

**THE DIAZ COLLECTION:
MATERIAL CULTURE AND SOCIAL CHANGE
IN MID-NINETEENTH-CENTURY MONTEREY**

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Figure 1. Cooper-Molera Adobe complex, Monterey, California: a) ca. 1870s. From left to right: John B. R. Cooper house (two story), Manuel Diaz home (with tile roof), Corner Store (signs and shingled roof); b) prior to beginning of restoration work in 1979. Victorian parapet obscuring earlier roof line has since been removed.

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INTRODUCTION

The Cooper-Molera Adobe, in Monterey, California, has long been a prominent local landmark. Built in the late 1820s by J. B. R. Cooper, an immigrant American ship captain and trader who had married into an important local family, this property was soon subdivided and went through a variety of ownerships. Though most of the historical interest in the property has centered on Cooper and his descendants, the longest single occupation involved the household of Manuel Diaz, a Mexican-born merchant who purchased the northwest half of the house and land in 1845. His wife, Luisa, continued to reside there until the turn of the century.

Located at the corner of Polk and Munras (formerly California) Streets in downtown Monterey, the Cooper-Molera property now consists of a series of rambling adobe and frame structures owned by the National Trust for Historic Preservation (Figs. 1, 2,). The adobe is currently the site of a major restoration project, conducted by the Office of the State Architect, which is designed to stabilize the buildings and permit public access and interpretation. The property is operated by the California Department of Parks and Recreation, which since the early 1970s, has sponsored several archeological investigations at the site as part of the restoration effort. This report deals with the excavation and analysis of a single feature, a mid-nineteenth-century privy deposit, associated with the Diaz family.

In our study of the artifacts from the Diaz privy, we have compared the observed patterns of occurrence with those from other sites whose occupants are of known status and ethnic identity. Our purpose was to transcend viewing the artifacts as simply representative examples of British and American industrial production during the 1840s and 1850s and to consider these objects as products of understandable choices by an individual household of consumers in a particular geographic and social setting during a specific historic period.

Archeological work at the Cooper and Diaz Adobes and other historic park structures in Monterey is continuing. The study of the artifacts and social history reported here is intended to provide an initial body of information and an investigative framework which will foster productive analyses and interpretations of other archeological resources recovered during this work.

