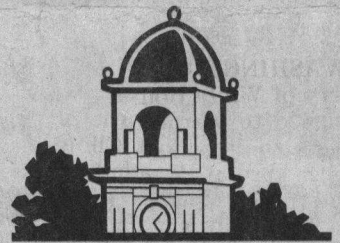




FROM THE COLLECTION OF ROSS ERIC GIBSON

Santa Cruz's 1793 mission, above, survived secularization in 1834 and remained as a church until the 1857 earthquake destroyed its facade. Below, the building at left was the 1824 mission "chastity

ward," housing widows and unmarried Indian women. It was converted into the "Monterey Colonial" style Eagle Hotel in 1848. The school at right was built in 1866 and demolished around 1940.



SANTA CRUZ
Historic Perspective

Trial and error structures

Early Spanish used five types of architecture in the area

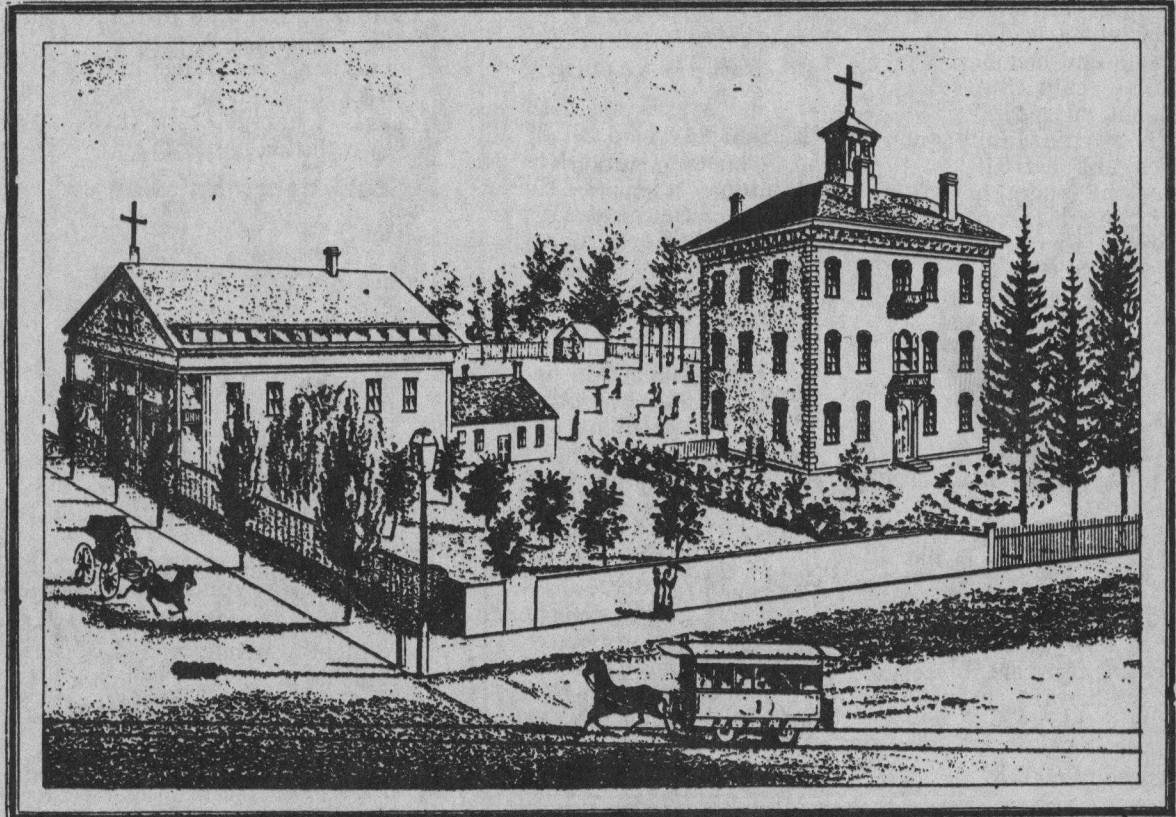
BY ROSS ERIC GIBSON
 Special to the Mercury News

Five types of architecture were common to Santa Cruz County's Spanish era. When the mission was established in Santa Cruz in 1791, it was originally below Mission Hill, 500 feet from the river, where San Lorenzo Lumber is today. Instead of adobe, the architecture was of split-log palisades rammed into the earth, then covered with a thatched roof. The "Spanish palisadal cabin" was a common forerunner to adobe in California.

In Santa Cruz, three months after construction, the mission was washed away in the winter storms, and when it was rebuilt, it was washed away again the following year. So it was rebuilt out of adobe atop Mission Hill, and never again did the Spanish build on this flood plain, which they used for agriculture.

Adobe was made by mixing mud with straw, dung and urine, and originated as desert architecture, where timber is scarce. The daily baking of desert heat actually strengthens the structure, while its thick walls keep a cool temperature inside.

Yet adapting desert architecture to a moist climate like the



Monterey Bay's required new solutions. Here, mud-bricks could not be laid directly on the ground, because the adobe would soak up moisture from

the soil, disintegrating the bricks; wall-gophers were also a hazard. Adobes around this bay were constructed primarily on three-foot stone foundations.

The Santa Cruz adobe mission was originally flat-roofed in desert style, until the roof caved

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Variety in our early architecture

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■ ARCHITECTURE

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in a year later under the weight of pooling rainwater. A gabled roof was added, though evidence of the original roof could be seen in the flat chapel ceiling, and in the old cornice line on the facade. The clay roof tiles were a new feature, not seen on California's missions before 1790. They originated, some say, because of numerous thatch-fires from Indian rebellions.

