

# The Rancho Period in Santa Cruz County

## Land Grants and Ranchos

### LAND GRANTS AND RANCHOS

In Santa Cruz County, Mexico gave land grants to important Californio citizens between 1821 and 1844.

In order to be given a land grant, a *diseño* had to be made. A *diseño* was a hand-drawn map of the area which included all land forms, such as rivers, creeks, ponds, hills, big boulders, trees and other identifying landmarks. The *diseño* had to be approved by the governor of Alta California (in Monterey) before the land grant was made. Once the land grant was issued, the rancho could be developed. There had to be a house or other structure built once it was granted.



**The diseño of Rancho San Andrés.** Source: United States District Court, California, Southern District, UC Berkeley Bancroft Library.

In what is now Santa Cruz County there were several large ranchos. Most of the names will be familiar to students living in the area. Some of the familiar names of roads and places in Santa Cruz County today came from the people and ranchos of those days. Here are some of those names: Salsipuedes, Aptos, Soquel, Amesti, Pinto, San Andrés, Corralitos and Pajaro. Please note that the name San Andrés and San Andreas are really the same words with only a slight change in spelling.

The Rancho San Andrés Castro Adobe was owned by Juan Jose Castro and his wife Rita Josefa Pinto Castro. Juan Jose was the son of Jose Joaquin Castro, who came to Alta California as a young child with the second Anza Expedition.

The rancho was granted in 1823 by Governor Arguello to Jose Joaquin Castro, and extended along the coast from La Selva Beach to the Watsonville Slough and inland about four miles. This rancho, like the others, raised longhorned cattle, horses, as well as other animals such as pigs and goats. These animals were originally brought to California by the Spanish and Mexicans. They did not exist here prior to their introduction by the Spanish explorers, missionaries and other newcomers to the area.

### LIFE ON THE RANCHO

Life on the rancho consisted of people working hard during the day, but Californios enjoying the nighttime when singing, dancing, playing games and other entertainment were popular.

Men and women had different jobs, but it was native people who did most of the work at the rancho. They found jobs at the ranchos after secularization of the nearby missions and served the family of the large ranchos.

Men raised crops to feed the families. The crops included wheat, corn, barley, lentils, beans, *nopales* (cactus) and some people planted apple, pear, lemon, orange and olive trees. People also raised chickens for their eggs and meat.



**The men's work included taking care of the cattle and horses.** Source: "Cattle Drive" by Nick Eggenhofer (1897-1985). [www.americangallery.com](http://www.americangallery.com).

Women cooked, cleaned the home, took care of the children, washed the clothes, weaved cloth and helped the men when needed. Native women typically got up very early to start the fire in the *cocina* in order to prepare breakfast. Breakfast usually consisted of *tortillas*, beans, eggs, hot chocolate and perhaps some leftover meat from the night before.

## — LESSON TWO CONTINUED —

Many of the men were *vaqueros* (cowboys), who not only watched over the herds, but gathered the cattle for branding and ear tagging so they could be identified. There were no fences in those days and the cattle roamed where they wanted in order to find grasses to eat. The *vaqueros* also needed to protect the cattle from grizzly bears and mountain lions.



**The vaqueros rode out to find and bring in the cattle because there were no fences.** Source: “The Herd Quitter” by Charles Marion Russell (1864-1926).

Cattle were important animals on the ranchos. Twice a year there were round-ups of the cattle. The Spanish word *rodeo* was used in Alta California to describe the rounding up of cattle, as well as the competitions held by *vaqueros* displaying their horse riding skills.

*Rodeos*, which are still popular today, started here in California. In the spring the calves had to be branded. The branding identified to which rancho the cattle belonged. The brands often included the initials of the owner; sometimes the brands included numbers or other symbols. The brands were not very complicated. They had to be easily identified and easy to make out of iron.



Once all the calves were branded, the cattle were let loose again.

**Rancho San Andrés’ brand**

The second round up of the year, called a *matanza*, was to select cattle for their hides. Each year, hundreds of cattle were killed for their hides and tallow. Each hide was worth one dollar (they were sometimes called the “California bank note”), which in those days was a lot of money. Not only were the hides important, but the tallow was too. In those days tallow was used for making candles and soap.

