

# California Vaqueros' Home on the Range

Rancho San Andrés' Castro Hacienda lives on as one Santa Cruz County's oldest residences

By Robin Shepherd

**T**he Rancho San Andrés Castro Adobe offers a rare glimpse into the Mexican Rancho Period of early 1800's California. Located north of nearby Watsonville, the adobe hacienda is currently being restored to its former glory by Friends of Santa Cruz State Parks (FSCSP) in partnership with California State Parks.

The historic hacienda (circa 1848) was built by Juan Jose Castro, son of Jose Joaquin Castro, a member of the epic Anza Expedition (1775-1776) and patriarch of one of San Francisco's founding families. Castro built the Castro Adobe on the family's land grant, Rancho San Andrés, a magnificent 8,856-acre tract that stretched from the Monterey Bay to Corralitos and from the Pajaro River to Aptos.

The Castro family raised cattle, sheep, and goats. They traded hides and tallow. And they grew wheat, corn, beans, and potatoes. They brought with them the Vaquero style of skilled horsemanship still practiced today. Native peoples, many of whom came from nearby missions, did the building construction, ranching, farming, and domestic work on the rancho.

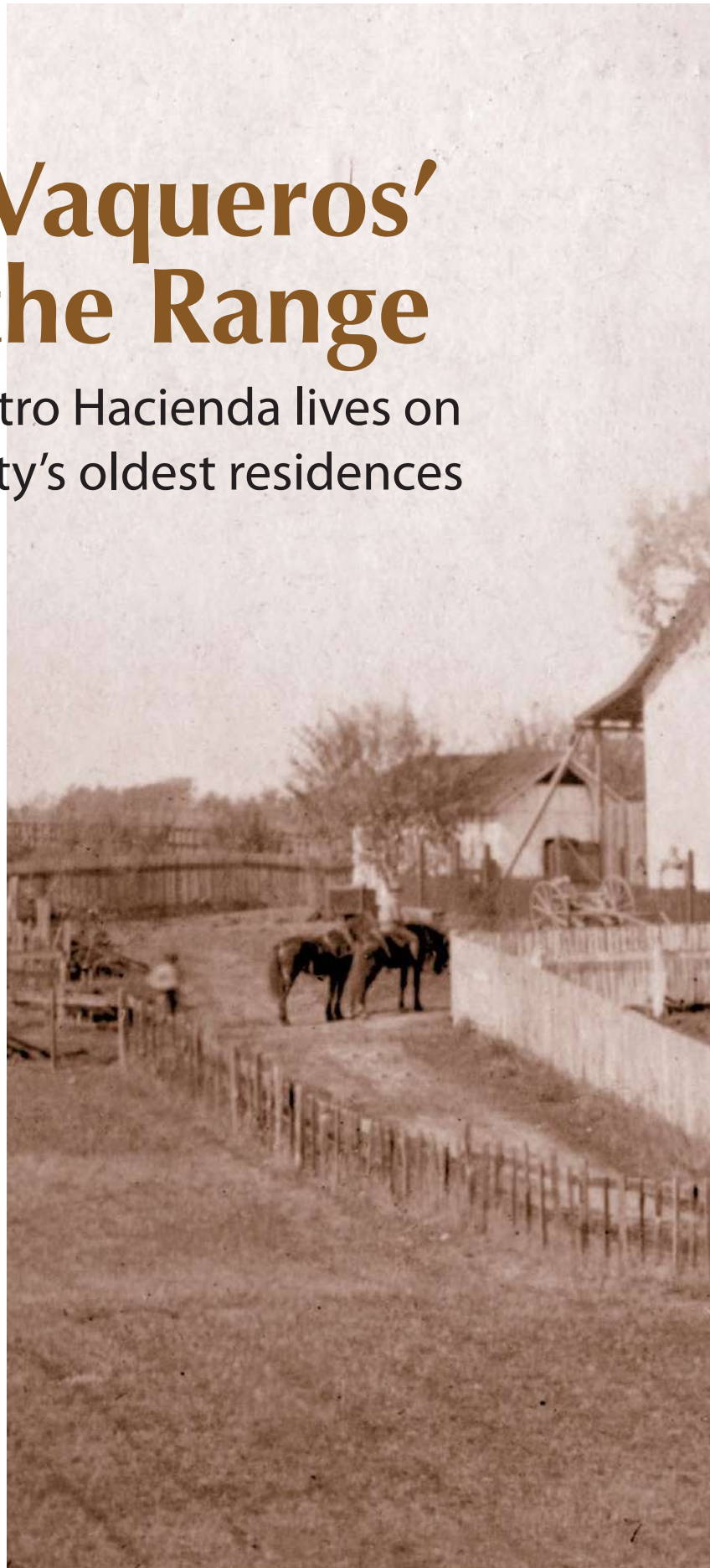
California Parks volunteer Charlie Kieffer, 79, is a direct descendant of the Castro family, a distinction of which he was unaware until he was in his forties.

