

COSMOPOLITAN CHRONICLE

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The Cosmopolitan Hotel and the Old Town-New Town Rivalry

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Opening his Cosmopolitan Hotel in Old Town in the fall of 1869, Albert L. Seeley had many potential customers. People poured into San Diego to check out Alonzo Horton's land promotions in New Town, yet Horton's own hotel would not open for another year. News of placer diggings in Baja California also drew people to San Diego. And talk of a railroad between San Diego and Los Angeles was the hope of many people.

In late January 1870 a rancher found gold near the headwaters of the San Diego River. The excitement of the Julian gold discoveries caused a large exodus of people from all over San Diego. Of course those miners often returned to town on business and some stayed at the Cosmopolitan. A guest register for the hotel has been preserved at the California State Library. Its pages start with April 1870 and show many entries from Julian City—people like George M. Dannels and the McGinley family.

As time passed, many of the

businesses began to leave Old Town for New Town. Spring Valley resident Rufus K. Porter wrote that "the old place was beginning to look desolate. Nothing will be left there in a short time but a few saloons and lawyers, with the officials, who of course cannot leave." When court was held in Old Town, business picked up. But Porter and others advocated having the county seat—court and jail—removed from Old San Diego. The Whaley house's downstairs was leased for court sessions and the upstairs for the storage of records. With only a small iron cage used as a jail, the jail situation was so unsatisfactory that prisoners were sometimes sent to Los Angeles for safe keeping. There were no real county public buildings. Meanwhile, Alonzo Horton continued developing his land by the bay, had offered space for public buildings, and would open his large, first-class Horton House hotel in October 1870.

Agitation for change came to a head when the Board of Supervisors ordered the removal of county records to Horton's Addition. Both District Court Judge Murray Morrison and County Judge Thomas Bush became embroiled in the situation. The supervisors were removed from office by the county judge and replaced by others more

sympathetic to Old Town. The residents and merchants of Old Town felt loss of the county seat would mean their ruin.

Controversy continued into 1871 when the Supreme Court ruled that Judge Bush had no power to remove and replace the old supervisors. In March, George Pendleton, the county clerk and recorder who was most active in trying to keep the county seat in Old Town, became ill and died. The District Court judge also passed away.

The Supervisors quickly appointed a new county clerk, Chalmers Scott, who removed all court records from the Whaley house late one evening. By April 1, 1871, the county records were available to the public in Horton's Addition. This ended the court controversy, changed the county seat, and put another nail in Old Town's coffin.

One wonders if Albert Seeley, who supposedly told Alonzo Horton in 1869 that "your mushroom town of New San Diego soon will peter out," was sorry that he had not accepted Horton's land offer to build his hotel in New San Diego. But by early 1871, the ambitious stage man Seeley was running daily stages and mail service between San Diego and Los Angeles and had expanded his stage line into Arizona.

