

Castros reunite at historic adobe home

Historic Homes
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Restoration progress allows rare indoor glimpse

By TARMO HANNULA

OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

Close to 100 members of the Castro family congregated at a family reunion for the first time in 130 years at the historic Castro Adobe home in Watsonville Saturday.

The three-hour celebration offered friends and family a rare glimpse inside the two-story home that was purchased by the state in 2002 and named the Rancho San Andrés Castro Adobe State Historic Park.

The home — which is one of five such buildings in the state — is undergoing a major restoration to restore it as close to its original state as possible. It was built in 1848-49 by Juan Jose Castro, son of Jose Joaquin Castro, an original member of the De Anza party expedition of 1775.

"We were just heart-warmed that so many people have come to this wonderful event," said Castro family member Charlie Kieffer. "To be able to celebrate a family heritage of this scale is just great."

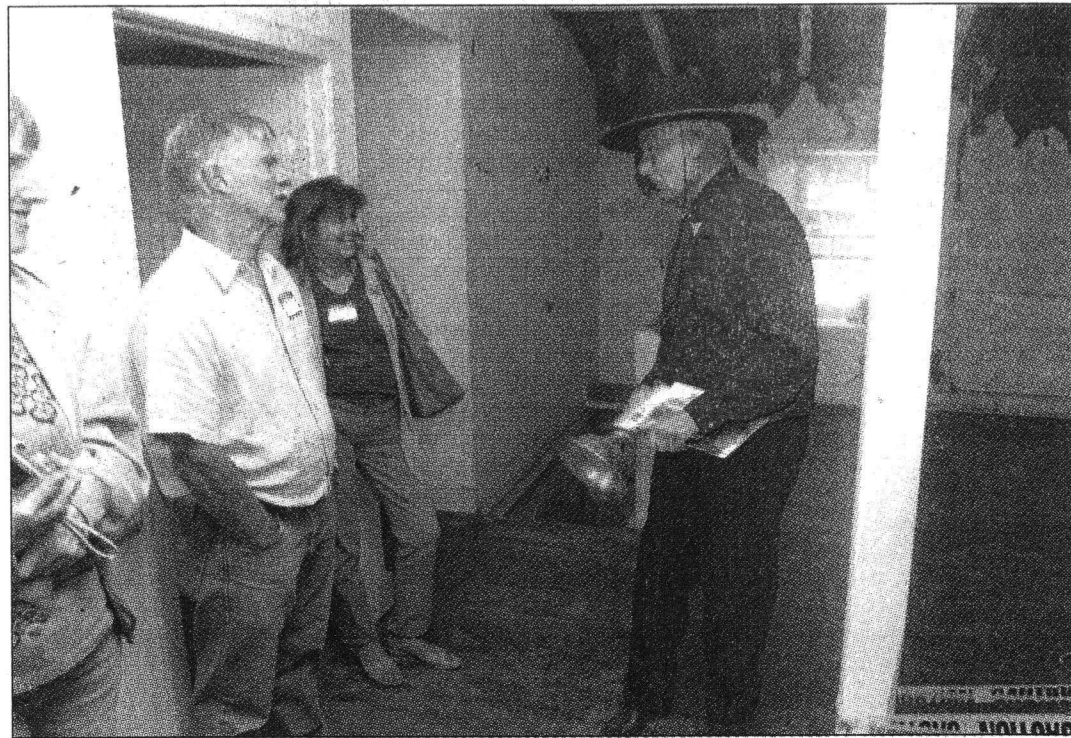
Kieffer said that the Castro family usually celebrates a reunion at Wilder State Park, but were able to meet at the adobe home on Old Adobe Road with special permission because the structure has been strengthened enough with recent construction to accommodate small groups of people for brief tours. The reunion party largely centered in the shady garden area beside the home.

Though various families have lived at the home over the decades, the Castro Adobe house had been crumbling under the weight of 160 years of

sun, rain and wind — as well as two major earthquakes. After the structure was damaged in the 1989 Loma Prieta Earthquake, then-owner Edna Kimbro tried for years to get it restored before selling it to the state in 2002. It's now a national historic site and a California Historical Landmark. State plans call for its complete restoration.

