



THE AMADOR HOUSE

Las Cruces, N. M.
Laiten L. Camien

This study was supported in part by a grant to the author from the New Mexico Foundation, Inc., University Park, New Mexico. Drawings for this article were done by the author. Supervised by the author, the field work was done by R. J. Hammersmith, the photography by Hubert S. Mathews in January and February, 1961.

The Amador house stands on the northwest corner of West Amador Avenue and South Water Street in Las Cruces, New Mexico. Due to the fact that it is surrounded by a large number of trees and other vegetation, few people know of its existence. Its current state is one of extreme neglect. Its last owner could not afford to keep it up; and now, while the courts are deciding its future, it is rapidly disintegrating. Vandals and arsonists have attacked the house as well.

The house was built in 1881 by Martin Amador, according to Mrs. William Adair of Las Cruces, who is a granddaughter of Mr. Amador. He was a merchant, farmer, wagon train operator, and later a hotel owner and manager. He built the house to hold his large, growing family. Up to that time the family had been living in the house and store building in which Mr. Amador and his mother had lived and worked when they first came to Las Cruces some thirty years before. This earlier building is still standing one block east of the Amador House, on the southwest corner of West Amador Avenue and South Main Street. It is presently occupied by Mrs. William Adair.

Judging from the advertisements that were carried in the *Rio Grande Republican*, Martin Amador rented

out rooms in his new home beginning in 1883. He got started on this because of another project that he did. In that year, the county seat was changed from Mesilla to Las Cruces. Since there was no place for the court to meet, Mr. Amador accepted the task of providing a place for it. He arranged for the court to use a building that was across Water Street to the east of his home which he converted into a court room, jail, and offices. With the opening of court that year, he extended the invitation to those who wished to come and stay at his home so that they might be conveniently located to the court. In his advertisement, he said that he also had a fine bath house for the use of his guests. At this time he called his home "The Garden House."

While the Amador house is not unusual in the fact that it possesses two stories, it is unique in that its lower floor was designed as a full basement. Martin Amador used this basement as storage for the products of his several farms. One room was used for each of the crops that he raised. Room P was used for storing watermelons, tomatoes, and other fruits that were intended for use as out-of-season delicacies. With the exception of room P which was fully plastered, the basement rooms and hall were unfinished. Floors were dirt except those in rooms T and U, which were concrete, and only those openings so indicated on the plan contained doors. Inside communication between floors was by means of a ladder and trap door in room L.

The entire house was constructed of adobe bricks that were laid up in mud mortar. The outside of the house and the main floor have plastered walls. After all of the years that this house has been standing, there is no evidence of structural cracks in the plaster, either inside or outside of the house. Since the only

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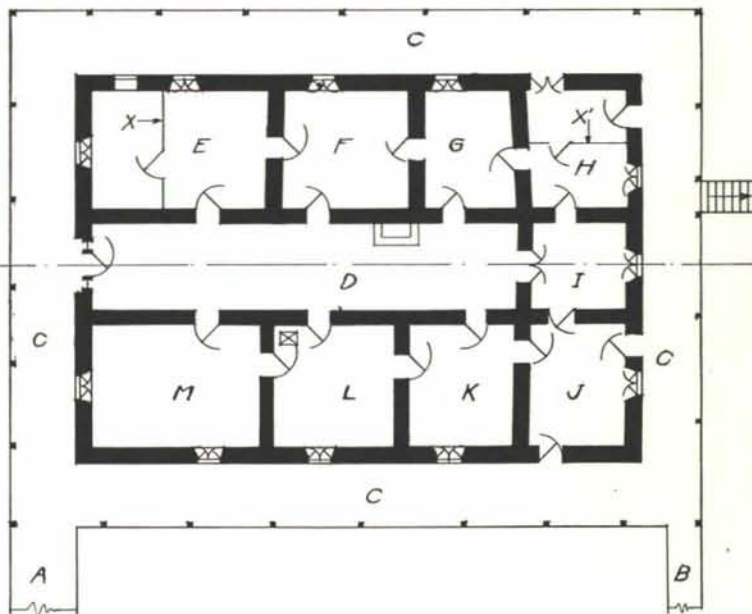
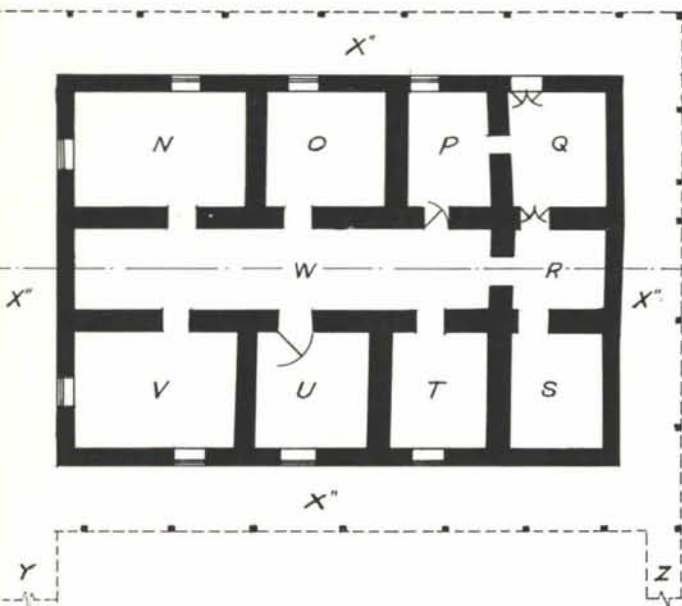
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exposed adobe walls are to be found in the basement, one may learn of the durability of this mode of construction here. With the exception of the openings which have doors, the others were left without the protection of frames or jambs. These openings show very little wear of any sort on their sides or thresholds. The house is significant insofar as construction is concerned in another point. There is a complete absence of mildew or other dampness nor is there evidence of any water having ever collected in the basement or run into it.