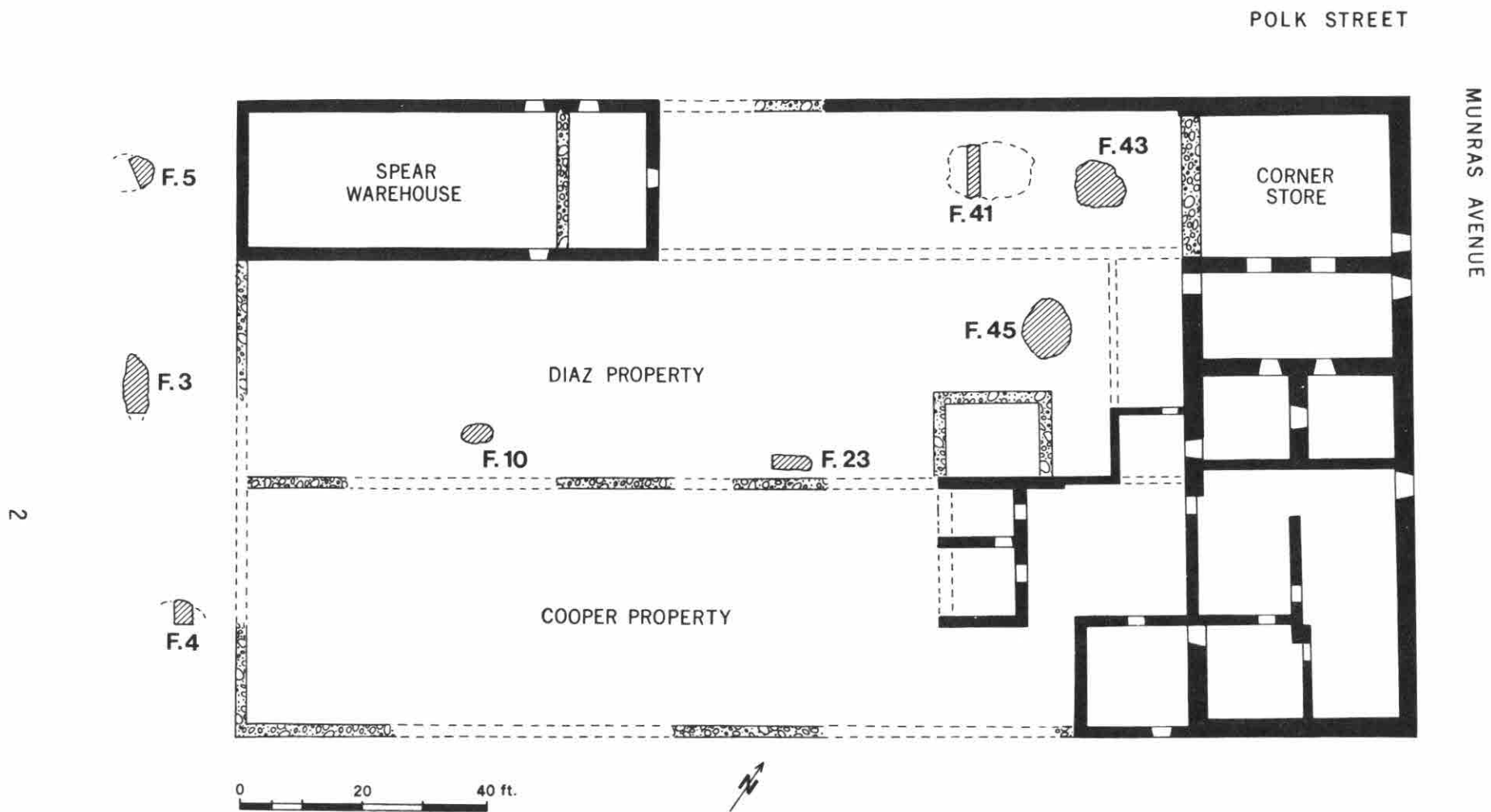


Figure 2. Plan of the Cooper-Molera Adobe complex, Monterey, showing the Diaz privy (Feature 23) and other archeological features.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: THE MANUEL DIAZ HOUSEHOLD

The large adobe house at the corner of Polk and Munras Streets was built during the late 1820s or early 1830s by John B. R. Cooper, an American ship's captain and trader who had immigrated to California in 1823 and married into the Vallejo family (Wallace 1975a:2-3; Kirker and Bry 1975a:12; Bancroft 1964:105-106). In October of 1833, Cooper subdivided his original parcel, including the northwestern half of the house itself, and sold that property to Captain John Coffin Jones, a New England merchant and the U.S. Consul to Hawaii (Reese 1972:56). Conditions of the sale of this property (a portion of the house 40 ft across and 48 ft deep, and a yard area 14 varas [38.5 ft] by 35 varas [90.5 ft]) required the new owner to build a kitchen and dig a well. These features were located and excavated in 1974 (Wallace 1975b). Other improvements during Jones' ownership included digging of a "vault for necessary" in 1833 (Wallace 1975a:11). This may be the privy which is the basis of the present archeological analysis (Feature 23), but the supposition is impossible to verify. While the original vault could have been cleaned out periodically, the outhouse may simply have been moved to a new location when the pit was full. Other privies, as yet unexcavated, are present on the property.

In 1836, Jones conveyed the property to Nathan Spear. Spear seems to have operated a store and lived there before moving to San Francisco in 1838. Thereafter, his store was run by William Warren, and the house rented to a series of tenants (Wallace 1975a; Hammond 1951, I:19-20, 100).

On September 17, 1845, Spear sold the property to its then current renter, Manuel Diaz, who had probably moved there shortly after his marriage in December 1843 (Reese 1972:57-58). This portion of the house was occupied by the Diaz family for the remainder of the nineteenth century.

While much historic documentation is available regarding the Cooper family, we know relatively little about Manuel Diaz. This is probably due both to his declining social and economic status following the American conquest, and to a previous lack of research and interpretive emphasis. Nonetheless, it is clear that Diaz was a prominent figure in Monterey during the late 1840s. In terms of the history of the site itself, the Diaz family is important, as their occupancy spanned a period of at least 55 years, while the adjoining half of the house was the Coopers' primary residence for only about 35 years.

Manuel Diaz was born in Tepic, Mexico in about 1812, to Ysidro Diaz and Maria Josefa Garcia (Elkinton 1980:1). Bancroft (1964:120) writes that Diaz, a "Mexican trader," came to California in 1843 as master of the vessel Trinidad, but notes that he may have visited the province earlier. Thomas O. Larkin, the United States Consul in California from 1843 to 1846, indicated that Diaz had lived in California since about 1838 or 1840 (Hammond 1953, IV:326). Diaz's obituary states that he had come to California in 1840 (Monterey Gazette April 18, 1867:2). The earliest document we have located mentioning his

presence in California is dated September 17, 1842 (Hammond 1951, I:288). Diaz married Maria Luisa Merced Estrada, the 20-year-old daughter of Mariano Estrada, on December 1, 1843 at Mission San Carlos Borromeo, in nearby Carmel. Their only child, Vincente, was born September 6, 1844 (Elkinton 1971:18).

