

— LESSON THREE —

The Rancho San Andrés Castro Adobe



BACKGROUND

The Castro family has a long history in Santa Cruz County. The original pioneer who came to Alta California was Jose Joaquin Castro who came with the second Anza Expedition in 1775. Jose Joaquin was seven years old when he traveled with his family to the San Francisco Presidio. Later he settled at Villa de Branciforte, across the San Lorenzo River from the Santa Cruz Mission, which is now part of Santa Cruz.

Where Branciforte and Water Streets meet was the center of the Villa de Branciforte in those days. Juan Jose Castro was born to Jose Joaquin Castro and Maria Antonia Amador in 1805. Juan Jose would later share his father's land grant of Rancho San Andrés. Rancho San Andrés covered the area from Rancho Aptos to the north, La Selva Beach in the west, to Watsonville Slough in the south, and Rancho Corralitos to the east. Juan Jose lived at the rancho with his wife, Rita Josefa Pinto and their 12 children.

Jose Joaquin's other son, Rafael, was granted Rancho Aptos which neighbored Rancho San Andrés to the north, and his sister, Martina, was granted Rancho Soquel and Soquel Augmentation north of Rancho Aptos. Wilder Ranch was known as Rancho Refugio, and was granted to the daughters of Jose Joaquin, Maria Candida Castro and Jacinta. Another daughter, Maria de los Angeles Castro Majors, was granted Rancho San Augustine, which is now part of Scotts Valley. The Castro family owned over 250,000 acres of what is now Santa Cruz County by the 1840s.

The San Andrés Castro Adobe is located in a beautiful setting. The house is only one room wide, so there are views in both directions from the windows.

The Castro Adobe is the only two-story adobe hacienda ever built in Santa Cruz County. It was considered the grandest adobe structure in the county! The Castro Adobe was built between 1848 and 1849 towards the end of the Rancho Period. It is a wonderful example of Monterey Colonial architecture.

There are many oak trees on the property. Acorns litter the ground. They would not have gone to waste during the time when the Ohlone lived in the area. The Ohlone ground acorns into a flour that they cooked as a main food throughout the year.

There is a stream and spring on the property that provided fresh water. Redlegged frogs and Santa Cruz long-toed salamanders lived in the wet area that is part of the San Andreas Watershed.



Source: californiahерps.com.



Source: savethefrogs.com.

The beaches along the coast provided good fishing, as well as *embarcaderos* for loading hides on boats. The rancho had fertile soil where many crops were grown to feed the family as well as the livestock.



The Rancho San Andrés Castro Adobe today. One can see the steps leading to the second story and the balcony.

— LESSON THREE CONTINUED —

Adobe buildings do not do well with earthquakes or wind blown rain. Many adobe buildings have not survived to this day because of these factors. In Santa Cruz County there are only four adobe buildings left, and one of them is the Rancho San Andrés Castro Adobe in Watsonville. The other three are the Santa Cruz Mission State Historic Park adobe, the Branciforte adobe and the Bolcoff Adobe at Wilder Ranch.



One of the adobe bricks inside the cocina. One can see the straw that was included in the adobe mixture.

INSIDE THE CASTRO ADOBE

The Castro Adobe became famous for having the Fandango room on the second floor. A fandango is a dance as well as a party that was usually held if guests were present for a special celebration or the annual *matanza*. The Fandango room took up most of the second story except for the bedrooms.



Here's a picture of what it was like when people were dancing in the Fandango room. Source: "Tradiciones Nuevo Mexicanas" by Mary Montano.

The Fandango room was a very important room in the house. It was where the musicians played their violins and guitars. It was where the people danced and had fun. The parties would last until very late, until midnight and beyond. When the party ended it was too late and dark to go home. Remember, in those days no one had flashlights and there was no electricity. People used candles for light inside.

Many people would fall asleep on the floor of the Fandango room. They would sleep in bedrolls. In the morning everyone would have breakfast before leaving for their own *ranchos* or town.

Outside the Fandango room is a balcony that is the length of the house. Women and children could watch wild bull and grizzly bear fights from the balcony. The balcony also provided a beautiful view of the Pajaro Valley and the *embarcadero*. This photo of the Castro Adobe shows how bare the landscape was surrounding the *hacienda*; one can understand how easy it was for people to see these views. **The Castro Adobe was typical of many haciendas in the Rancho Period; it was built on the top of a hill with a view of the Rancho San Andrés property in all directions.**



Source: c. 1890. Pajaro Valley Historical Association.

COCINA AND FOOD

The Castro Adobe is also important because it has an indoor kitchen, the *cocina*. This is one of only a few Mexican Rancho kitchens in California that survive to this day. Inside the *cocina* is a *brasero*. The *brasero*, a long masonry cooktop, has three openings where fires can heat up the pots. Most adobe houses built in the Rancho Era had outdoor kitchens that included the beehive shaped adobe oven called an *horno*, but the Castro Adobe had an inside kitchen.