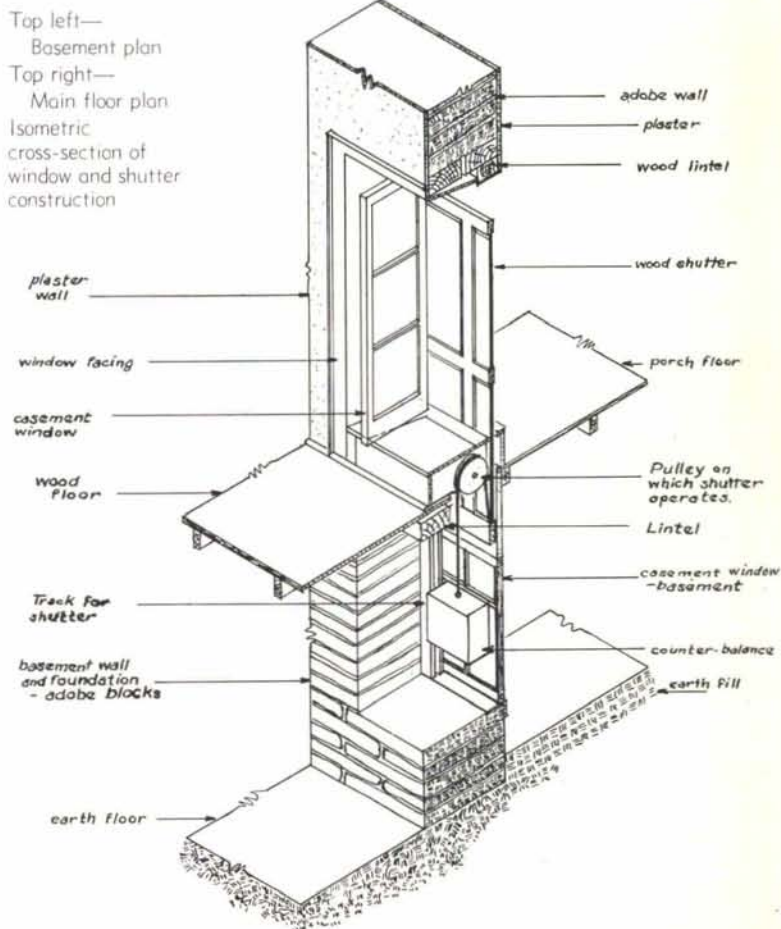
Few observers are aware of the basement floor because it is hidden from view or at least from direct attention because the house is built in an old river bed. Water Street is on the bank above the lot which is in the bed. Thus the basement floor is about six or seven feet below the street. This floor is partially hidden also by a porch that surrounds the house completely at the level of the main floor. The porch is an important feature of the house since it is the only means by which access may be gained to the house, by which persons in the house may gain access to the grounds surrounding the house, and by its own architectural qualities.

The porch connects the house to Water Street by means of a bridge (see point A, First Floor Plan). When the house was first built, there were two bridges (A, B) that not only joined the house to the street, but also crossed an irrigation canal that runs along the east side of the property. Through the years, Water Street has been widened so that the irrigation canal now goes underground just north of the house. The back bridge was abandoned and the front one shortened to fit the new circumstances. A gate house that once stood astride the street entrance to the front bridge, was moved to another place on the lot when the street was widened the last time.