Diaz is most visible in documents and newspapers from 1844-1848. Larkin's "biographical sketch of principle Natives and Foreigners of the present day in California," provided as part of his official 1846 report, includes this description:

Manuel Diaz, Merchant and Alcalde for 1846. Born in San Blas [sic]. Aged about 35 years. A resident of California for six or eight years. Of some property, good general information, advice, note, and influence in Monterey. Quiet and retired. Is aware that his country cannot remain as it is. Prefers the United States to any European Nation (Hammond 1953, IV:326).

While we know of no collection of documents on Diaz's commercial activities, his name appears frequently in other collections. In May of 1844 he is listed among thirty individuals who had pledged a monthly fee for the maintenance of a hospital in Monterey "...during the present illness" (Hammond 1952, II:132). Presumably this is in reference to the smallpox epidemic of that year, reportedly introduced from Mexico by Larkin (Bancroft 1964:214).

During the latter part of 1844 and in 1845, Diaz is mentioned often in conjunction with Larkin's business transactions with the firms of Parrott & Co., Copmann & Lomer, and Barron Forbes & Co., in the cities of Tepic and Mazatlan, Mexico (Hammond 1952, III:19, 26, 42, 135, 143, 144, 163, 212-214; 1953, IV:288, 289, 328). These accounts refer primarily to Larkin's shipment of 717 pounds of dried meat to Copmann & Lomer in November of 1844 with Manuel Diaz aboard the Mexican brig Juan Jose, and to problems with the transfer of funds between these individuals and companies. On June 9, 1845, Diaz arrived back in California aboard the schooner Julia Ann with a \$13,000 cargo of his own (Hammond 1952, III:231; Hawgood 1962:23).

In August 1845, Diaz was appointed to a commission "...to appraise the goods and say the duties..." regarding salvage from the wreck of the Star of India, a British schooner wrecked off Point Lobos the previous month (Hawgood 1962:30-31; Hammond 1952, III:298-299). His involvement in local civic affairs culminated in his election as first alcalde of Monterey in December of the same year. He assumed office on January 1, 1846 (Bancroft 1886, 5:636). The responsibilities of the alcalde were many and varied, and included the duties of mayor, sheriff, and judge. As such, the position was one of substantial prestige and authority. Walter Colton, Diaz's American successor to the office, wrote "...such an absolute disposal of questions affecting property and personal liberty never ought to be confided to one man. There is no judge on the bench in England or the United States whose power is so absolute as that of the alcalde of Monterey" (Colton 1860).

One of the earliest extant documents bearing the signature of Manuel Diaz in his official capacity is a request, dated January 15, 1846 to Manuel de Jesus Castro, prefect of the Monterey district, asking to be excused from duties as first alcalde:

...having been named to the Electoral College of Alcaldes for the present year, I would serve this charge with pleasure, if it were compatible with my line of business [giro]. It is well known in the Department that I actually have to begin a journey to the interior precisely on which base rests the system of business which I have established...you ought to consider me as a travelling salesman and not as a local resident; and if I must delay said voyage which I have already prepared for the coming month of February, irreparable damage to me will follow... (Diaz 1846, original in Spanish).

Requests for release from office because of interference with private business concerns were common (Francis 1976:760), but apparently Diaz's petition was denied; he continued to serve in his elected position until he was replaced by Walter Colton immediately following the American seizure of Monterey in June.

As alcalde, Diaz became involved in the Fremont episode of 1846. Although Fremont's real intentions have often been questioned, as a Captain of the United States Topographical Engineers he was ostensibly in charge of an expedition of nonmilitary personnel instructed to survey and map practical cross-country routes from the Mississippi frontier to the California coast. After spending part of the winter of 1845-1846 in northern California, Fremont in March 1846 was ordered to leave by Jose Castro, Commandant General of Upper California. Angered by the order, Fremont refused to obey, entrenched his company in the Gabilan Mountains (now Fremont Peak State Park), and raised the American flag. This action created a tense political situation and occasioned a flurry of official correspondence between Fremont, Larkin, and California officials, including Diaz, regarding Fremont's plans and intentions. Having provided a critical passport permitting a courier to carry messages between Larkin and Fremont, on March 10 Diaz requested and received a Spanish translation of Fremont's rather dramatic response to a communiqué from Larkin (California Historical Society 1924:282, 286-287). Fremont had stated:

...I am making myself as strong as possible in the intention that if we are unjustly attacked we will fight to extremity and refuse quarter, trusting to our country to avenge our death...if we are hemmed in and assaulted here, we will die every man of us under the Flag of our country (California Historical Society 1924:282).

