune—mustered out soldiers, disaffected Californios, and hordes of newcomers from around the world converged on the new land. In many Californian enclaves, lawlessness and vigilantism reigned. With the booming horse and cattle market to feed the miners and other newcomers in the land, cattle rustling and horse stealing became everyday occurrences. Soon the new legislatures enacted laws restricting Hispanics in the mine fields while others sought to persecute and deny rights to Mexicans and Californios throughout California. California and Monterey became the Pacific's Wild West. Although Monterey was established as the county seat in 1850, it was no longer the capital. For the first two years of the gold fever, it supplied the southern mines, then new boom towns to the east and north grew and become the entrances to the Gold Country. In the 1850s through the late nineteenth century, Monterey became its own kind of enclave – still retaining its distinctive blended heritage of Californio and American cultures.

It was not gold in Monterey that attracted newcomers. For some, it was the wealth of sea life around the Monterey Peninsula, from migrating whales to abalone and squid. Rumsien Indians had harvested for abalone, mussels, salmon, and steelhead and other fish, but their population had dwindled under

colonization. It was due to this same rich marine abundance that the Chinese arrived on Monterey's shore and thrived. By 1853, they had established a vibrant fishing village of families – not single men— making the Monterey villages unique in early Chinese immigration to California. The Chinese would continue their livelihood, despite fire and hardships. They were joined on the Bay by Portuguese whalers from the Azores who found a lucrative and dangerous livelihood in shore whaling.

Others sought land: If not a town lot in old Monterey, then part or all of former rancho lands for farms and ranches. Not only rancho lands were lost or divided, but Monterey city lands itself would be subjected to loss. Once Monterey's lands stretch to the mouth of the Salinas River and south to near the Carmel River. Through the chicanery of a land baron, David Jacks, it would lose a portion (later to become Ft. Ord) of its city lands in the 1850s. Monterey's story, though, is not only of loss but gains, and periods of challenge and opportunity.

In 1874, the first railroad to Monterey was established—the Monterey and Salinas Valley Rail Road, -- shipping grain, fish, and other goods. Soon, the narrow gauge was overtaken by the Southern Pacific Railroad, led by Charles Crocker of the Big Four land barons. Local merchants rejoiced at the arrival of a competitor to David Jacks. One wag wrote, unattuned to grammar, that now “we can remove the boot of Davy Jacks off our necks.” Crocker's dream was to create a destination for his railroad, a luxury resort centered on the grand Hotel Del Monte with gardens, polo fields and race track, and a seventeen mile leisure road to the Del Monte's Pebble Beach. The hotel opened in 1880 and was immediately dubbed the “most elegant seaside establishment in the world.” It was also the birth of Monterey's international tourist industry. In 1920s the Hotel would link life at the resort with the recreated, romanticized world of carefree Spanish dons and señoritas.

Tourism in Monterey did not begin solely with Crocker's dream of the Del Monte. In the 1870s, travel magazines touted Monterey's “sleepy Mexican town” and charming adobes. Soon it attracted visitors, including artists and writers, who found its combination of seaside views and adobe houses inspiring.

In 1874, Jules Tavernier opened a studio on Alvarado, invited his friends from San Francisco, and initiated Monterey's art colony. Five years later, a little known writer in pursuit of his muse, Fannie Osborne, arrived in Monterey. Robert Louis Stevenson was quickly befriended by members of Monterey's French community and, when he fell ill, was nursed by Jules Simoneau, a local restaurateur and saloon keeper. He would later describe his time in Monterey in “The Old Pacific Capital.”

By the mid-1850s, the Army had moved its local operations to San Francisco. Except for a short period during the Civil War, the old fort on Presidio Hill (the American Presidio in contrast to the Royal Presidio located east of Old Town) was not utilized by the Army although it remained a military reservation. Following the Spanish-American War, the need for more bases on the West Coast prompted the Army to establish the Monterey Military Reservation on the same site as the 1846 Army installation. The 15th Infantry and the 9th Cavalry (African American Buffalo soldiers) were the first two units to garrison the newly reactivated post. In 1904, it was renamed the Presidio of Monterey in honor of the original Spanish and Mexican presidio (1770-1846) at Monterey. From 1902 onward the mission of the Presidio

changed from 19th century coastal defense to instruction and training, which it continues today as the home of the Defense Language Institute.

While local fishermen guided sports fishermen from the Hotel Del Monte in the best ways to catch salmon, they also attracted the interest of commercial fish processors. Already in the 1890s, Japanese fisheries experts praised the rich beds of abalone and numerous salmon in Monterey Bay and at Point Lobos. In 1902, Otasaboro Noda and Harry Mapas opened the first fish packing and canning operation on Ocean View Avenue (Cannery Row). In 1900, H. R. Robbins opened the first sardine cannery (with dance hall) in Monterey, adjacent to the Monterey Wharf. In 1903, Frank Booth took over Robbins' cannery and began promoting sardines. Working with Booth, Petro Ferrante brought Sicilian fishermen to Monterey to fish and introduced the Mediterranean *lampara* boat and net system, increasing salmon and sardine catches. Booth would hire a Norwegian fisheries expert, Knut Hovden, to mechanize the canning process. Hovden would go on to revolutionize the canning industry and successfully operated the largest and longest operating cannery--- today's Monterey Bay Aquarium. By the 1940s nineteen noisy, smelly, fully operating canneries harvested over 250,000 tons per season on "Cannery Row," making Monterey the "Sardine Capital of the World." Men fished for sardines, while other men steamed cans or boxed them for shipment by rail and ship around the world, while battalions of women worked the production lines canning the fish. Soon issues arose over wages and conditions at the canneries. Fish workers began strikes in the mid-1920s and 1930s; labor unions for both cannery workers and fishermen pushed for better wages. Then, in the late 1940s the sardine harvests diminished year by year signaling the end of Monterey's signature industry.