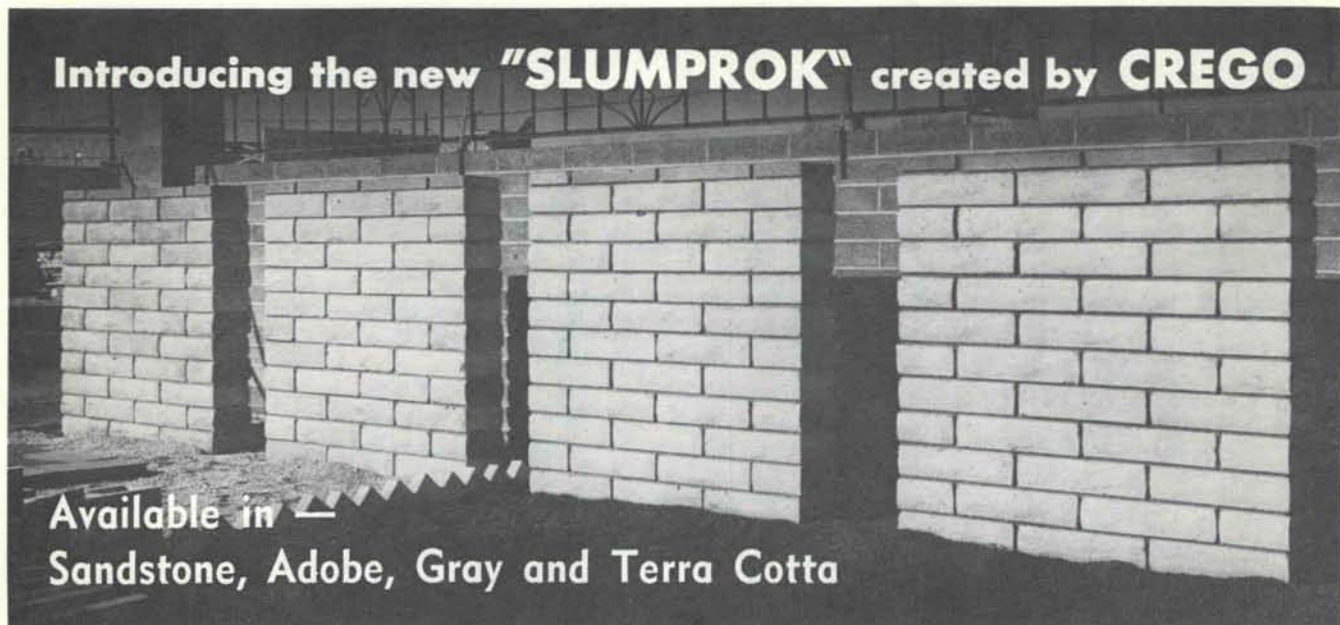
The porch covers an earth fill that was put around the base of the house at the ground level. This fill (X'') varies from 12 to 20 inches in height above the lot level. The house does not

have a foundation in the sense that the term is used today. The adobes were laid directly on the earth. The porch connects the house to the ground level in the rear by means of a set of steps. At the front of the house, the ground may be reached by means of a small gate and a set of steps that lead off of the front bridge.

The porch is of wood and is eight feet wide on all sides except the rear, which is seven feet. The porch roof is of corrugated iron. The porch is enclosed by a railing that is thirty-three



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Bridge leading from main floor of house to South Water St.

and a half inches high. The wooden pickets have been scroll-sawed by hand from one by six inch stock. They have been installed on nine and one-half inch centers. This means that there are over four hundred pickets on the porch, not counting those that were used on the two bridges. Two patterns of pickets were used. Only one is reported, here. A casual examination will point out the difficulties of maintenance that are presented by this feature of the house.

The house is impressive because of its size. It is seventy feet long and forty-eight feet wide, excluding the porch. The main floor and the basement each have nine rooms and a large hall. The construction of the main floor, its ceiling, and the roof of the house might be regarded as standard for the time at which they were built. The main floor is a single, wooden one supported on two-by-four joists that are set on twenty-four inch centers. The flooring is tongue and grooved in long lengths. There was no evidence of sagging to be observed in the floor when this investigation was done.

