



Ethnography and History: The Monterey Example



Monterey: A Contemporary Perspective

Monterey, California, is one component in a system of tourist sites which includes Seventeen Mile Drive, Pebble Beach, Carmel and Pacific Grove. The Peninsula is an entire “package” that is sold to tourists, although some come specifically to golf at Pebble Beach, while conventioners rarely stray outside of Monterey proper. People are drawn to the area because of the climate, the scenic rocky coastline, the many state parks and campsites in the area, the beaches, forests, golf courses, shops, and restaurants. Some also come to the area to see the landscapes that inspired international literary figures such as John Steinbeck, Robert Louis Stevenson, and the many other artists, writers, and poets who lived or live on the Peninsula.

The vivid beauty of the natural landscape is evident everywhere along those sections of coastline that have not been developed. Some areas, such as Pebble Beach and Pacific Grove, took special pains to create and maintain a scenic coastal road, and whether one walks along the pedestrian paths in Pacific Grove or drives the scenic route, the ocean and the rocky shores are very beautiful and very visible. Monterey, on the other hand, devoted itself to more obvious commercial interests. This resulted in car dealerships and other business structures being built adjacent to the ocean, effectively blocking any view of the



Fig. 1-1. Monterey Bay and Fisherman's Wharf (photo by M. Norkunas 1987).

sea from the major avenue in town (Del Monte Avenue). As the city struggles to move completely away from an economy based on manufacturing to one based on service, it has begun to buy up the leases of these businesses. The city plans to create a "Window on the Bay," opening up a vista of the shoreline.

While lawns are not a common sight, flower and fruit trees line residential streets. Many residents keep small gardens, for the climate of the area is very mild. In the Portuguese sections of the city, grape arbors are common. Winter sees no snow but much rain. Fog rolls into the Peninsula every morning, but by midday, in the spring, summer, and fall, it has been burnt away by the temperate sun. The average annual temperature is fifty-six degrees. In the summer months the temperature reaches the sixties and, on occasion, hits the seventies but rarely goes higher, while in winter it can become cold but never freezes.

As in the past, the contemporary Monterey Peninsula is an ethnically and economically stratified area. Multimillion dollar estates line Seven-

teen Mile Drive as it winds its way through Pebble Beach and into Carmel. Carmel and Carmel Valley are upper middle-class towns, boasting literary figures, movie stars, and high real estate prices. Pacific Grove and Monterey are more residential areas, offering housing to professional people, to the international staff of the Defense Language Institute (DLI is a military language school teaching more than forty-four languages and dialects), to military personnel from DLI and from Fort Ord, to the many retired people who move to the area, to shop owners, and to the waitresses and store employees, bookkeepers and administrators who are employed by the tourist and local businesses.

Seaside, Sand City, and Marina are for insiders and are not highlighted as tourist areas. While these cities have middle-class housing, they are known on the Peninsula as being "tough places to live." Most of the working classes and minority groups on the Peninsula live in these cities, with Seaside housing a significant African-American population. While some Mexican-Americans live in these three towns, most reside in the agricultural areas located west of Monterey.

The major industry on the Peninsula through the 1980s has been the military, due to the presence of the Fort Ord Army Base, the Naval Post Graduate School, and the Defense Language Institute. The second largest industry is tourism. Some Peninsula cities make a major effort to create and control the tourist environment. The city of Carmel, for example, maintains strict control over shop signs, as well as over the kinds of artifacts one may sell in any given store. One florist was denied a permit to sell flower vases that the city's governing board deemed to be of insufficient quality and, hence, smacking of souvenir status. This tight control over artifacts and building facades was one of the major issues leading to the election of Clint Eastwood as mayor of Carmel in the mid-1980s. Eastwood's election, in turn, heightened the tourist traffic to Carmel, and his own Hog's Breath Inn, once a quiet restaurant and bar for some of the local jet set, became inundated with curious visitors to the Peninsula.

Pacific Grove remains the most residential of the upper middle-class Peninsula cities. There are inns and restaurants scattered throughout this small city, but there are no tourist stores. No souvenir or tee shirt shops exist, and no street is lined with restaurants or other amusements. There is no bounded tourist space as exists in Carmel and Monterey. While tourists do spend time in Pacific Grove, aside from the scenic coastline they are not directed to particular activities and places