"I found out after my wife Patty signed me up for the Wilder Ranch docent program and I became a volunteer with Santa Cruz State Parks," said Kieffer, a former Chair of the Friends Castro Adobe Advisory Committee. "I did some research and

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(Right) Just outside the Castro Adobe's garden fence, a pair of horses stand patiently on the carreta road. The hacienda's surrounding assortment of barns and out buildings were essential to the rancho.

Photo: © Pajaro Valley Historical Association 1970.15.5ab





By Peter Crooks

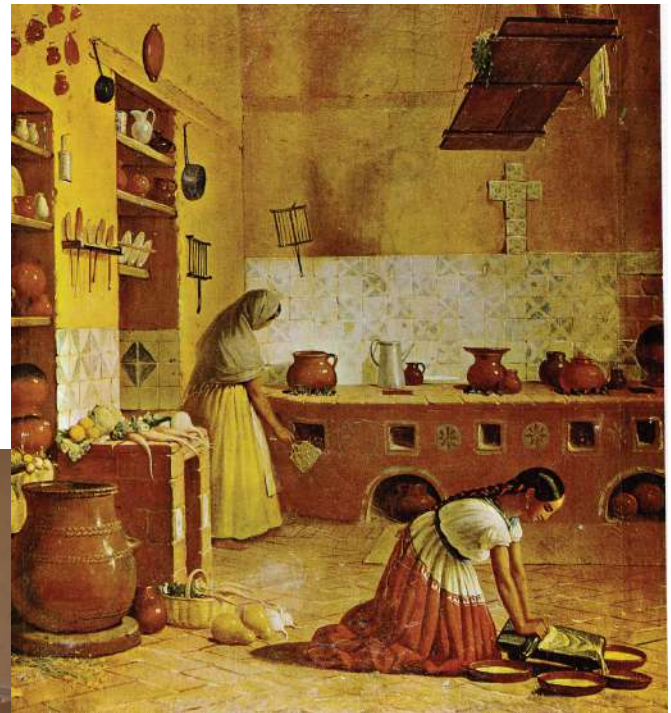


Photo: © Friends of Santa Cruz State Parks

(Above) The rear of the adobe features an expansive patio and the Potter-Church Garden designed by Thomas Church. Church was a 20th century landscape architect who inspired the “California Style” movement in modern landscape architecture, his work included master planning for UC Berkeley and UC Santa Cruz.

discovered that my great-great grandmother and her two sisters were part of the Castro family. They held a Mexican land grant for the land that is now Wilder Ranch State Park. I learned about the Castro Adobe and other State Park lands that were originally part of their landholdings. The Castros were one of thirty families that traveled on foot with Juan Bautista de Anza from New Spain (now Mexico) to Northern California. They documented everyone in the expedition party. Some kept diaries of the experience, which are available online.”

