

THE STORY.

The United States victory in the U.S.-Mexico war occurred the same year that gold was discovered at Sutter's Mill at Coloma, on January 28, 1848. News of the gold strike traveled across the United States and to other countries. By 1849, enthusiastic gold seekers, immigrants, soldiers, and other settlers flooded into California.

San Diego was the first U.S. port of call for passengers arriving by ship via Cape Horn or the jungles of Panama and Nicaragua. Many structures around Old Town plaza were turned into saloons, restaurants, retail stores, boarding houses, and other commercial enterprises to capture their trade.

By 1854, the Machado-Silvas home was altered and became "The Commercial Restaurant." Three years later, the establishment operated as "Antonia's Restaurant."

Little is known about either of these short-lived businesses. At some point a bowling alley was in operation. However, both restaurants had more dining tables than are currently displayed, and the tables may have been covered with oilcloth.

The restaurants would have offered simple, everyday fare, dominated by meat. Such offerings might have included beef, pork, mutton, and goat, as well as wild game such as quail, duck, rabbit, and deer. Fish and shellfish were also abundant along San Diego's coast. Refrigeration was

not widely available in the 19th century, so perishables needed to be cooked and eaten before spoilage occurred. To preserve food for later use, it was pickled, salted, or dried.

Some vegetables and fruits would have been grown on the property or purchased from farms in Mission Valley or from what is now Orange County. Corn, beans, peppers, cabbage, squash, garlic, grapes, oranges, and limes would have been available in season. Herbs such as rosemary, thyme, and oregano were also likely grown and used. Imported spices such as cinnamon, cloves and saffron added zest to the savory stews popular in *Californio* cuisine. Imported food might include flour from Chile, fruit and vegetables from Hawaii and all sorts of foodstuffs and goods from the Eastern United States.

Refreshments offered might have included *aguardiente* (brandy), wine, rum, whiskey, chocolate, and coffee. Brandy from Chile and pineapple from Hawaii were combined to make a popular cocktail called "Pisco Punch."

Descendants of the Machado Family have preserved recipes for dishes they have prepared for more than 150 years. Spanish and Mexican tastes and cooking styles have been part of San Diego for centuries. Early San Diegans left records of the appreciation for good butter (when not rancid from long transportation), fiery pepper-flavored sauces, bread, tortillas and crackers, and sweet or savory tamales. These food preferences can still be found at many of the local restaurants.

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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Illustrations by Megan Curtis.

LA CASA DE MACHADO Y SILVAS.

(THE MACHADO-SILVAS HOUSE.)
THE COMMERCIAL RESTAURANT MUSEUM.

Date Built: **Circa 1829.**
Interpretive Period: **Transitional.**
Original Structure restored in 1968.
**California Historical Landmark
Number 71.**

THE BUILDING.

La Casa de Machado y Silvas was one of many that the Machado Family owned. It is one of the five remaining original adobe buildings in Old Town San Diego State Historic Park.

María Antonia Juliana Machado acquired the property in 1843. The house is believed to have been built on the land in the latter part of that year, or soon thereafter. In addition to her house lot, María Antonia obtained land for a garden. The additional property faced south and extended westward toward the orchard of her nearby neighbors—her sister, Juana Machado de Alipas, and her husband, Thomas Wrightington.

Originally, the Machado–Silvas House was a rectangular adobe structure with a low-pitched, thatch or tile roof. Little wood was used for construction due to the expense of hauling timber from the mountains. Adobe brick (composed of clay, water, cow manure, and sand) was a widely used building material that could insulate from summer heat and winter cold.

Whitewash (composed of crushed seashells or bone and water) protected the adobe bricks from moisture and also helped protect the house from insect and rodent damage. Inside the white walls brightened the rooms illuminated only by open doors and windows, the light of candles, or oil lamps.

The original floors in the house were probably made of compacted earth. Sometime later, they were resurfaced with clay tiles—perhaps with tiles salvaged from the *Presidio* (military headquarters) on the hill above Old Town. This was common practice after the *Presidio* was abandoned around 1835.

The building has undergone numerous changes during its long existence. Between 1852–1855, for example, a west wing was added, giving the *casa* an L-shaped design. Doors and windows were also “modernized.” During the 1850s, the structure was transformed into the “Commercial Restaurant” and, soon after, “Antonia’s Restaurant.”

It must have been a sturdy dwelling, as evidenced by its ability to withstand floods, earthquakes, and a railroad that ran only a few feet from the front door. *La Casa de Machado y Silvas* even survived the 1872 fire that destroyed seven other nearby structures in Old Town San Diego.

In 1920, it was again developed as a restaurant. By the 1930s, another wing was added, and the house functioned as an art gallery and, later, a photography studio.

In its 100th year, 1943, the building became known as the Machado Memorial Chapel. Finally, in 1968, *La Casa de Machado y Silvas* became part of Old Town San Diego State Historic Park in order to preserve the building and the heritage of early San Diego.



THE PEOPLE.

This adobe *casa* was originally constructed as the family residence of María Antonia Machado and her husband, José Antonio Nicasio Silvas. María Antonia, born in 1815, was an older daughter of Corporal José Manuel Machado Jr. and Maria Serafina Valdez. María Antonia's husband, a native of San Diego, was born in 1810. As a young man, he served as a soldier in the San Diego Company under his future father-in-law.

The couple was married about 1835 and raised six children. They lived here in town from about 1843 to 1854. Like many families living in town, the family also maintained a *rancho*. In the early 1850s, José Antonio moved to *Rancho El Rosario*, located across the present border in Baja (Lower) California. María Antonia lived on the ranch periodically, but generally preferred residing in Old Town and having family members and friends nearby.

A story told about María Antonia is of her patriotism during the U.S. invasion of 1846. Seeing the Americans about to take down the Mexican flag from the Plaza, she dashed out, cut the ropes on the flagpole, and rescued her country's flag. Because she pulled down the halyards an American, Albert B. Smith, had to climb the pole and nail the American flag to the top. Four years later, Smith married María Antonia's sister, Guadalupe Machado de Wilder. Because of María's rescue of the Mexican flag, some people call the house “*La Casa de la Bandera*” (the House of the Flag).

In 1861, María Antonia moved to *Rancho El Rosario*. José Antonio died in 1887. The properties remained in family hands until about 1933.

MYSTERIES.

- Beneath the floor of the family quarters archeologists discovered a brick lined pit. It may have been used for curing cowhides before the house was built over it.
- Sometime in the 1840s Alan Light, an otter hunter and mariner, hid his identity papers and a commission from the Mexican government in the walls of the Commercial Restaurant. They were discovered by accident during renovations in 1948.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Drinking chocolate was more popular in Mexican California than coffee or tea.
- Beef and beans were served at almost all meals in California.
- Macaroni and cheese became popular in the mid-19th century after initially being considered a gourmet dish.
- Tableware from China was widely used by *Californios*.

CAN YOU FIND?

- A deck of cards. The Commercial Restaurant was also used as a saloon.
- A black stone slab with grinding stone. Corn was ground into flour or *masa* (dough) with these tools.
- A string of chili peppers. Peppers originated in the Americas and have been eaten since 7500 BC.