

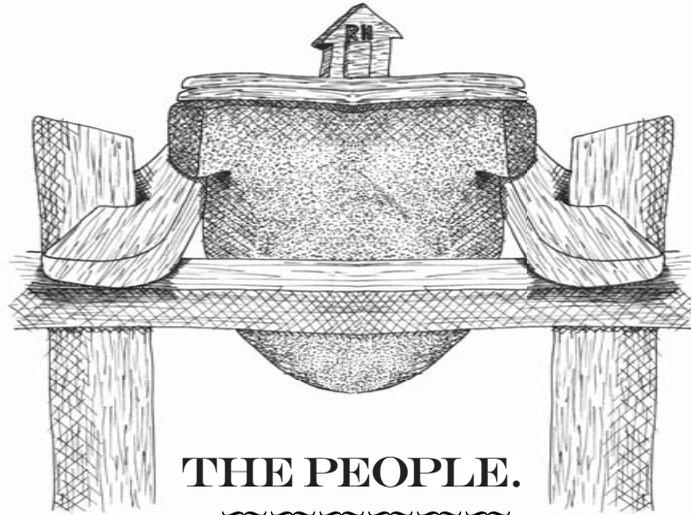
THE STORY.

La Casa de Estudillo was a social and political center of San Diego during California's Mexican Period, 1821-1846, and into the early American Period. Besides serving as the town house of the Estudillos when they were not on one of their four ranches, the house served as a business office, schoolroom, chapel, and even as a place of refuge for women and children during the American invasion of 1846. The Estudillo Family occupied the house for some sixty years. After José Antonio passed away in 1852, his widow rented rooms to others outside the family, including Benjamin Hayes, a Democratic Party district judge and historian, and David Hoffman, a surgeon and Democratic Party Assemblyman.

The popularity of Helen Hunt Jackson's book, *Ramona*, helped launch historic tourism and a romanticized perception of San Diego history. Hazel Waterman's reconstruction completed in 1910 was to reflect an idealized upper status *Californio* home and did not restore exactly the original Estudillo home. The entrepreneur and showman, Tommy Getz, welcomed visitors for years telling highly embroidered stories of an idealized and fanaticized past.

The story of the *Casa de Estudillo* is like many old stories; it gets better as it is repeated. The old adobe has had several makeovers and interpretations. Hazel Waterman wrote of the frustrations of her foreman during the 1910 restoration, "No two openings, either doors or windows, were found to be of the same height or dimensions. To keep these irregularities was a great trial to our Scotch foreman; up to the end of the job he complained, "There's not a straight thing here!" All good stories have

twists and surprises. The story of the *Casa de Estudillo* is no different and is still being retold today.



THE PEOPLE.