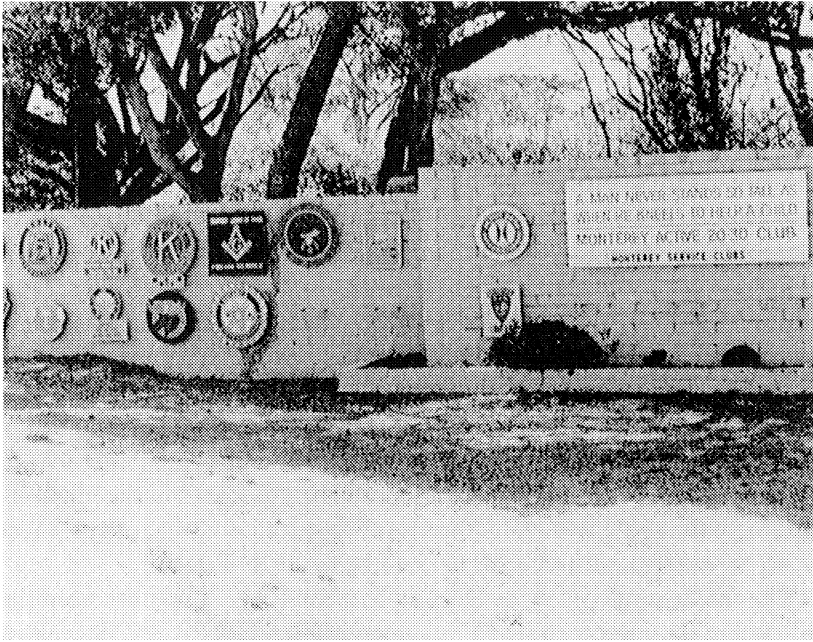


Fig. 1–2. Symbolic entry gate into Monterey with the emblems of the city’s civic organizations on display (photo by Stephanie Allredge 1988).

designed for them. The city thus retains a feeling of being a “real” place, not one constructed for the outside world.

Monterey, on the other hand, offers tourists three distinct areas to visit: the Path of History, Cannery Row, and Fisherman’s Wharf. The city promotes these areas in the literature tourists receive: each area has its own brochure and each is mentioned in general Peninsula brochures. They are also visually framed near and within the city. Signs on the highway and within the city announce these spots as places to visit. Each site has large parking lots, souvenir shops, and pedestrians (a rare sight apart from tourist areas and shopping malls).

The city itself is visually framed by a series of symbols. At the Monterey city line a low wall, suggestive of a fence, faces the highway. It is laden with the emblems of sanctioned civic organizations: the Rotary Club, the Lions Club and other groups. These emblems convey to the visitor the values that the city feels are important to its identity.

Many of the tourist events on the Peninsula are staged events. They

have been designed by promoters to draw large temporary crowds to the Peninsula. Examples include the Monterey Jazz Festival, the Carmel Bach Festival, the Hot Air Balloon Festival, and the recently instituted Monterey Film Festival. Each of these events lasts for a concise period (from one weekend to a full week), takes place in a specific location, and is attended by a national audience that travels to the Peninsula for that event. Monterey designed a special area, a bounded space, to house some of these events: the Monterey Fairgrounds. The fairgrounds is a large fenced area of open ground with a number of structures ranging in size from warehouse proportions to small booths. It is located on the edge of the city and is further framed by highway and city signs.

Unlike Carmel and Pacific Grove, Monterey's past includes an important industrial era. Monterey was not created and preserved as a place of natural beauty reserved for leisure. Instead the city's landscape is dotted with the physical remains of its industrial days and a variety of commercial businesses.

Most of the fish canneries were located along Ocean View Avenue, now known as Cannery Row. Empty canneries filled "The Row" for twenty years before developers elected to renovate them into restaurants and shops. Transformed from an area of industrial factories to a leisure environment dedicated to the sale of recreational commodities, the Row today attracts tourists from all parts of the world.

Of all the Peninsula cities, Monterey is the one that most struggles to create an identity for itself. No longer a city of canneries, it has changed itself into a middle-class tourist mecca, a place where people spend their leisure time. It is a collection of written, visual, and verbal texts that, taken together, portrays a culture of advanced consumer capitalism (Dorst 1989:2-3). For whatever reasons tourists come to the area, once they arrive they spend their time in the context of recurrent economic exchanges. Even the Path of History, which counts only two shops among its numerous historic "homes," foregrounds artifacts as examples of a class-based aesthetic. Experience for sale, souvenirs, and specific commodities so define leisure that one tour guide only convinced an older woman to visit the Path of History by describing one of the houses (the Larkin House) as an "ancient Macy's."

The homogenizing effects of a world market imply a certain sense of placelessness. In Monterey, souvenir sea otter salt and pepper shakers that were made in Japan, clothing stores selling dresses from India, and chain restaurants contribute to the idea that the tourist has reached a

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destination that is not rooted in a particular locale. Although the tourism industry uses historical descriptions in its brochures as a tool to market Monterey as unique, upon arrival it is the commodity from "Somewhere Else" that the tourist encounters. The contradiction in modern mass tourism that Dean MacCannell noted is present in Monterey: the international homogenization of the culture of the tourist and the artificial preservation of local attractions.

