

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

VOL. III. No. 8

SAN DIEGO, ALTA CALIFORNIA, MAY 1, 2009

PRICE: FREE

The Cosmo Balcony

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The Cosmopolitan Hotel opened in September 1869 amid much fanfare. For proprietor Albert L. Seeley and many other Old Town inhabitants, the two-story building with its wood-columned balconies and baluster railings on all four sides symbolized Old Town's economic revitalization.

The hotel offered a variety of services, including a bar, sitting and billiard rooms, a barbershop, and a post office equipped with telegraph. But the one feature that caught everyone's eye was the imposing second-story balcony overlooking the plaza. Guests reportedly could see as far as the bay on a clear day.

The balcony quite literally was the community's grandstand where guests often gathered to watch an array of activities taking place on the plaza, anything from bullfights or mule team races to holiday

celebrations like the Fourth of July or circus performances.

The Fourth of July was an especially gala affair, marked by cannon fire, marching bands, speeches, and toasts. The Declaration of Independence was read in both English and Spanish.

Occasionally, guests saw more sordid things such as an Indian "vagrant" being whipped.

The correspondent for the *San Francisco Daily Evening Bulletin* left an intriguing account of one such bullfight that he witnessed in December of 1869--a spectacle of torment more akin to bull-baiting than bull fighting in his opinion.

Last week Old San Diego was in all its ancient and pristine glory--the Plaza fenced in and scores of poor bulls driven round by the *Hijos del País* (Sons of the Country) on horseback, care having been taken first to saw off the animals' horns. Any one would naturally suppose that the American element was powerful enough to put an end to such barbarous pastimes as

bull-baiting in a public square. The saloon, store and hotel-keepers seemed to enjoy the whole thing hugely. American ladies as well as gentlemen being among the lookers-on, from the balcony of the Franklin and Cosmopolitan.

When a poor terror-stricken bull could not be made to face any kind of an enemy, not even by fire crackers, the muchachos (boys) would fasten a tin can to his tail and then his gyrations caused immense applause. One would frequently break through the barrier and escape outside in a vain endeavor to fly from his tormenters; but he was speedily captured by the *bijos* on horseback, and dragged to the scene of his suffering again.

The pageantry of events seen from the hotel balcony indicates that Old Town was a frontier society in transition, shaped as much by its Mexican traditions as by its aspiration to become an American town.