Paintings obliterated

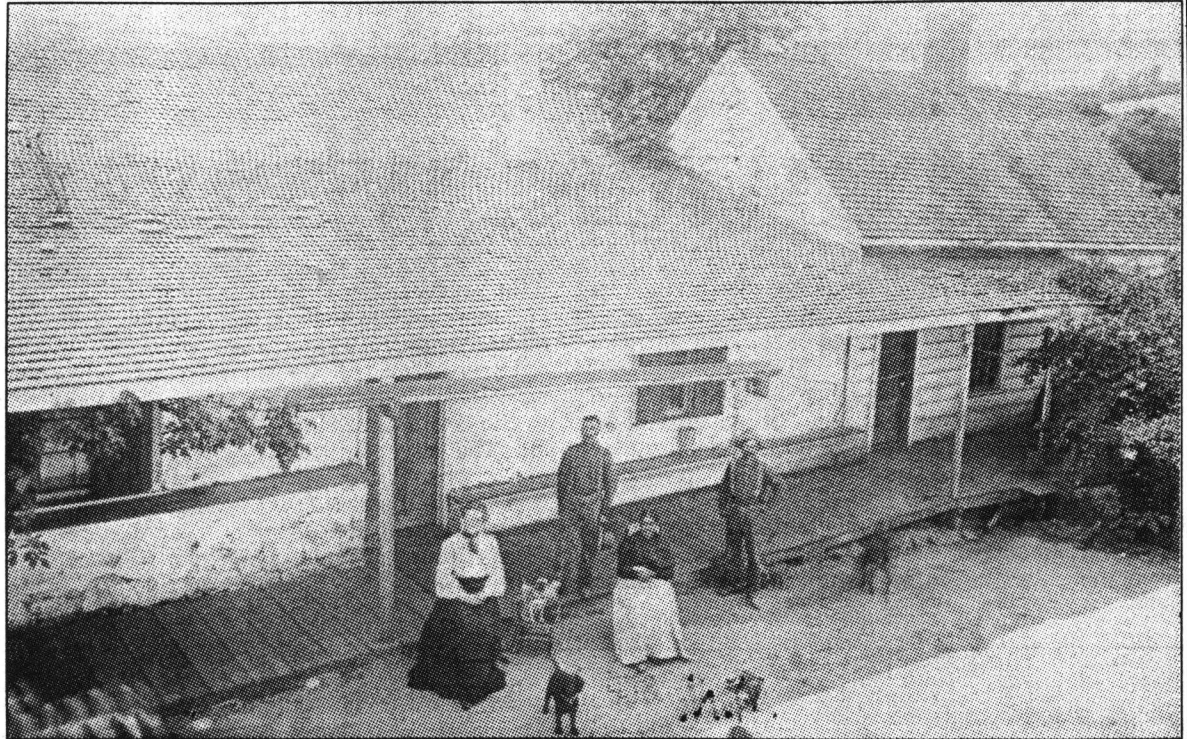
"California mission style" was decorated with simplified classical, Moorish and folk-art designs. The facades were generally carved masonry. Colorfully painted details (lost in later whitewashing) showed the features to come later in relief. Even desired furnishings were painted on walls in their proper places, until the actual items were supplied.

The long wings of the mission were unornamented, and were the basis for the "hacienda adobe," the house style of Indians, mission guards, villagers and ranchers. Due to their damp chill and lack of chimneys, outdoor life was preferred when weather permitted. These adobes were characterized by side colonnades and verandas.

Indoor campfires

In Indian adobes, a campfire was built on the dirt floor, and the smoke filtered out through gaps in the rafter tiles, blackening the unpainted walls in the process. In the settlers' homes, as Joseph Buelna recalled in 1886, the only house heat came from an adobe cook range. Heavy clothes and a sunning patio were the chief method of warmth, unchanged since medieval days. Most adobes had a fandango room, for festivities and family gatherings.

In 1796, Branciforte became the third and last secular Spanish town in California, founded at today's intersection of Bran-



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Photo from 1904 shows 1840s "modernization" of adobe house at the present Oakwood Cemetery.



SANTA CRUZ
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ciforte Avenue and Water Street. Mission guards helped build a nucleus of adobe houses at Branciforte Plaza, but the majority of pueblo homes were thatched, palisaded cabins. The padres complained that these settlers didn't know how to build a proper town, because they would "hide" their homes behind trees along the bluff of Branciforte Hill, where their gambling and mischief could not be observed.

But the palisadal cabin was essential under trees, being the

building of choice for Spanish mountain dwellers. Adobes could not take the damp forest environment. The redwoods drip long after a rain, and even release their own mist, making this environment at times as damp as a rain forest. And mountain clearings tended to be marshy in the rainy season, so it was only the rare mountain site suitable for an adobe home.

Non-Spanish settlers continued the tradition of adobe construction as late as the 1850s. New Englanders spruced up local adobes with shutters, framed windows and doors, wrap-around verandas, a shake roof, fireplaces and wooden floors. This gave birth to the "Monterey Colonial" style, represented in Santa Cruz by the Golden Eagle Hotel, a converted adobe at Emmett and School streets, which served as our first courthouse.

Enter the sawmill

In 1840, an earthquake top-

pled the mission tower and damaged county adobes. This came around the time when California's first power sawmill was established near Felton, mass-producing pre-sawed lumber for the first time. In a year of aftershocks, "plank haciendas" became a popular alternative to adobes, and were the forerunner of the "craftsman bungalow" style.

Adobes are high-maintenance architecture in our area, and the padres wrote of yearly rebuilding programs. Today, only five adobes are left in the county, with several in need of repair. But the restored Mission Adobe on School Street is open for tours, and will host the Mission Fiesta on Oct. 2.

Local historian, architectural consultant and author Ross Eric Gibson writes a history column twice a month for the Santa Cruz/Monterey edition.