Monterey's other industry-- tourism and sightseeing, -- flourished throughout the war years, especially with nearby expanded Fort Ord and the Presidio. Stemming from tourist's and resident artists' fascination with Monterey's adobe heritage, an historic preservation movement to preserve the adobes grew rapidly in the first quarter of the 20th century. Monuments, Serra pageants, and numerous parades, restored buildings and produced numerous books and articles, -- all contributing to Monterey's popular tourist culture as the Adobe Capital of California. In 1939, the visitor's Path of History, connecting 55 historic sites, became part the preservation-focused City's Master Plan.

Interwoven with the fishing and canning communities and the affluent seasonal hotel guests of the Adobe Capital were ethnic enclaves. Steinbeck's "Tortilla Flats" of Indian, Mexican, and Spanish heritage,--the "pianos," existed in various areas--from Dutra near Colton Hall to the hills above town. Following the burning of the fishing village near the Monterey Bay Aquarium site in 1906, the Chinese reestablished a new community on McAbee Beach (Cannery Row). Near the harbor (Washington-Adams) was another Chinese community and a robust Japanese community which has flourished for many years. Other communities, Spaniards, Sicilians and others also thrived and celebrated their heritage in custom and annual events.

Following the end of World War II, Monterey capped its celebration of its history with two centennials. Both took place on the eve of Monterey's sardine industry collapse. In 1946, the Raising of the American Flag Centennial, and, in 1949, the California Constitutional Convention Centennial ("Beginning of Statehood"), led to new signs, costumed residents, parades, pageants, visiting dignitaries and Hollywood

Stars (Governor Earl Warren would open the 1949 ball by dancing with Ginger Rogers). In 1949, Alvarado Street was painted gold and its banners announced to the throngs of visitors from across the state, "Saludes Amigos." The party ended and soon Monterey faced several challenges.

Over 300 years after Vizcaino's discovery a California writer, John Steinbeck, while living in his favorite Mexican-era adobe, Lara-Soto, in 1944, began writing a novel. The novel, originally entitled the Pearl of the World, was a cautionary tale of beauty and greed. The pearl is not an inappropriate metaphor for the challenges Monterey was about to face, as its pearl was seen to be taken from it. By 1949, the harvest of sardines crashed; the heyday of the sardine capital was about to end. Already in 1943, Sam Morse, the president of the Del Monte Co. sold the Hotel del Monte resort to the federal government, and focused on developing Pebble Beach. Suddenly, both the luxury resort and the economic engine of Monterey were no longer. The fishing industry continued and tourism still flourished, but the decline of the expected commercial drivers for Monterey threatened its continued prosperity. In an effort to revive Monterey, heritage organizations and the city moved to enhance its Californio heritage as the adobe capital. Preservation efforts to preserve and rehabilitate Monterey's adobes had already begun in the early 20th century, culminating in the founding of the Monterey History and Art Association in 1931 led by artists, historians, and a retired Presidio commander. The City, the Association, and various other organizations and private owners had saved many historical buildings. Now they promoted them.

Then by the 1960s a new agenda of change arrived. The national movement to revitalize downtowns through renewal projects arrived in Monterey. The Urban Renewal Agency ushered in a program to demolish the older parts of lower Old Town Monterey, an area which for decades supplied food and supplies for the fishing community. Others saw, with the expansion of nearby Fort Ord, a blight of spreading greasy spoons, bars and poolrooms. Some thought Urban Renewal would save and beautify lower Alvarado, enhance its historic infrastructure, and draw more tourists. Already by the 1950s, the wholesale fishing businesses of the Wharf were being transformed into Italian and seafood restaurants following the sardine collapse. While many adobes would be saved, other buildings of Lower Old Town (below Franklin) ,-- many of them dating back to the Victorian architectural era,-- would be demolished. The result was a new plaza near the foot of Fisherman's Wharf, a Conference Center, a tunnel connecting to New Monterey and Cannery Row, and a roster of highlighted Mexican era adobes which flanked the plaza or were linked to the plaza by the Path of History. Old Town (now a National Landmark District) would be heralded as an "island of adobes" (primarily: Calle Principal, Pacific, Alvarado, Olivier, Pacific, Polk and Hartnell streets) containing the most historic adobes of any city west of Santa Fe.

Renewal also came through adaptive reuse of the old industrial canning structures eventually leading to new industries based in tourism, marine research, education, and environmental protection. Starting in the 1950s, Cannery Row suffered its own version of urban renewal through a series of fires which consumed empty canneries and warehouses. Scientists at Stanford University's Hopkins Marine Station on Mussel Point, site of the original Chinese village, recommended the creation of a marine interpretive center and aquarium in the old Hovden cannery site. With support from the Packard Foundation, the Monterey Bay Aquarium opened on October 20, 1984 Designated in 1992 as the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, an enormous federally protected marine area of California's central coast was created, centered on Monterey Bay.

With the closure of Fort Ord in 1994, one of the first redevelopment projects on the former military base was the creation of California State University Monterey Bay (CSUMB). The success of the Defense Language Institute (DLI) at the Presidio of Monterey led to a blossoming of language and other educational institutes. The internationally recognized Monterey Institute of International Studies, a progeny of DLI and Middlebury College's graduate school, specializes in graduate degrees in international studies and is a center for foreign language studies. Coupled with the numerous ecological and environmental research facilities, these educational institutions along with tourism have replaced fishing and canning as the primary magnets for Monterey's economy.

Monterey's pearl has been returned. Perhaps it never disappeared.... The lesson learned: Monterey's historic livelihood has always been and will continue to be its intimate and sustaining connection to beautiful Monterey Bay.