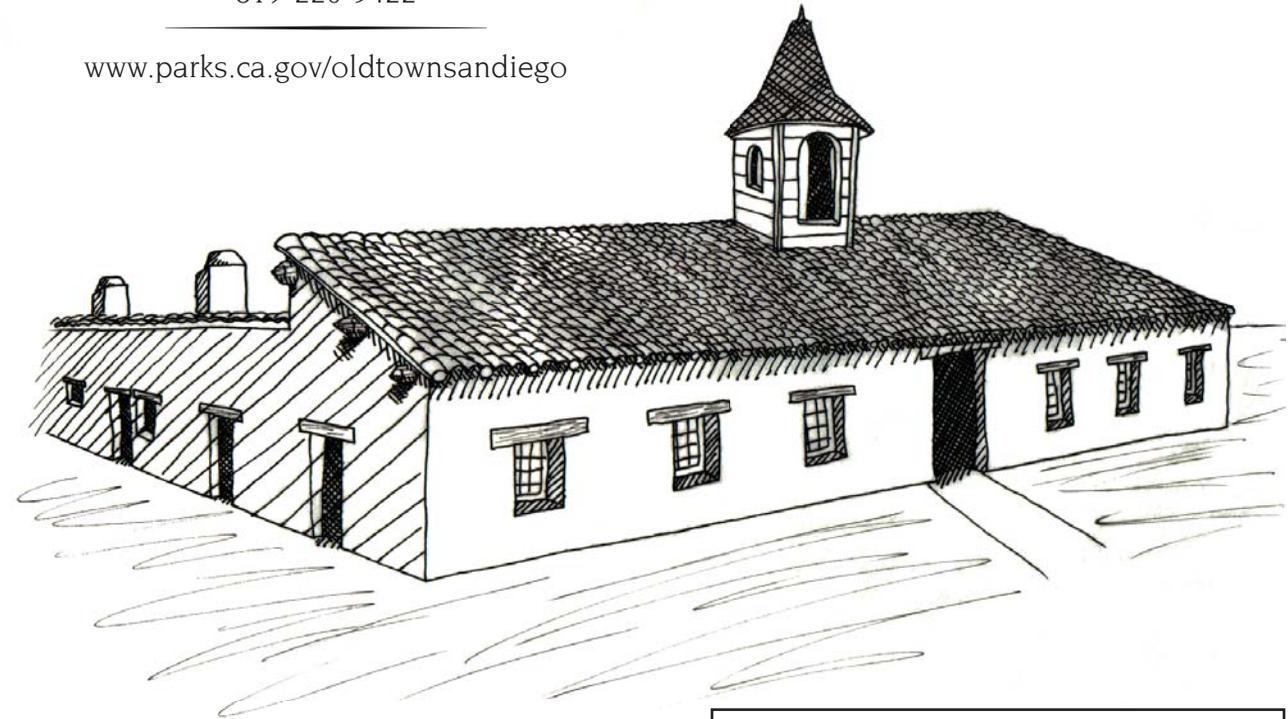
José Antonio Estudillo, a wealthy rancher, held many public offices in San Diego. He and other family members acquired extensive land holdings in the county. His wife, María Victoria Domiguez was noted for her many charities. Within the walls of this house, they had twelve children of their own and adopted several more. The family descendents moved to Los Angeles in 1887 and left the house with a caretaker.

While mostly hidden, the stories of Indian people must never be forgotten or overlooked. Kumeyaay people probably built the *Casa de Estudillo*, including collecting the cobblestones from the river for the foundation, making the adobe bricks, and carrying pine timbers from the Cuyamaca forest. They served as cooks and domestics. They were the *vaqueros* and sheepherders on whose labor the economic life of California depended. They are still among us and they are the First People.

Thank you for your interest in Old Town San Diego State Historic Park, part of the California State Parks system. Inquire at the Robinson-Rose Visitor Information Center or visit our website to find additional ways to experience California's history.

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www.parks.ca.gov/oldtownsandiego



Illustrations by Megan Curtis.

LA CASA DE ESTUDILLO.

(THE ESTUDILLO HOUSE.)
THE ESTUDILLO MUSEUM.

Date Built: **Circa 1830.**
Interpretive Period: **Mexican.**
Original Structure rehabilitated in 1910 & 1972.
California Historical Landmark Number 53.
REGISTERED NATIONAL HISTORICAL LANDMARK.

THE BUILDING.

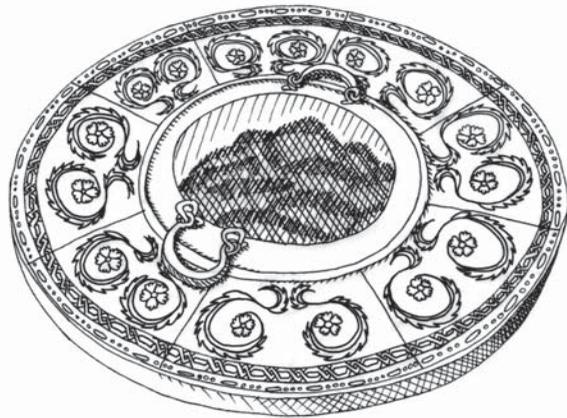
Capitan José María Estudillo, a military commandant of the San Diego *Presidio*, born in Spain, began construction of the *casa* (house) in 1827 on a parcel of land granted to him by Governor José María Echeandía. Upon José's death in 1830, construction of the house continued under the direction of his son, Lieutenant José Antonio, and his son's wife, María Victoria Dominguez de Estudillo.