The ceiling and roof are a single unit that consists of vigas, brush, an earth fill, and a three inch layer of cement on top. The roof is drained by sixteen stone canales. Only one other house in Las Cruces has the distinction of having such equipment. Mr. Martin Campbell, great-grandson of the builder thinks that these canales were carved in Chihuahua and shipped up here. All of the rooms on the main floor have been equipped with cloth ceilings that were placed about a foot or so below the vigas. No evidence indicates whether these were installed at the time the house was built or later.

The woodwork, doors, door frames, window frames, trim, and windows suggest that most of these parts were purchased ready made from some supplier. It is interesting to note though that the builder did not attempt to secure any uniformity among the doors, for

example. Several sizes were used for the same purpose in the house.

The window arrangements in this house are unique. For the most part, the windows of the main floor were mounted in the walls immediately above corresponding windows in the basement. The main floor window and its mate in the basement were then mounted in a single frame that ran down the wall between the two floors. A wooden shutter for the main floor window was placed in a track that was then mounted in the frame. This was arranged so that the shutter could move up or down the full length of the frame. The shutter was matched by a counter-balance that consisted of a metal box which was filled with gravel so that it was of the same weight as the shutter. The shutter and the counter-balance were united by a half-inch manila rope. The rope operated over a nine-inch wooden sheave. This sheave was cut by hand and was provided with an axle that was a half-inch bolt that was about eight inches long. The sheave was mounted in a window seat that was placed below the main floor window. When the main floor window was unshuttered, the shutter was run down into the basement. When the shutter covered the main floor window, the basement window was open for use. The main floor windows were pairs of wooden casement sash that were located just to the rear of the shutters. The basement windows were single casement sashes that were mounted just outside of the shutter tracks. The wooden sheaves apparently did not work too well for most of the windows were equipped with metal pulleys of modern design at the time of this study.

According to Mrs. Adair, heat was supplied in the house by means of four fireplaces at first. These were in rooms M, K, F, and D. The hall fireplace was the only one still in use in 1961. It was designed for the use of coal. The other three fireplaces had been removed at some time prior to this study. Small gas

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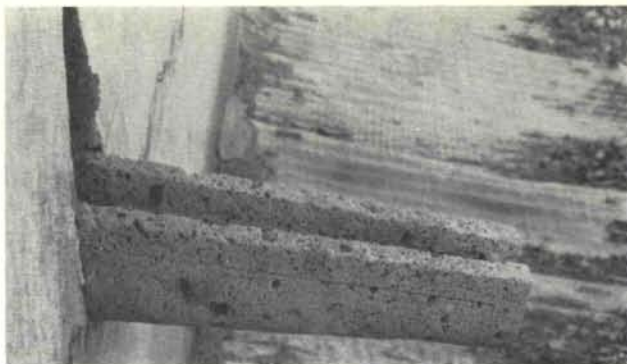
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stoves supplied heat at the time the house was last used. Insofar as plumbing is concerned, the house had been made modern some years ago. Room I, which had housed Mrs. Amador's plants in the beginning, was made into the bathroom. Room H became a kitchen at about the same time. Room J has served also as a kitchen at various times.

There is one feature in the yard that attracts attention for some observers. It is a wall that was constructed on the west side of the irrigation canal adjacent to the house. This wall holds dirt up to the side of the canal. It is over forty feet long and is about two feet above the level of the yard. It is constructed of one quart, clear glass, liquor bottles that are embedded in earth. Here again, Mrs. Adair said that this means seemed to have been the only effective method of protecting the canal bank against various animals that sought to burrow in it. Since the bottle wall extends for only a third or less of the length of the canal that is on the lot, one may wonder whether the project was halted because the source of bottles gave out or that the animals gave up their endeavors. One might also infer that this means was used as an inexpensive scheme for giving some order to the wall of the canal. The bottom ends of the bottles do give a decorative touch.

In view of the time of construction, one might say that this house was ahead of its day in a number of ways. The floor plan was adaptable to a variety of ways of living. The construction of the windows and the porch was unique. The quality of construction that was used in the house has shown itself to be thorough and durable. There are, of course, some who would view the house as being extremely expensive to maintain by current standards. Within these qualities and limitations, Martin Amador built himself a fine home. It is a mark of achievement for a man who has shown himself to be a real contributor to his times in a variety of activities.—L. L. C.

The chairman of the Magazine Committee has just received word of the death of A. JOHN BRENNER of Phoenix, Arizona. To this unhappy notice Miles Brittel adds, "John Brenner's kind thoughts and consideration of the other fellow was an attribute that caused much admiration among his colleagues. Those of us who knew him so well will miss him."