In its heyday, the house offered sweeping views of the surrounding countryside, overlooking the carreta (cart) road that stretched from the redwood forests of neighboring landowner Jose Amesti to the Castro embarcadero near Monterey Bay Academy and Sunset Beach, where lumber was shipped out.



(Above) Early California women prepare meals in a typical cocina, or kitchen, similar to what would be seen in the Castro Adobe. (Left) Damaged by the Loma Preita earthquake, the Castro Adobe’s kitchen has now been restored with a functioning wood burning brasero (stove).



Photos (Left) Mickey Carroll (Right) Colmenares, Octavio, editor 1984 Escenas Mexicanas del Siglo XIX. Edamex. Mexico, D.F.

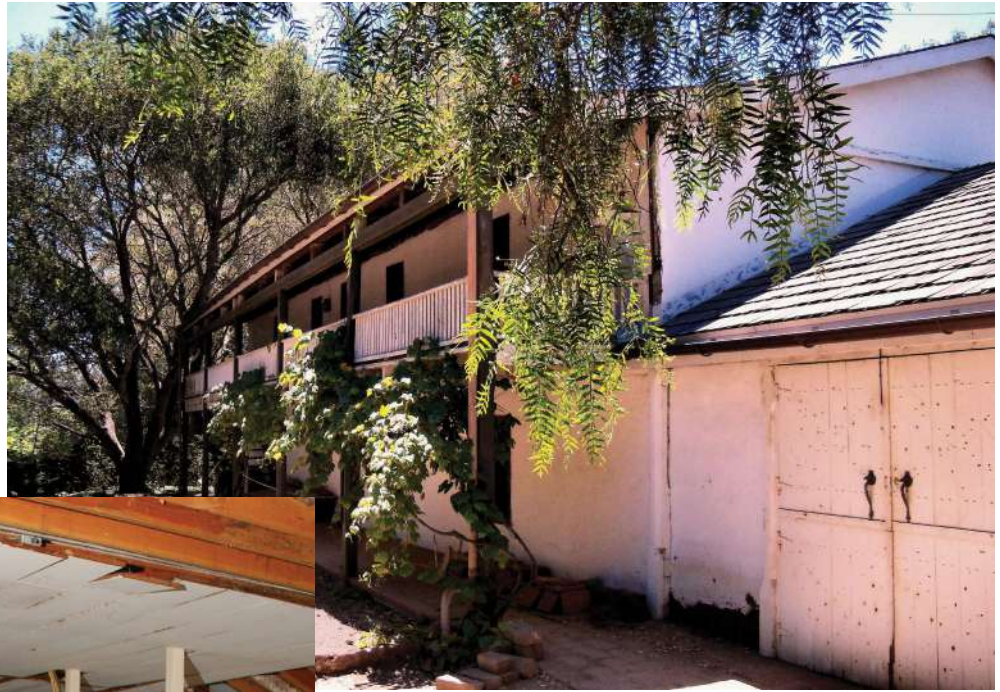


Photo: John Pilge

(Above) The front of the hacienda featured an extensive balcony that offered commanding views of the Pajaro Valley.

(Left) Although currently under restoration, the hacienda's spacious fandango room, which is located on the second floor, is where family and vaqueros would meet for music and dancing.



Photo: Mickey Carroll

"What makes the Castro Adobe historically distinctive is that it's a two-story hacienda with a fandango room and an original cocina (kitchen)," said Bonny Hawley, Executive Director of Friends. The adobe is built one room deep, allowing the California sunshine to warm and brighten the interior spaces. Hospitality was shown to travelers by providing a room, a hot meal, and a lively fandango with music and dancing for family, workers, and guests to enjoy. The Castro family lived in the adobe until 1880, after which it changed hands many times. In 1988 Edna and Joe Kimbro purchased it.

