

COSMOPOLITAN CHRONICLE

True tales from the annals of history, archaeology, construction, and restoration of the Casa de Bandini and Cosmopolitan Hotel.
Old Town San Diego State Historic Park

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A New Era: Part 1

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On November 1, 1859, a debt-ridden and long-suffering Juan Bandini died at his son-in-law Abel Stearns' home in Los Angeles. As the executor of Bandini's estate, Stearns continued to lease out his father-in-laws' Old Town home and to wrestle with his creditors.

A man of exacting duty, Bandini had requested in his last will and testament that his creditors be "satisfied" before the estate "be divided among (his) heirs."

Over the next decade, the old mansion, reflecting the family and Old Town's decline, fell into disrepair. Adobe walls were removed, and part of the building was converted into a stable and feed storage complex. By 1860, it was unoccupied. In May of 1862, an earthquake cracked the adobe walls in several rooms, and collapsed the wing facing Juan Street. The damage was not repaired.

In 1869, Stearns sold the family home to Albert L. Seeley, a seasoned stage driver and horseman from Texas, and a new era began. Seeley converted the old adobe into an imposing two-story, L-shaped Greek revival style hotel. The renovation would cost Seeley \$8,000—money from his English-born wife Emily's recent inheritance.

Seeley hired a local contractor, Parson Brothers, to repair the deteriorating adobe and to add a wood-framed second story and balconies. This was a common practice among American businessmen who converted Mexican adobes into commercial operations. The Exchange Hotel, Franklin House, and Freeman-Light House also used adobe and wood-frame construction.

The siding on the second story was mill sawn old growth red-wood clapboard probably from northern California shipped down the coast. The balcony featured turned wooden columns and was enclosed with turned baluster railings. The doorways had full height pilasters and bracketed cornices over the top. Windows were framed

by large wooden shutters and were capped with the same style of cornice.

Judging from samples of exposed adobe brick on the first floor, Seeley's construction crews had apparently repatched the walls with red brick mixed with adobe mud. Traces of lime suggest that they plastered the brick with lime plaster.

The clay tile roof of the Bandini era was replaced with a wood shingle hipped roof. It had a wide, level overhang covering the upper balcony.

A stairway from the entrance hallway and an exterior stairway facing the courtyard from the back of the Mason Street wing provided access to the second-story guestrooms. The exterior stairway no longer exists, but State Parks' inspection team recently uncovered its entrance behind the walls at the top of the interior stairway. Apparently at the threshold where the two stairways met, intersecting steps about a foot-and-a-half high on both sides connected to the guestrooms.