Monterey: A Historical Perspective

In the early part of Richard Handler's monograph on *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Québec*, he calls into question the "rhetoric of historical narration" that treats the nation as an objective, bounded unit and history as constructed of solid facts.

Relegated to the background, history can be presented in matter-of-fact fashion as to what is already known or what needs to be known to understand the present-day problems that one wishes to examine.... This strategy obliterates any sense of history as story or construct (Handler 1988:19).

The writing of history, just as its presentation in public history texts, involves political choices. The history of Monterey, which is outlined for tourists on a large wayside adjacent to Fisherman's Wharf, has become the official history of the city.

Monterey Harbor

Look out upon these waters

Their recorded history began when Juan Rodriguez
Cabrillo sighted the "Bay of Pines" on Nov 17, 1542.

Sebastian Viscaïno was first to touch land Dec 16,
1602. He claimed it for Spain and named it the harbor
For the Viceroy of Mexico, the Count of Monterey.

June 3, 1770 is Monterey's birthday. On that day Gaspar de Portola, the
soldier, and Padre Junipero Serra, father of the California Missions,
joined from land and sea to establish the first settlement.

For 76 years this was the capital of Spanish and Mexican California. Here
was the Royal Chapel, the Presidio, and the only Custom House. They
still stand nearby.

In 1818 Bouchard, the Argentine Privateer, sailed into the bay and
sacked the town. In 1842 Commodore T. AP Catsby Jones, U.S. Navy,

under the mistaken belief that war had been declared against Mexico, seized the port but withdrew after three days.

On July 7, 1846, War actually having been declared Commodore John Drake Sloat, commanding a squadron of three ships raised the 28 star flag of the United States over the Custom House, taking possession of a great Western territory now forming all or part of seven states.

Three years later, in 1849, many delegates to the states's constitutional convention arrived by ship.

On these sands in 1879 walked Robert Louis Stevenson dreaming the plot for "Treasure Island."

From 1854 to the early 1900s Monterey was a whaling port and the beaches were white with whale-bone. Sails came to dot the bay. Later in the 1930s here was the greatest sardine fishery in the world.

Look out again upon these waters, Monterey Harbor is small, but it has made history.

In contrast to this sanctioned text, I offer the following thoughts on the kind of history that has been omitted from the official version. This other history concerns Native Americans, Asians, Mexicans, and southern Europeans, and it concerns an industrial economy and the working classes. The thoughts I present below are not meant to be comprehensive, but to note the evidence of that history, however unenshrined, upon the landscape.

Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo was the first European to "discover" the Monterey Bay in 1542, but it was not claimed for Spain until Sebastian Viscaino named it the Port of Monterey in honor of the man who had ordered his expedition in 1602, the Viceroy of New Spain. The Spanish settled the area in 1770 when Don Gaspar de Portola and Father Junipero Serra traveled to its shores from Mexico (then a part of Spain) to establish a mission and a Presidio. Father Serra reportedly said mass for his group under the same oak tree where Viscaino had prayed. When Portola and Serra arrived, they encountered the original inhabitants of the area, a group of Native Americans, the Costanoans, who had been living in the area for some three thousand years. They were soon colonized by Father Serra.¹

Spain named Monterey the Capital of the Baja (lower) and Alta (upper) California Empire in 1776. The city remained in Spanish hands until Mexico seceded from Spain with the Mexican Republic Proclamation in 1822. This proclamation brought all residents of California, or

“Californios” under the rule of Mexico and marked the beginning of what is today known as the Mexican Period. During the Mexican Period the number of ranches increased dramatically and the trade of cowhides (called California Bank Notes) to English and American vessels became an important commercial activity. Monterey became a port of entry for trading ships, and so in 1827 the Mexicans built the Custom House in Monterey to collect import duties. In 1842 the United States established a consulate in Monterey and appointed a wealthy American merchant living in the city, Thomas Larkin, as the first American consul to Mexico.

In 1846 the land again changed hands, this time to the Americans, when Commodore John Drake Sloat demanded the surrender of Monterey and raised the American flag over its shores. Larkin was certainly instrumental in effecting this takeover. Thus began a short period of American occupation. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, signed in 1848, made all of Alta California a part of the United States. Shortly thereafter a constitution for the new territory was written in Colton Hall in Monterey, and California was admitted into the United States (1850). Monterey then lost its importance on three fronts: the designation of capital city was changed from Monterey to San Jose; the port of entry was relocated to San Francisco; and, later, the county seat was moved to Salinas. These events, coupled with the gold rush of 1849 in lands east of Monterey, depleted Monterey’s population and the area experienced a dramatic decline in activity. The subdued nature of the early American years has, in retrospect, colored contemporary interpretations of Monterey’s Spanish and Mexican periods.