"Edna was a noted adobe conservationist and historian who had worked for several State Parks," Hawley said. "The Kimbros had been living in the Castro Adobe less than a year when the Loma Prieta earthquake struck, damaging the structure. They moved into a FEMA trailer and built a new home, the Kimbro House, on the property. Their advocacy for the adobe's restoration led California State Parks to purchase the property in 2002."

Over the next four years, FSCSP partnered with California State Parks to plan the Castro Adobe's restoration, beginning the

work in 2007. They brought in preservation architect Anthony Crosby and structural engineer Fred Webster to provide design and engineering services. The damaged adobe brick walls had to be rebuilt to be historically accurate while also meeting seismic requirements.

"The composition of the new bricks had to be compatible with the original bricks in terms of sand, silt and clay content," said FSCSP Historic Preservation Project Manager Jessica Kusz. The organization received brick-making guidance from Tim Aquilar of the Santa Barbara Historic Trust and raw material from Central Home Supply. More than 150 people teamed up to make 2,500 adobe bricks—each measuring 14 by 28 by 4 inches and weighing about 85 pounds—by hand. The massive bricks had to be watered daily for about three weeks, and then carefully turned for curing.

"The rebuilt walls were reinforced with steel rods," Kusz said. "A steel beam was added to strengthen the second floor and provide for larger loads. The damaged roof was replaced with new wood shingles. In the cocina, the earthen floor was restored

and State Parks constructed a reproduction brasero (stove), in keeping with the original structure. Wilder Ranch blacksmith volunteers crafted the brasero's iron grates."

Along with stairs, a lift was installed to provide ADA-compliant access to the second floor.

"It required a bit of excavating under the first floor, which was completed by Albion Environmental, an archaeological consulting firm, along with UCSC and Cabrillo College volunteers," Kusz said. "They discovered game pieces, buckshot, ceramic chards and beads. They also found part of a violin, which may have been associated with Juan Jose's brother, who was a violinmaker."

Next steps will include restoring the front of the building, balcony, boardwalk, and exterior stairs and columns. Inside, chicken wire and stucco will be removed to get to the original whitewashed adobe walls. Every detail of the hacienda must be historically accurate, down to the kitchen utensils, door hardware, and furnishings.

"The vision for interpretive programs is to provide visitors with a sensory experience of life on the rancho," Hawley said. "Imag-



Photo: © Pajaro Valley Historical Association 1970.1.56b

(Above) Following the death of Juan Jose Castro in 1877, the adobe became property of Hans Hansen. Three generations of Hansen pose with their dog in front of the adobe for this nineteenth-century portrait. The Hansens occupied the adobe until just after the turn of the century.

ine people dancing in period costumes to Californio music in the fandango room. Even now, local students get to eat tortillas fresh off the brasero, learn roping techniques, and make adobe bricks.”

Not bad for a field trip.

“Edna Kimbro passed away in 2005, but her research library archives have provided us with valuable information for interpretive planning,” Hawley said. “We plan to make her archives open to the public.” Along with the Castro Adobe, the State Park owns the Potter-Church Garden, the Kimbro house (slated to become the future visitor’s center), and eight acres adjacent.

“It’s a labor of love to preserve and interpret this California Historic Landmark so people can experience the rancho lifestyle that is part of Santa Cruz County’s history,” Hawley said. The Castro Adobe will host monthly open house events throughout 2017 as fundraising and restoration efforts continue. The grand opening is targeted for Fall 2018. 🍷



(Above) Charlie “Castro” Kieffer, who was raised in the area, is a direct descendant to the Castro family.

Visit Early California

Upcoming Events at the Adobe

- Luck o’ the Castros, March 18
- Vaqueros y Bandidos, April 22
- Women of the Castro, May 13
- Papas of the Castro, June 17
- The Castro Adobe in the American Era, July 22
- Evening at the Adobe, Aug. 19

Castro Adobe State Historic Park

184 Old Adobe Road, Watsonville

Information on the Adobe

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Photo: Mickey Carroll