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 build 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.

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.
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.

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.

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.

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 horn, but the Castro Adobe had an inside kitchen.