

Villa de Branciforte marks 220 years

Branciforte

Event showcases unusual circumstances behind colonial era Santa Cruz

By Michael Todd

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SANTA CRUZ » Most of the people in the Branciforte Small Schools community room didn't know native Americans could be held as slaves until 1877 – after the Civil War. Or that they could be considered U.S. citizens only in 1924. Or that they could practice their faiths legally after 1977.

Those and other lessons were

instilled during an hour-long seminar Saturday celebrating the 220th anniversary of the Villa de Branciforte at Branciforte Avenue and Water Street.

Visitors participated in adobe brick-making and a walking tour along Branciforte Avenue, the first surveyed road in California, said Ed Silveira, founder of the Villa de Branciforte Preservation Society. The society hosted Saturday's event.

"Our goal is to bring out the

true history," Silveira told the Sentinel. "Our history should have never been forgotten. ... We were the first county. Did you know we were one of the first three cities in California?"

Saturday's history lesson reminded the room of about 45 people that Santa Cruz always has a weird history.

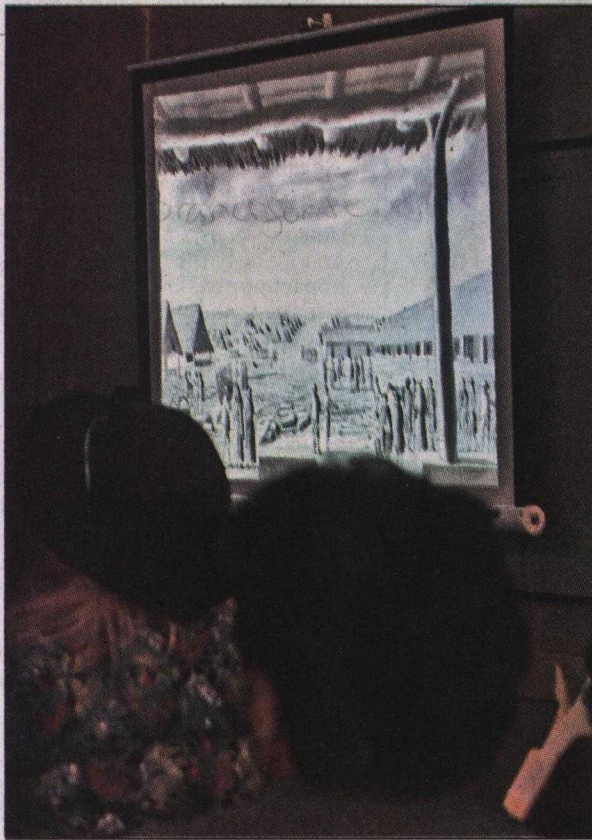
"It's a strange town with lots of interesting archaeology," State Archaeologist Mark Hylkema

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Dylan Hubbard, 8, left, and his 11-year-old brother Bryson use mud to make adobe bricks, in one of the extracurricular activities of historian Mark Hylkema's Saturday lecture about Villa de Branciforte.

LUCJAN SZEWCZYK — SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL



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Slide-show during historian Mark Hylkema's Saturday lecture about the importance of Villa de Branciforte.

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said. During the 1830s, Branciforte had a race track and was a hub of raucous behavior.

"There was a lot of partying and drinking — kind of like now," Hylkema said.

He also said it is a mistake to think the frontier was wilderness. He said the land was managed by a populous and diverse group of native Americans.

For Peter "Vallejo" McGettigan, a native American, said he knew the stories from his grandmother and was proud that others were willing to hear the real story of California.

McGettigan is a mem-

ber of E. Clampus Vitus — a historical and fraternal drinking society with chapters across the West. The group was formed to help orphans and widows of miners killed during the 1840s gold rush. The organization still exists today.

For Larry Singer of Santa Cruz, the event was a way for him to spend time with his grandchildren. His grandchildren loved to "get their hands in the dirt" while making adobe bricks of the type that were used during the colonial era in Branciforte.

Villa de Branciforte was formed in 1797. The town was secular and was the only of its kind created in colonial California, according to villabranciforte.org.