

## THE STORY.

In 1823, José María Estudillo would start to build a townhome for his family at the bottom of Presidio Hill. *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 Estudillo family when they were not on one of their four ranches, the house served as a chapel, school, law office, store, 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 the son of José María Estudillo, José Antonio, passed away in 1852, his widow, María Victoria, rented rooms to others outside the family, including District Judge Benjamin Hayes and his new bride Adelaida Serrano Hayes, David B. Hoffman, and Francisco de P. Rodriguez who operated a store in the home.

The Estudillo family lived in the home until 1887, when the family moved to Los Angeles and the house was left in the hands of a caretaker. During this time, the popularity of Helen Hunt Jackson's book, *Ramona*, helped launch historic tourism and a romanticized perception of California's history. The house's reconstruction by Hazel Wood Waterman,

which was completed in 1910, reflected an idealized upper status *Californio* home and did not restore the Estudillo home to its original form. The entrepreneur and showman Tommy Getz welcomed visitors to "Ramona's Marriage Place" for years, telling highly embroidered stories of an idealized and fabricated past.

## THE PEOPLE.

Who lived in this house? Commander José María Estudillo (from Andalusia, Spain), *Comandante* of El Presidio San Diego, his wife Gertrudis Horcasitas (from Tlayacapan, Moreles, Mexico) and their children.

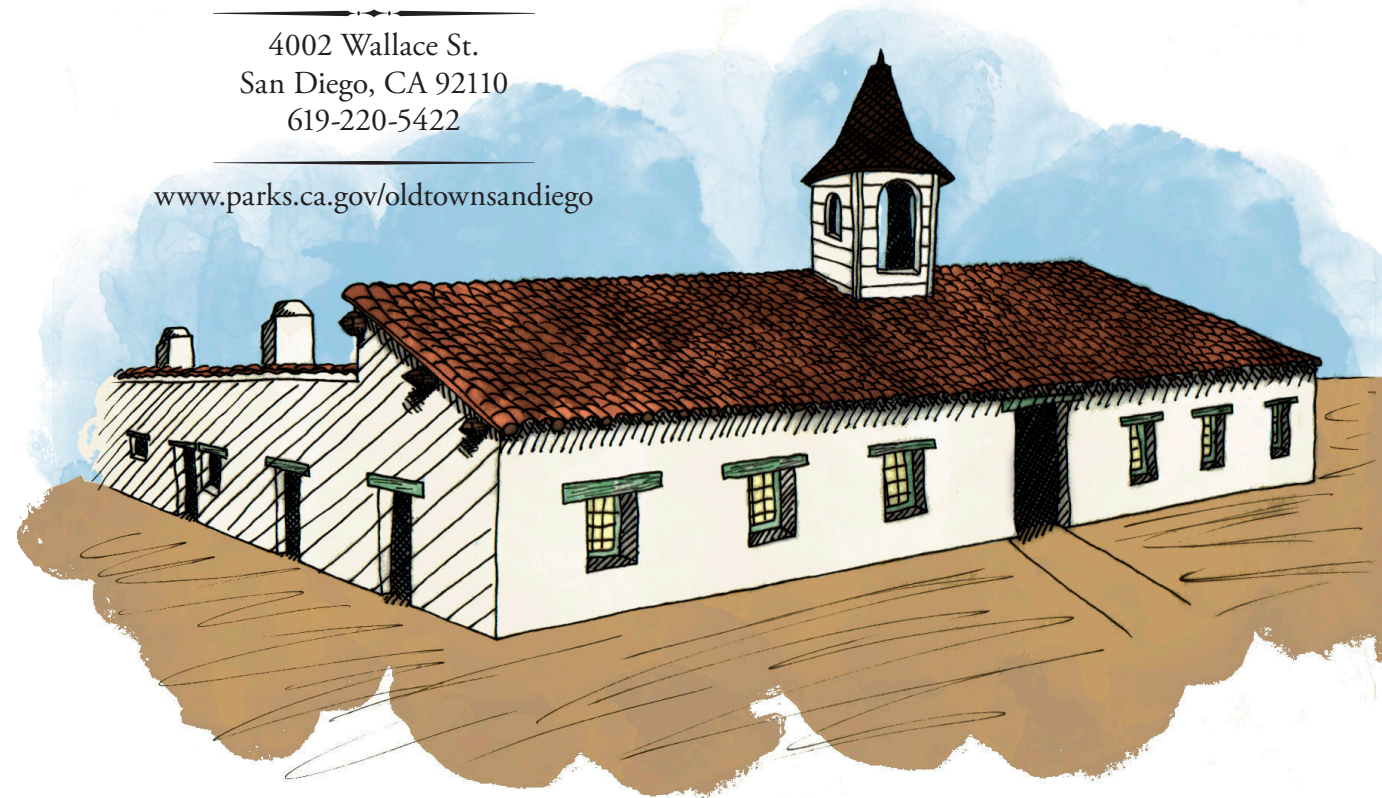
One of José María's children, José Antonio Estudillo, finalized the construction of this home as his family grew. José Antonio became a wealthy rancher and held many public offices in San Diego. He and other family members acquired extensive land holdings in the county. His wife, María Victoria Domiguez, was noted for her many charities. Within the walls of this house, they had twelve children of their own and adopted several more.

While mostly hidden, the stories of the Kumeyaay people in early San Diego must never be disregarded. Kumeyaay likely built this home by collecting cobblestones from the San Diego River for the foundation of the structure, making the adobe bricks for the walls, and even possibly carrying pine timbers from the Cuyamaca forest for the roof. The Kumeyaay also served as cooks and domestics, doing things like taking care of the family's children, in addition to being the *vaqueros* (cowboys) and sheepherders on whose labor California's economy depended. The Kumeyaay called this area home from before the Spaniards came to North America and they still live here today.