Like many adobe homes, this one probably began with two rooms. Wings were added overtime to create the U-shaped building. On the roof was a turreted balcony, accessible by a stairwell. Seated here, family and friends watched the bullfights, horse races, and *fiestas* on the plaza.

About eighteen years after the Estudillos abandoned the house, John D. Spreckels of the San Diego Electric Railway Company bought and rebuilt the house to be a tourist attraction at the end of a streetcar line. Most of the reconstruction we see today was the work of Hazel Waterman. The alterations included indoor fireplaces, rusticated interior woodwork, and a courtyard garden with fountain, brick pathways, arbors and a "wishing well" that never existed when the Estudillos lived in the house. The *casa* became part of the California State Park System in 1968 and was restored as a house museum identified with the Estudillo Family. It has been described as the finest example in the United States of a large Mexican adobe townhouse.

With assistance from the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America, the house was furnished in the 1970s with representative items from the 18th to the 20th century intended to reflect an upper class *Californio* family. The choices made were strongly influenced by

a lingering romanticized perception of San Diego's early history.



La Sala. The large *sala* (living room), was the center of activity for family and social functions of a well-to-do *Californio* family.

The portrait on the wall facing the doorway is a contemporary portrait of *Capitan* José María Estudillo, based on descriptions given by family members.

Study. The next room is arranged as a typical study. The maps and wall charts reflect *Capitan* Estudillo's early military career. Many Chinese goods, such as the rug on the wall, were brought to Alta California by trading ships.

Master Bedroom. The canopy on the bed helped to retain heat as well as keep pests off that may have fallen from the ceiling above.

Bed Rooms. Early *Californio* families lived in large extended families, requiring many bedrooms for children, extended family, travelers, priests, and friends.

Workroom. Due to the mild climate, the Estudillos' servants usually worked outdoors. In this reconstructed workroom area, you can see tools from their typical day. Floor tiles were taken from the old San Diego Mission dam and brought to the house during the 1908 restoration.

Garden. The garden you see here today was originally planted as a romantic setting for "Ramona's Marriage Place." Historically, the inner courtyard was an open gathering place for family parties, christenings, and feast day celebrations. The courtyard was also a place where Indian servants tended children, spun cotton and wool, hung clothes, and groomed horses. *Vaqueros* deposited freshly butchered meat from the *ranchos* in the corral behind the rear patio. Here it was cut into long sinewy strips and placed on a low adobe wall to dry in the sun.

Kitchen. The kitchens of adobe homes were usually built separate from the house because of heat. However, this reconstruction shows an interior kitchen and elements of food preparation. Just outside the kitchen is a reconstruction of a *horno* (oven). Once the walls of the beehive-shaped oven were sufficiently heated, the coals and ashes were raked out. Enough heat would be retained to bake food, such as bread, roasts, casseroles, etc.

Dining Room. The dining room reflects California's wealth from the thriving hide and tallow trade in the 1830s. Ships loaded with fine glassware, china, carpets, furniture, and other goods from far away places visited San Diego's harbor regularly. Exotic spices, tea, chocolate, macaroni and other foodstuffs were also traded, as well as everyday items.

Storage Room. Families with townhouses needed a place to store items that arrived on the trading ships until they could be transported to their *ranchos*.

Chapel and Priest's Room. One room of the *casa* was turned into a temporary chapel for religious services. In addition, the visiting priest was provided with a bedroom for longer stays.

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MYSTERIES.

- What happened to the furnishings after the family moved away? Did the caretaker take care of them or take them away?
- Is the ghost said to haunt the house?
- Does the crossed knife and fork on the dining room table really mean that it is safe or not safe to freely talk about politics or religion?

DID YOU KNOW?

- Water shortages were always a problem in early San Diego. Porous lava rock water filters as seen on the *corredor* (corridor) were used to clear sediment and debris from water obtained from a well or the nearby San Diego River. The "R.H." carved onto the wooden cover stand for "Ramona's House."
- The 24" to 40" thick walls are made of sun-baked adobe bricks built on large river cobble foundations.

CAN YOU FIND?

- A large copper dish on a floor used to burn charcoal for heat.
- Children's toys.
- Chinese items, such as porcelain, storage chests, etc.