

= Casa de Estudillo =

The Casa de Estudillo , also known as the Estudillo House , is a historic adobe house in San Diego , California , United States . It was constructed in 1827 by José María Estudillo and his son José Antonio Estudillo , early settlers of San Diego , and was considered one of the finest houses in Mexican California . It is located in Old Town San Diego State Historic Park , and is designated as both a National and a California Historical Landmark in its own right .

Besides being one of the oldest surviving examples of Spanish architecture in California , the house gained much prominence by association with Helen Hunt Jackson 's wildly popular 1884 novel Ramona . The Casa de Estudillo is one of three National Historic Landmarks in Southern California that were closely tied to Ramona , a novel of Californio life shortly after the American acquisition of California ; the other two are Rancho Camulos and Rancho Guajome .

= = Description = =

The large building is a U @-@ shaped structure , measuring 113 feet (34 @.@ 4 m) on the front side , and 98 feet (29 @.@ 9 m) on each of the wings . It is constructed in the Spanish Colonial style , meaning that the house 's 13 rooms are set consecutively in the building and connected only by an external covered corredor (as opposed to an interior hallway) .

The main portion (the center) contains the entrance , facing west . To its left is the chapel and to its right is the schoolroom . Both rooms originally were smaller , with bedrooms located at the ends of building , but a 1910 restoration eliminated those walls to enlarge the rooms . Two bedrooms , a living room , a kitchen (which was added at a later date) , and the servants ' dining room are in the north wing , while the south wing has three bedrooms and the family dining room . The house is topped by a cupola from which bullfights and festivals in the adjacent plaza could be seen .

= = Ramona = =

= = = Association with the novel = = =

José Antonio Estudillo died in 1852 , and his family stayed until 1887 , when they moved to Los Angeles , leaving the house in the hands of a caretaker . Meanwhile , the 1884 publication of Ramona , a novel set in Southern California which painted a romanticized portrait of Californio life , generated a nationwide interest in the region . This , combined with the opening of the Southern Pacific and Santa Fe Railway lines (and the ensuing rate war , which drove prices down to as low as \$ 1 from St. Louis , Missouri to Los Angeles) , meant that hordes of tourists made their way to Southern California to see the locations in the novel . Unfortunately , Jackson died in 1885 without ever having disclosed what the actual locations in the novel were , which caused a great deal of speculation .

In 1887 , a front page article of the San Diego Union declared the Estudillo home to be " Ramona 's Marriage Place " , saying , " To sleepy Old Town (the house) is known as the Estudillos , but the outside world knows it as the marriage place of ' Ramona . ' " This was despite Jackson never having visited the house , but in the novel , Ramona was married in a " long , low adobe building which had served no mean purpose in the old Presidio days , but was now fallen in decay ; and all its rooms , except those occupied by the Father , had been long uninhabited " . Despite the novel being a work of fiction , visitors flocked to the building thinking it was the actual location of Ramona 's marriage . To be clear , the Union did not simply invent this story ; a tourist had already scratched the name " Alessandro " (Ramona 's husband in the novel) in one of the walls . The caretaker decided to capitalize on the attendant publicity and began selling off pieces of the house as souvenirs . Naturally , the building 's condition began to deteriorate rapidly .

= = = 1910 restoration = = =

In 1906 , the dilapidated building was purchased by the San Diego Electric Railway Company , owned by prominent San Diego citizen John D. Spreckels (who also owned the Union) . In his vision , the house would anchor a number of tourist attractions connected via his railway which would realize his twin goals of developing San Diego into a popular locale and generate revenue for his company . To this end , he hired architect Hazel Wood Waterman to renovate the house to a condition more closely matching descriptions in the novel . The original cupola and balcony was removed because there was none mentioned in the novel , and several doors and windows were moved . Waterman was exacting in her specifications : She wanted the building to look aged as well as have the " charm of the work of half @-@ skilled Indian hands " , although modern conveniences such as electricity and indoor plumbing were included . Upon its completion in 1910 , it was marketed as a Ramona @-@ related tourist attraction , and remained popular as such for years to come , drawing 1 @, @ 632 visitors on one day in 1940 .

Spreckels hired Tommy Getz , a theater showman , to manage the property , and it was under Getz 's guidance that the property truly gained its Ramona association . He began strongly marketing the property : Tchochkes of all sorts were labeled with " Ramona 's Marriage Place " , and more postcards were printed for the adobe than any other Ramona attraction . Due to its association with Ramona 's marriage , the house was used to host weddings as well . Getz eventually purchased the adobe from Spreckels in 1924 .

The association with the novel was so keen that the application for National Historic Landmark status was entitled , " Casa Estudillo / Ramona 's Marriage Place . " The Journal of San Diego History goes so far as to say that without the novel 's influence and the popularity of the house , the historic buildings that make up Old Town San Diego would have been razed . In fact , for a time , the Estudillos ' relationship to the house was nearly forgotten .

After Getz 's death in 1934 , his daughter Margeurite Weiss continued to operate the business for another thirty years , finally selling it 1964 to the Title Insurance and Trust Company , which then sold it to local businessman Legler Benbough , who donated it to the State of California in 1968 .

= = = 1968 restoration = = =

The state Park Service then set about restoring it to its pre @-@ Ramona state , including the missing cupola . The house now stands as a museum and is furnished as it would likely have been during Estudillo 's ownership , but with an added kitchen . The state seemed embarrassed at the property 's association with the novel : The long @-@ standing " Ramona 's Marriage Place " sign was removed , and brochures printed in the 1970s make no mention of the novel at all . By the 1990s , the state began to acknowledge the long @-@ standing relationship to the book .

Ramona no longer has the same hold on the country 's imagination as it once did . It is estimated that only 1 % of visitors to the Casa de Estudillo now are aware of the house 's ties to the novel .

= = Photo gallery = =