Thank you for your interest in Old Town San Diego State Historic Park, a 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. Feel free to share your State Park adventures with us on our Facebook and Twitter. *#inventyouradventure*

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*Illustrations by Megan Curtis.*

# LA CASA DE ESTUDILLO.

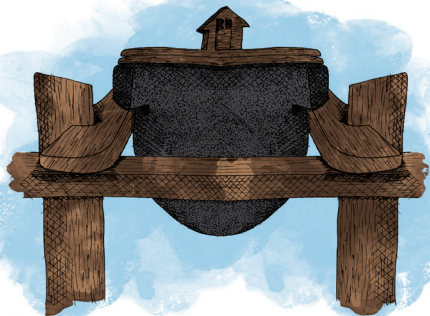
THE ESTUDILLO  
HISTORIC HOUSE MUSEUM.

**Date Built:** 1823-1827

**Interpretive Period:** Mexican/American  
**Structure rehabilitated in 1910 & 1972.**

**U.S. National Register of Historic Places**  
**#70000143**

**U.S. National Historic Landmark**  
**California Historical Landmark 53**  
**San Diego Historic Landmark 14A**



# THE BUILDING.

Upon José María Estudillo’s death in 1830, construction of the *Casa de Estudillo* was continued by his son, José Antonio, and his son’s wife. Like many adobe homes, this one probably began with two rooms. Wings were added over time to create a U-shaped building. On the roof was a turreted balcony, accessed by a stairwell. Seated here, family and friends watched the bullfights, horse races, and *fiestas* on the plaza. When the family’s descendants moved away, they left the house with a caretaker who sold pieces of it to tourists who thought it was where the heroine of a fictional book, *Ramona*, was married.

About eighteen years after the Estudillos abandoned the house, John D. Spreckels of the San Diego Electric Railway Company bought and rebuilt it 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, a courtyard garden with a fountain 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 United States’ finest example 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 items representative of the 17th to the 20th centuries intended to reflect a wealthy, upper class *Californio* family. The choices made were strongly influenced by a lingering romanticized perception of San Diego’s early history.

**La Sala.** This grand *sala* (living room) was a multi-purpose room. Not only did the family host *fiestas* and *bailes* in this room, it was also where the community could celebrate important religious ceremonies such as weddings and memorial services.

**Office of Judge Benjamin Hayes.** Over the years, some of the rooms were rented to prominent Californians. This room features Judge Benjamin Hayes and has mentions of other renters such as Dr. David B. Hoffman and his wife María Dolores Wilder.

**Evolving Scholarship Room.** This room shows some of the ways that the Estudillo House was used throughout history. From a tourist attraction as “Ramona’s Marriage Place” to a romanticized Spanish revival museum, the house has changed with the times.

**Disaster Room.** Many disasters happened in Old Town San Diego, including floods, earthquakes, locusts, sickness, and crashing economies. Within this room are recordings and panels that detail some of these trials and tribulations.

**Family Bedroom.** José Guadalupe Estudillo and his wife Adelaide were the third generation of Estudillos to live in this house. They and their children might have slept in a bedroom very similar to the one on display here.

**Food Preparation Room.** Most cooking during the time the Estudillos lived here would have been done outside in an *horno* (beehive-style oven) or under a thatch-roof covered area. Cooking also could have taken place on the floor, which you can see an example of in this room.

**La Tienda (Store).** Francisco de P. Rodriguez rented one room of the Estudillo house during the 1850s and used it as a store. The objects in this room are some examples of merchandise that would have been available to purchase from the international ships that came to San Diego’s port during this time.

**Children’s Room.** Many children grew up calling la Casa de Estudillo home. This room shows some of the possible furniture and toys the Estudillo children would have played with.

**Dining Room.** Dedicating a room just for eating was a luxury when the Estudillos lived here. This showed how wealthy they were and they even had a shoofly attached to the ceiling to keep bugs off their food while they ate.

**José Antonio’s Office.** José Antonio Estudillo was an important man in San Diego. He held official posts including treasurer of municipal funds, *alcalde* (mayor), administrator of Mission San Luis Rey, and *juez de paz* (Justice of the Peace), as well as owning various ranchos.

**Rancho and Religious Storage.** When the California Missions secularized and reorganized, they needed to store their sacred items in a secure place. Since the Estudillos were well-known, trusted, and devout Catholics, a chapel was established in their house until the Adobe Chapel opened on Conde Street.

**Master Bedroom.** María Victoria Dominguez Cristobal de Estudillo, who would have been the one to live in this bedroom, lived in the house for around 50 years and had many children.

## DID YOU KNOW?

- The 24 to 40 inch thick walls are made of sunbaked adobe bricks built on large river cobble foundations.
- The Estudillo family ranchos produced thousands of hides that were exported from San Diego on ships. The ships transported the hides to Boston, New York, and England to be made into leather shoes, belts & hats. The ships then brought those goods back to trade for more hides. The hides became known as “California Bank Notes.”
- The paper used to wrap sugar cones like the ones in the Tienda was dyed with indigo dye. Women used to soak the used paper from the sugar cones to make new dye for use with their fabrics. The color this makes is similar to a muddy gray color.
- Originally, chocolate was made into a drink and wasn’t as sweet as we think of it today. It wasn’t until much later that chocolate became associated with being a solid candy treat.

## CAN YOU FIND?

- A water filter made of volcanic rock?
- A louse comb?
- A spinning top?
- A painted leather trunk?