To prepare hides for shipping they had to be cleaned and stretched out to dry in the sun. To make sure the hides didn’t shrink, holes were made around the edge of each hide so that they could be staked in the ground when they were drying.

Once they were dry, the hides were folded in half and piled into stacks of about 25 hides. These bundles were then cured. The curing process included taking bundles of hides and letting them soak in ocean water for two days. Then these bundles were put into large containers of ocean water to which even more salt was added, and the hides stayed in this really salty water for another two days. Now the hides were considered “cured”.

The prepared hides were taken down to the *embarcadero* near what is now Monterey Bay Academy. There men would carry the hides over the heads out to small boats to be loaded. Ships in the Monterey Bay took the hides to other ports and wharves in the United States where the hides were made into shoes, boots, saddles and other important items made of leather.

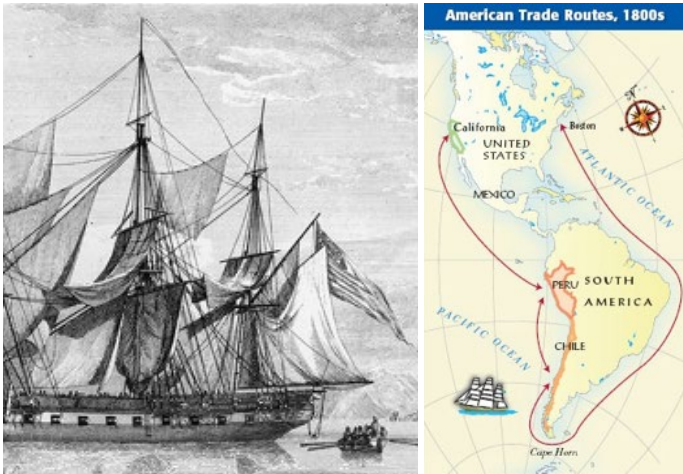
The native people had the job of cooking the carcasses of cattle until the fat would float to the top of the giant kettles. They would skim off the tallow and put 25-50 pounds of tallow into leather bags called *botes*, which were then traded or sold for supplies they needed on the *rancho*.



Source: [www.mysanpedro.org](http://www.mysanpedro.org).

## — LESSON TWO CONTINUED —

When the trading ships were in the Monterey Bay, the ships were like stores where people from the *ranchos* would go on to them, so they could buy or trade for what they needed. Certain things they couldn't make on the rancho. It was from the trading ships that people got dishes, fine cloth, clothing from America, Britain, Peru, Hawaii or the Philippines, and other items not available in Alta California at that time. When the trading ships were in the Bay, it was often a time to celebrate.



Ship Source: USS Boston by Jean Jerome Bugean (1764-1819).  
Map Source: [www.macmillanmh.com](http://www.macmillanmh.com).

### FANDANGOS AND FIESTAS

There were celebrations throughout the year when big jobs such as rounding up and branding the cattle were finished. The celebrations included sports such as horse races, wild bull and grizzly bear fights, and similar activities. The celebrations always included feasts with roasted beef or pork and lots of delicious foods.

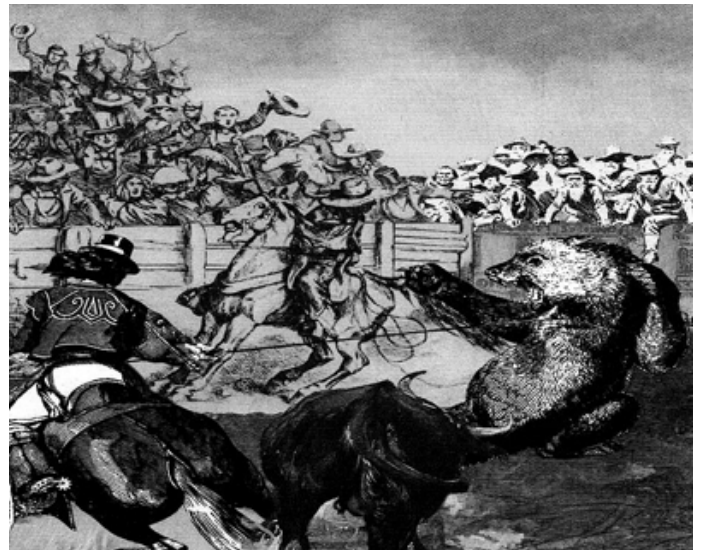
Dancing was included in the celebrations, and the Mexican fandango dance was very popular. In one description of the fandango dance the women kept their arms down to their sides and only their feet moved in a very rapid, particular rhythm. Then men, with more movement of their bodies, danced around and between their partners.

