

JAMES HOUSTON MEMORIAL

Friends gather to remember Houston

Music a central element to
'celebration' of author's life

By WALLACE BAINE

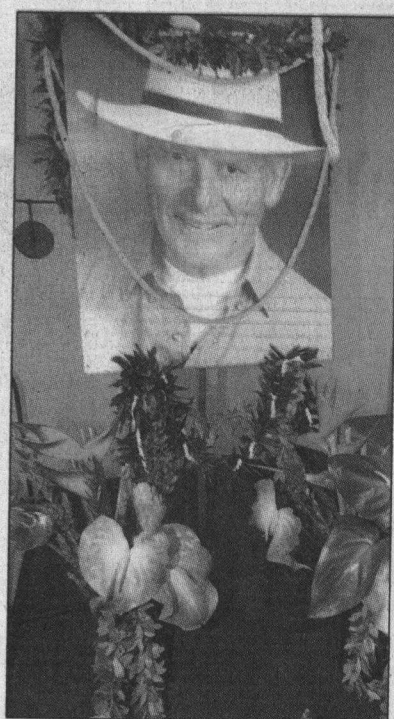
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SANTA CRUZ — From mournful Scottish bagpipes to a moving Hawaiian chant, the spirit of writer James D. Houston was celebrated Saturday in a remembrance that attracted an estimated 500 people.

Houston, who died at the age of 75 on April 16, was one of Santa Cruz's most celebrated literary figures and his memorial service reflected the essence of a man who was of Scottish ancestry, with Texas roots and an abiding love for Hawaii, but who was above all a man of California.

Writer and filmmaker Geoffrey Dunn, a close family friend, hosted the memorial that also featured such leading literary lights as novel-

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James Houston was remembered at a memorial service Saturday at Chaminade.

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HOUSTON

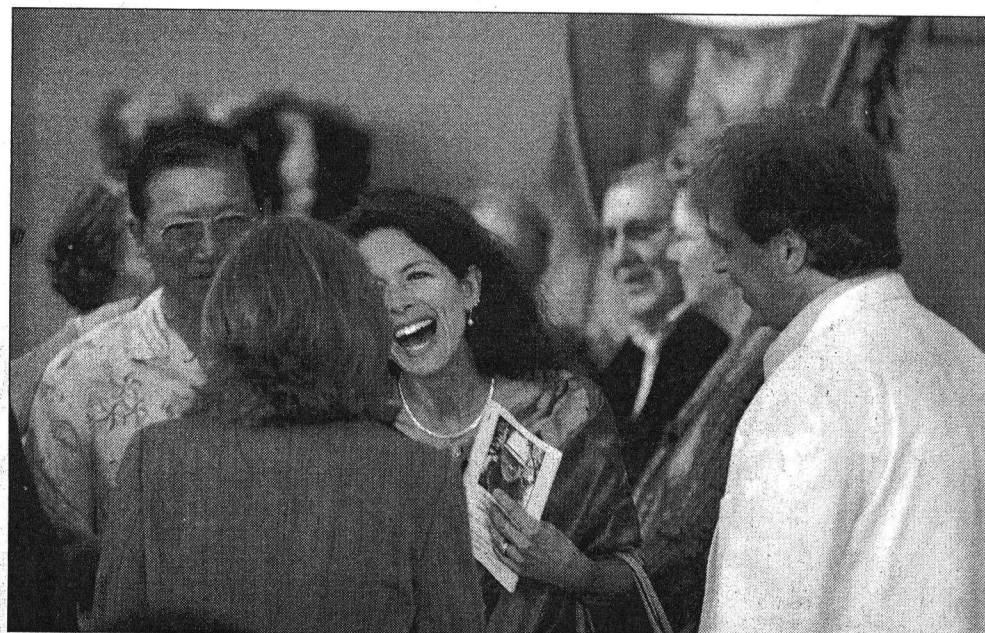
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ist Maxine Hong Kingston, Hawaiian musical legend Eddie Kamae and former California poet laureate Al Young.

"We're here to honor the life of a radiant spirit," said Dunn in his opening, stressing that the gathering was a "celebration." In that spirit, many of the attendees came dressed in aloha shirts and other festive flower prints.

Houston's influence encompassed his work as an author of eight novels and numerous essays and non-fiction books, many of them reflections on California history and culture. He was also a teacher and workshop leader at UC Santa Cruz and several other universities and was a long-time board member of the Squaw Valley Community of Writers. He and his wife, Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston, lived in the East Cliff Drive house that once belonged to Donner Party survivor Patty Reed.

Santa Cruz arts patron and Houston friend George Ow Jr. reflected in wonder on Houston's many blessings, including his three children, his career and his house. "He had it all," said Ow. Guest speaker Jeanette Paulson is the director of the Hawaiian Film Festival,



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Friends of James Houston, including George Ow and Siri Dunn, exchange greetings before Saturday's memorial service for the Santa Cruz author.

tival, which was the direct inspiration for the Pacific Rim Film Festival in Santa Cruz, founded by the Houstons and Ow. She remembered her first meeting with the Houstons. "My life was never quite the same after meeting Jim and Jeannie Houston."

Kamae, the Hawaiian ukulele legend turned documentary filmmaker, collaborated on seven films about Hawaiian life and culture with Jim Houston. He and his wife Myrna flew in from Hawaii; Eddie, his voice croaking with emotion, sang a song called

"We'll See You at Home."

Music was a central facet of Houston's life — he earned a living as a guitar teacher and played in a jug band in Santa Cruz in the 1960s. Kamae's song and the haunting bagpipes of Santa Cruz piper Jay Salter were the only scheduled musical events, but there were impromptu moments as well, as when poet and friend Al Young began singing Hank Williams's "Hey, Good Lookin'," adding later of his relationship with Houston, "We loved each other and that doesn't end."

Hawaiian chanter Kalae Miles closed the service with a chant titled "A Love Chant for James," which capped an afternoon of friends, family and admirers trying to express the legacy of a man of wide-ranging passions and interests. Novelist Kingston, who shared the stage with her husband actor Earl Kingston, left the audience with the reminder that Houston's influence continues.

"Right now, Jim is hearing us," she said, "and if we listen carefully, we can hear him, too."