



Tarmo Hannula/Register-Pajaronian

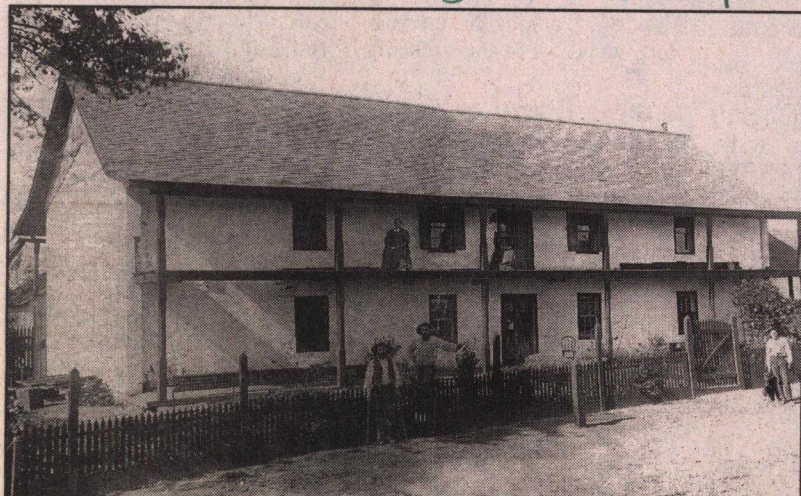
Charlie Kieffer, a descendant of the Castro family, talks about progress on preserving the Castro Adobe home on Old Adobe Road in Watsonville Thursday.

# A historic milestone

Castro Adobe to hold open house on June 7

Historic Houses - South County

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Contributed

The Castro Adobe is shown in a photo from around 1895.

By TODD GUILD

OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

**WATSONVILLE** — Some seven years after a team of volunteers began restoring the Castro Adobe, and 165 years after Juan José Castro built it, the historic structure will open June 7 to the public, but anyone who wants to see it should hurry.

The one-day open house will highlight the renovation work that has been going on in earnest since 2007, with tours of the cocina-style kitchen and restored garden.

Visitors will also be able to witness the unveiling of "The Adobe Series," art prints featuring the Castro Adobe and Santa Cruz Mission by artist Michael Schwab, who is credited with prints of several other county state parks.

After the open house, visits will be for school groups and other tours by appointment only, until it opens sometime in 2015.

The Castro Adobe, which was built in 1849, lies on a patch of land that has throughout its 165-year history been variously used for cattle grazing and farming.

The building is located on Old Adobe Road in Larkin Valley, which is itself an old horse cart path dating back to the 1800s.

Most of the original 13,000-acre Rancho San Andreas, which once stretched from the Pajaro River to Seascapes, has been sold off.

The last resident, Edna Kimbro, moved out in 1989 after the Loma Prieta Earthquake rendered it untenable.

But the historic structure has never



**Bonny Hawley,**  
executive director  
of Friends of Santa  
Cruz State Parks,  
talks about a fully  
restored brasero  
inside the cocina at  
the Castro adobe.

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## CASTRO

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been forgotten.

That's thanks in part to Kimbro, whose restoration efforts continued until she sold it to Friends of Santa Cruz State Parks in 2002.

The organization also purchased the old Kimbro house, which will serve as the interpretive center.

The efforts haven't been easy. The adobe has been besieged by years of wet winters and scorching summers and hammered by the 1989 Loma Prieta Earthquake.

Before the work began the walls were cracked and crumbling, the garden unkempt and overgrown. The upper floor, moreover, was unsafe.

Friends of Santa Cruz State Parks and a group of volunteers began to restore the adobe in 2007, making 2,500 adobe bricks by hand over a three-week period. These now replace several aging bricks that were placed there well over a century ago.

The house is now a National Historic Site and a California State Landmark.

The building was once part of a network of haciendas throughout the state that served as waypoints and rest stops for people traveling

through California.

Charlie Kieffer, whose great-great grandmother, Maria de los Angeles, once lived in the house, described the places as the Hyatt Hotels of their day, where travelers could rest from the rigors of the trail.

"You couldn't survive on the trail without stopping at the places," he said.

There, visitors could borrow a horse, stay for free as long as they needed and take from a basket of pesos left outside, Kieffer said.

Unique because it had two floors, the Castro Adobe boasted the only fandango room — a large dance hall — for hundreds of miles.

It was there that the owners would host dances, weddings, and other events that would draw visitors for miles. After the parties, the revelers would simply lay their bedrolls on the floor.

Visitors would also stand on the balcony and watch the goings-on below, which famously included fights between bulls and grizzly bears.

Perhaps most importantly, the adobe has one of five Mexican-style cocinas left in the state.

If all goes according to plan, school groups and other visitors will watch as workers make food on the brasero, a Mexican-style wood-burning stove made from brick.

To get it ready for the tours,

which are slated to begin in the upcoming academic year, workers repaired walls and fixed the roof.

They also restored the garden, which was designed by landscape architect Thomas Church and managed by Elizabeth Potter, who once lived in the house.

"We're really excited about it," said Friends of Santa Cruz State Parks director Bonny Hawley. "We think it's going to make a lovely event space."

But still to come were the structural upgrades that would hold up the building during an earthquake. This included a series of steel beams, rods, essentially creating a giant rib cage around the building.

When it opens on June 7, the Castro Adobe will be the second historic state park in Santa Cruz County, and the only state park in South County that isn't a beach, Hawley said.

"This has been a labor of love," she said.

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*The Castro Adobe open house is from noon until 2 p.m. on June 7 at the Castro Adobe at 184 Old Adobe Road in Watsonville. Parking is limited and carpooling is encouraged.*

*For information, visit [www.thatsmypark.org/projects/castro-adobe](http://www.thatsmypark.org/projects/castro-adobe). To schedule a tour, call Friends of Santa Cruz State Parks at 429-1840.*