### WILD BULL AND GRIZZLY BEAR FIGHTS

The California grizzly bears, the largest land animal in California, flourished in Santa Cruz County. They could weigh from 700 to over 1,400 pounds, and be 7 to 9 feet long. In 1852 an American pioneer reported that at First and Main Streets in Watsonville, there were bullfights and occasionally wild bull and grizzly bear fights. In Rancho Corralitos, not far from Rancho San Andres Castro Adobe, there were wild bull and grizzly bear fights in their corral. In the 1860s, a Jonathon Watson counted 300 grizzly bears in one valley in the county.

There was plentiful food for the grizzlies. They ate everything from tiny huckleberries and acorns, to salmon, deer, tule elk and dead whales that washed up on the beaches. When the *matanzas* happened in the fall, there was plentiful meat for the grizzlies to feast on because the vaqueros killed cattle for their hides and tallow, but left the carcasses out on the range to rot.

The wild bull and grizzly bear fights were exciting and very dangerous. First, several vaqueros had to find and lasso a wild longhorn bull and bring it to the rancho. There they had to make sure it was secure and couldn't escape or injure anyone. It also took four or five vaqueros on their horses to go out and capture a grizzly bear. They had to lasso the grizzly's neck and legs, and then drag it back to the rancho's corral. One of the hind legs of a grizzly bear was tied to a front leg of a wild bull and then the fight would begin.



Source: "Visions of Frisco" by Wilfred Satty (1939-1982).

Grizzly bears were large, dangerous animals that would sometimes kill animals belonging to the rancho as well as the vaqueros who tried to protect the rancho's cattle.

When the two animals fought each other, people would bet on which one would survive or be killed. Sometimes the bear was able to kill the wild bull, and other times the bull was able to gore the grizzly bear to death. Whichever animal survived the fight was considered the winner.

The wild bull and grizzly bear fights were held outside the Rancho San Andrés Castro Adobe where people could watch. The women would usually be upstairs on the balcony where it was safe.

Later owners of the Castro Adobe discovered an iron tang (ring) which had been inserted into a nearby tree and was used to tie the animal to the tree during these fights.

## — LESSON TWO CONTINUED —



*Native Californians Lassoing a Bear*

New York: F. Appleton & Co.

**Vaqueros capturing a grizzly bear.** Source: "Native Californians Lassoing a Bear" by Felix Darley (1822-1888).

When the United States took over California from Mexico, after the Mexican-American War (1846-1848), the bull and bear fights were no longer allowed although some fights were held up until the 1860s.

### ACTIVITIES

1. Make a brand using the information on what the various styles of brands mean. Use a pipe cleaner to shape the brand – keep it simple – attach a second pipe cleaner to the first one as a handle. When the brand is complete, dip it into tempera paint and print the brand on a piece of paper.

There are a lot of websites where one can learn about what the symbols on brands mean. This is one of the simplest:  
<http://www.tscrabrand.com/design-brand.html>.

2. Make a *diseño*: a map of the rancho for the Mexican government. Using a piece of drawing paper 18 x 11 inches, students draw a map showing a "birds eye view" of the school grounds. The map will include all the buildings, trees and garden areas, playground structures, basketball courts, and other important landmarks of the school.
3. Make a *diseño* in another way – pretending to do it as it was done 150 years ago. Get a rope that's 10-15 feet long.

Have one student pretend to be a horse, and another student pretend to be the rider holding one end of the rope. The "horse and rider" drag the rope across the playground and field, and other students record every time the rope has covered 30 feet of ground. Other students map the area the horse and rider cover, including all the important buildings and other landmarks on the school grounds.

4. Research the uses of tallow in the rancho days. Find out how much tallow was shipped from Alta California in the 1820s and 1860s.

Here's a helpful link: <http://www.sfgenealogy.com/sf/history/hb75yr.htm>.

5. Write a story pretending you are the one who has to carry the tallow or cured hides out to the boats in Monterey Bay. Explain what it's like to walk in the water and make sure the hides or bags of tallow don't get wet or lost.