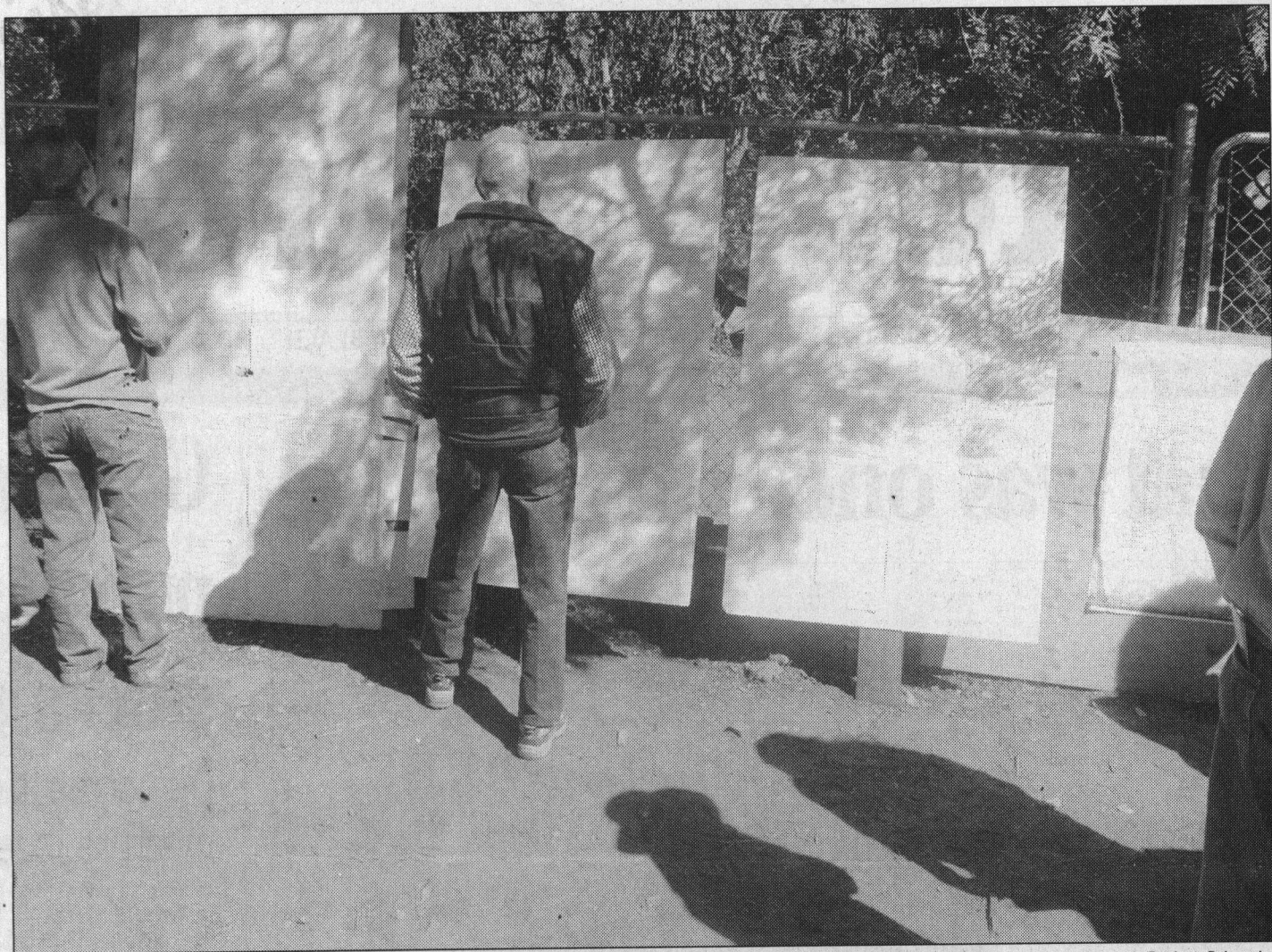
"The grandest of all adobe buildings representing Northern California's rancho period is the two-story Castro Adobe," according to the Castro Adobe Web site. "This hacienda features a spacious fandango room on the second floor and an original one-story cocina, one of only five such Mexican kitchens remaining in the state. With

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Tarmo Hannula/Register-Pajaronian

Charlie Kieffer (right) leads a tour of the Castro adobe home on Old Adobe Road in Watsonville Saturday during a Castro family reunion at the State Historic Park, which is still undergoing a major renovation.