In 1880 the major investors in the Southern Pacific Railroad opened the Del Monte Hotel. This elaborate, expensive resort hotel catered specifically to the rich (its present day counterpart is Pebble Beach). It boasted multiple swimming pools, each a different temperature, croquet courts, archery ranges, a stable, and a seventeen-mile scenic trip along the coastline to a rustic lodge. Today this scenic trip is known as the Seventeen Mile Drive, and a fee is charged to drive its length. The rustic lodge is now called The Lodge at Pebble Beach and is an elite resort next to a world-class golf course. While the Del Monte Hotel suffered several fires in the ensuing decades, each time it was rebuilt in even grander proportions and was known as the “Queen of American Watering Places.” One of the only major drawbacks to the hotel was the odor emanating from Cannery Row, where the Chinese community dried fish and fish meal on large outdoor racks. (It is said that three of

the adjacent Peninsula cities were known as Carmel by the Sea, Pacific Grove by God—referring to its fundamentalist beginnings—and Monterey by Smell.) The Great Depression forced the hotel to close and in 1947 the Navy purchased the hotel and the surrounding 627 acres for its Naval Post Graduate School.

Although offshore whaling had been an important commercial enterprise in the late nineteenth century, Monterey's fishing industry was really launched in the early twentieth century. The industry concentrated upon catching and canning sardines, with the first cannery opening near present-day Fisherman's Wharf in 1906. Competing cannery owners arrived shortly thereafter and soon Ocean View Avenue was lined with canneries and warehouses. Some fifty-eight years later (1964) the last of the canneries closed when the once plentiful sardine completely disappeared from local waters. The sudden disappearance of the sardine, which had been considered a limitless natural resource, stunned the local industry and brought it to financial ruin.² The era of postindustrialism must certainly have been another contributing factor in the fate of the canneries.

The earliest settlers in the area were the Costanoans. They were followed by the Spaniards and later the Spanish-Mexicans and finally by the Mexicans as the area changed political hands. For twenty-two years Monterey was a Mexican territory. During this time several powerful Mexican families presided over the city while the average person lived on ranches or in the city in homes with earthen floors. The whaling industry brought a small community of Portuguese to the area, and Portuguese is still spoken in certain sections of the city. Chinese workers had been recruited to build the first transcontinental railroad and eventually found their way to Monterey in the 1850s. They built their own village along the sea and became fishermen. Victims of a virulent prejudice known as the "yellow fever" that swept through the United States at the turn of the century, the Chinese village experienced a series of fires of suspicious origin. After fire again devastated their village in 1906, the Chinese left Monterey for the last time. Genovese fishermen arrived to set up a fresh catch shipping service to San Francisco via the new railway in 1874. Sicilians were brought to the area to fish for the new canneries in the early 1900s. They revolutionized the local fishing industry with the introduction of the "lampara net" and remained fishermen throughout the life of the canneries and into the present. The Italian section of the city became known as "Spaghetti

Hill.” Today Italian-Americans, with a strong sense of their ethnic identity, own and operate most of the restaurants and shops on the tourist Fishermen’s Wharf.³ The twentieth century also saw the arrival of Japanese on the Peninsula, who again turned to fishing. The social and economic life of the Japanese was destroyed by the internment policy of the United States government during World War II and today there is a small Japanese community on the Peninsula.⁴ Portuguese, Japanese, Italians, and Mexicans made up the labor force at the canneries. Following the ancient division of labor, men tended to work on the fishing boats while many of the canneries’ sardine packers were women.

This, then, is the larger physical and historical context for the specific tourist environments within the city of Monterey.

Notes

1. The present-day controversy over the proposed canonization of Father Serra is a very clear example of the kinds of political considerations that influence historical interpretations, particularly when public history is at stake. The Catholic Church supports canonization, citing Serra’s many Christian acts, including the founding of the California missions and a miracle reportedly performed in the 1960s, in support of his sainthood. Local Native Americans argue that, after the Spanish established the California mission system, Native Americans were subjected to brutal treatment that resulted in thousands of deaths and the suppression of a culture that had existed in California for many hundreds of years. They claim that canonizing Father Serra would be a moral and historical mistake, conveying the message that colonization and brutality are good. One Dominican brother agreed with the Native Americans, saying that the present impoverished condition of many Native American peoples is the result of racism signified and symbolized by Father Serra and his missions (*Monterey Peninsula Herald* 9/3/87).
2. When asked where all the sardines had gone, a subject of much discussion, one wry observer noted, “in the cans.”
3. Although the Genovese and Sicilian communities in Monterey see themselves as ethnically distinct, the outside world describes them both as Italian. For the sake of clarity, I shall refer to them both as Italian-Americans.

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4. In the late 1980s a memorial was dedicated to those Japanese from the Monterey Peninsula who had been interned during World War II. The memorial, a small garden, is located in Salinas.