

Turning back the clock to the early days of Santa Cruz, historic Mission Hill will ring out this Saturday with the exuberant sights and sounds of Fiesta Day. In its fourth year, Fiesta Day not only celebrates the birthday of our town but recalls the unmelted pot of Californios, Native Americans, Spaniards, Mexicans and Yankee New Englanders that originally made Santa Cruz.

Launched by an 11 am parade (led by Grand Marshall Sandy Lydon) that drips nostalgia, horses, the Wells Fargo stage coach, antique autos, military brass bands and countless high school high-steppers, the Fiesta swings into high gear up on Mission Hill where every available inch of grass and every Mission hall will be taken over by salsa, mariachi and blue grass music, crafts booths, food vendors and folkloric dancing.

In every sense of the word (real and exaggerated) this is a hometown affair. Begun four years ago by the active leaders of the Adobe Coalition (a fiercely committed group of Mission Hill preservationists), Fiesta Day not only provides old-time frolic for anyone remotely enamored of Santa Cruz, but also helps call attention to the only remaining relic of the Spanish Mission days.

Actually, it would be more accurate to call Fiesta Day a revival of a Santa Cruz Mission Fiesta that began back in 1928, thanks to the efforts of Fred McPherson, Jr. — founder the SC Historical Society. Edna Kimbro, who spearheads the Adobe Coalition, recalls that back in the '20s Fiesta Day was combined with a gala Santa Cruz Birthday Party, a week-long celebration that included a parade, a costumed Cascarones Ball and a Spanish Cantina at the Palomar Hotel. The original Fiesta was crowned by an outdoor Mass on Mission Hill during which the original 18th century Mission vessels and vestments were used.

"It [Fiesta Day] was probably in response to a wave of nostalgia and a reaching into the past that swept California when the wildly popular novel *Ramona* came out," Kimbro theorizes. "Those were the days when the Mission revival in furni-

Fiesta or Famine: Mission Hill Festival



Costumed revelers at the roaring '20s version of the Santa Cruz Mission Fiesta, posing around the fountain at the old St. George Hotel.

ture design and architecture thrived." But eventually World War II came along and the Fiesta shut down.

Ask any one of the present Fiesta Day coordinators what Saturday's day-long festivities are *really* about, and they'll tell you in no uncertain terms.

According to Kimbro, there was "a little flurry of interest in preserving the remaining Mission structure in the '20s and '30s, then nothing...until lately. Now some serious people, mostly archaeologists and historians, have taken it on together. It's really been the first rebirth of interest in this issue." And the issue is the School Street Adobe, built in the late 18th century by Native American parish converts as their living quarters.

Plagued by floods, earthquakes and deterioration, the Adobe is now all that remains of the Mission

Marlow de Ville

complex founded by Father Fermin Lasuen in 1791. Owned by Tulare Indian families in the mid-1800s, the building was eventually divided into two domiciles — that of the Neary family, and the eastern portion, owned by the Rodriguez family and lived in by Rodriguez descendent Cornelia Lunes Hopcroft until her death several months ago at age 104.

Thanks to the efforts of McPherson and various local legislators, the state bought the Adobe in 1958, a purchase that brought no further monies or action from state legislators. Today the Adobe continues to crumble and the once-flourishing gardens behind have fallen into overgrown ruin. Worse, the original structure remains hidden

beneath additions and alterations foisted upon its skeleton during the Victorian period.

Fiesta Day coordinator Doni Tunheim fumes about the state's irresponsibility regarding this Santa Cruz monument. "They owe the community. They've spent millions in Monterey, from adobe doghouses to adobe outhouses. The Fiesta makes enough to keep itself in business for next year. But the main function of the event is to publicize our heritage. For this one day the Adobe will be open to the public — it's the *only* time people can see it. And you'll get to see the embarrassing state it's in. We're the orphan of the Mission chain, and all we want is to see it restored to what it is: the oldest remaining piece of the Mission."

Politics aside, Fiesta Day planners are excited about the upcoming celebration itself. This year

there is a special attraction, over and above the non-stop music in the Plaza, programs in the Mission Chapel and authentic Mexican folkloric dancing in Parish Hall. Inside the Adobe itself, from noon until 4 pm, Olga Ponce Furginson will demonstrate the ancient Mexican craft of "Papel Picato" (paper cutting).

In addition to a multi-media slide show, an exhibit of historic panorama photographs of old Santa Cruz and the Monterey Bay area will be on view. Behind the Adobe, Fiesta-goers can participate in "Hands-on History" which includes demonstrations of tortilla-making in the adobe oven (horno) and candle-dripping. You can also make your own adobe bricks and grind corn on a mano and matate.

Ruth Marie Arguello Sheehan of the American Story Telling Institute will spin tall tales of early California at 1 pm in the Mission Patio (behind the Chapel) and adventurers will enjoy a tour of Rob Edwards' (of the Cabrillo College Archaeology Department) dig-in-progress of a Lost Adobe structure.

Fiesta-going will be made painless for history buffs, thanks to two dozen strategically placed historical markers around the Mission Hill area. You'll be able to imaginatively strip back the decades to the days when the Plaza was the central gathering place and water source for the early Mission community, and to a later era when the Hill was the business center of Santa Cruz, dotted with saloons, jails, hotels and Chinese laundries.

On Saturday the Mission Hill Plaza will be crowded with covered wagons, teepees, mariachi bands, and heritage craft and food booths from over 60 local non-profit organizations. Try a quesadilla from Tandy Beal & Co., wash it down with a wine cooler from the Scotts Valley Historical Society and finish it off with homemade apricot tarts. Spinners, weavers, a blacksmith, as well as the Latin folk music of Jose Luis Orozco, will conspire to satiate your historical and physical appetites and hopefully take you on an early California time-trip of which the Adobe is the sole legitimate relic. □