Tarmo Hannula/Register-Pajaronian

ABOVE: Friends and family observe the extensive Castro family tree. **BELOW:** Charlie Kieffer shows a young girl historic photographs of the early days at the Castro adobe home.

CASTRO

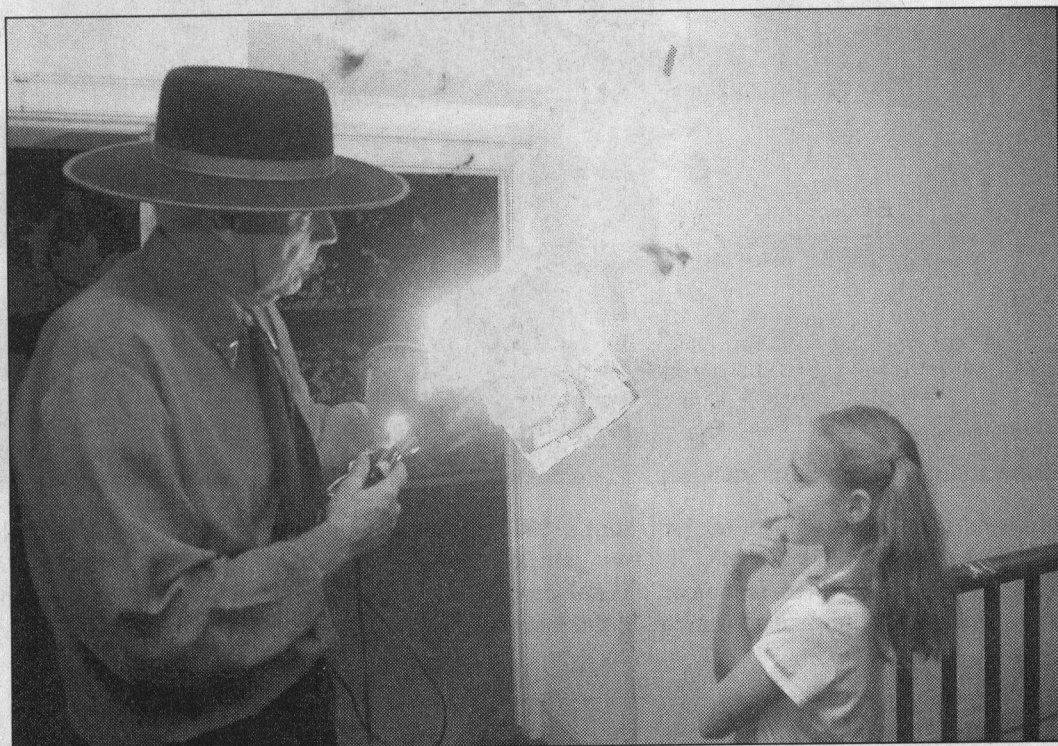
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its long, two-story proportions and full-width open balcony, it is a distinctly Monterey-Colonial building that demonstrates the expansion to the countryside of this celebrated architectural form from its original urban setting, at the end of the Mexican era (1821-48)."

Renovation work is now approaching the final stages of roof work, said Chris Barraza, the carpenter foreman working with the project. New roof rafters are being bolstered by I-beam steel and numerous bolts and lags. Porch work is next in order, as well as extensive interior restoration.

Teams of volunteers recently built 2,500 adobe bricks that are being used to reconstruct some of the walls. The bricks were put up for "adoption" for \$100 each, an idea borne to raise funds for future phases of the restoration.

Dobie Jenkins said he not only helped make some of the bricks, but also was happy to



get on board a tour of the upper floor of the Castro Adobe Saturday.

"I heard a lot of stories I've never heard about this place," Jenkins said. "There's so much to learn. It's really important keeping this history alive. They

thought for a long time that this building was just going to end up as rubble. And now look at all this work that has taken place."

For nearly a year, a team of state experts adept in restoring historic buildings have been working on the structure. Now,

walls once crumbling to dust are fully restored, smoothed with adobe mud by craftsmen whose knowledge runs back generations.

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Staff writer Todd Guild contributed to this report.