

✓ Mission is one of a kind

By KAREN CLARK
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SANTA CRUZ — On Aug. 28, 1791, members of several Ohlone tribes gathered in a place called Aulinta and watched as a handful of Spaniards planted a cross and conducted a strange ceremony.

The Ohlones didn't know it then, but what they knew as Aulinta had officially become Mission Santa Cruz.

In the next 43 years, Ohlone Indians built the mission and lived on its grounds as unpaid workers for the priests and soldiers.

What they left behind was a treasure trove of cultural artifacts unique in the preservation efforts of the California missions.

The lone surviving building of the Santa Cruz mission (the 12th of 21 Spanish missions built along the California coast) is part of a 17-room long house on School Street where the Indian workers lived. The way subsequent dwellers remodeled the building served to encapsulate remnants of those early days.

200th year

■ Santa Cruz marks its bicentennial this year, honoring the founding of the Santa Cruz mission on Aug. 28, 1791.

Today's stories mark the first in an occasional series on the mission and the founding and development of Santa Cruz.

Nothing like it remains at any of the other missions, said local historian Edna Kimbro, making Santa Cruz the source of much of the hard-to-find knowledge on Indian life at the missions.

"In excavating Mission Santa Cruz, we learned a great deal more of Indian physical culture was preserved than we

thought," said Kimbro, an expert in adobe construction. "It wasn't obliterated."

This year, as Santa Cruz celebrates its 200th birthday, not a single descendant of any Ohlone who worked at the mission has been found in the county.

"There are Ohlone Indians here," said Kimbro. "No one has ever been able to find one who could trace their roots back to life at the mission."

A smallpox epidemic in 1839 decimated the already weakened Indian population in Santa Cruz, said Kimbro. By the end of 1839, only 70 Indians were counted.

Many of those who survived left the area. One, however, stayed in Santa Cruz and was interviewed by a historian near the turn of the century.

Kimbrow said this interview also makes the Santa Cruz mission unique because it's the only written recollection that remains of life in the California mission system from an Indian perspective.

Lorenzo Asisara, as he was called by the Spanish priests, was the son of one of the Indian founders of the mission.

So much of the mission history, said

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Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Edna Kimbro in the Mission Adobe.

Santa Cruz bicentennial

Mission

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Kimbro, was written from a Spanish viewpoint that Asisara's interviews are both rare and valuable because they come from an era when little thought was given to what the workers in the mission thought.

"Very few people paid much attention to them," said Kimbro. "It's great that some of the only writing from Indians of that time was from a Santa Cruz Ohlone."

The adobe living quarters at the local mission has been painstakingly restored, and will be opened to the public when enough money is allocated by the state to build bathrooms and parking facilities, said Kimbro.

The state has spent nearly \$4 million in the past 10 years to buy land and restore the mission's lone remaining building. Restoration is expected to be finished in about six weeks.

"What's real special is that the whole point of the mission was to Christianize and make (Spanish) citizens of the Indians," explained Kimbro. "The churches are the symbols of that effort, but they tell you very little about the people. Even so, restoration and preservation has concentrated on the churches."

At Santa Cruz, said Kimbro, an earthquake collapsed the church in 1857, and what was left was torn down in 1886. It had survived since being built in 1794, but most of the other buildings at the mission weren't as lucky.

In fact, said Kimbro, Santa Cruz priests and soldiers were plagued with building problems — the structures kept falling down.

"Here, when it was found that the only building we had left was the only remaining Indian-quarter building left (in the mission system), the archaeological significance was understood," she said. "It had huge repercussions. . . it was an opportunity to really archaeologically investigate the structure to understand how the Indians lived there."

It took awhile to figure out what the adobe had been, said Kimbro. Until 1980, it was thought to have housed the soldiers at the mission.

Kimbro is a member of the Adobe Coalition that was formed in 1980 to preserve the structure. Ed Castillo, its first chairman, was a UC Santa Cruz faculty member and a Native American.

The coalition's main goal was to save the mission adobe, which had been owned by the state for 20 years, but had not been restored. The restoration began when the state finally allocated the money.

"When the state archaeologists found the fire pits in the middle of the floor, that was it. Everyone knew the definition of a Native American habitat was they had a fire pit in the floor."

"That's when the logic became overwhelming that this is the only Indian quarters left in this system in the entire state."

It took years to carefully tear out later remodeling, painstakingly charting each item for its own historical significance, said Kimbro. What couldn't be restored to its original condition was accurately reproduced.

"This was the most intensive investigation of a structure before restoration that's ever been done in the state," she said. "That building was turned inside out to cough up everything it could tell us about the Indians who lived there. . . Everything that could be preserved as it was has been."

Kimbro said key to uncovering the

building's secrets have been state archaeologists Karen Hildebrand and Larry Felton, who have been on the project since 1980.

What they found was there had been 17 rooms in the long house when it was built between 1822 and 1824. Kimbro said it was the last major building project at the Santa Cruz mission, and one of the most solidly built.

"It obviously was not the first one built," said Kimbro. "So they built a lot of other housing for the Native Americans before, and apparently not very well because they didn't survive."

"They had a problem at Mission Santa Cruz of putting up buildings and them falling down," added Kimbro. "We do know they had lousy luck. . . The reason this one survived is that by 1822 they probably had figured out what they had been doing wrong."

The wall on the seven remaining rooms in the Indian long house are very thick and the foundation comes up high enough to protect the walls from quakes and rains.

Kimbro said the other 10 rooms would have survived as well, but the Catholic Church used them for a parochial school, and then in 1890 folks decided they didn't like it. Called Holy Cross Boarding School, it was torn down that year and replaced.

Evidence shows a whole Indian family lived in a single 16- by 18-foot room, which had one window and one door. The window had no glass, just wooden shutters. A loft 10 feet off the ground could be reached by ladder and was used for storage, or possibly a place for children to sleep. The adobe building was covered with a tile roof.

"It was a lot like a studio apartment from today," said Kimbro. "The doors were real low because, we assume, . . . the Ohlone were considerably shorter."

Although the Spanish were trying to force the Ohlones to abandon their old ways, Kimbro said much of the Indians' culture was uncovered in the restoration.

For instance, although the Ohlones adopted games of chance played by the soldiers (much to the priests' displeasure), there also is evidence old Indian gambling games were played at the same time.

Then there are the fire pits. The Spanish used braziers for cooking, and, in fact, wanted the Indians to eat the food they provided from a communal kitchen.

The Ohlones took their gourds, shells or baskets to the big kitchen and got their servings, and then returned to their rooms to cook pieces of meat they had hanging from the ceiling.

That much was known from Lorenzo Asisara's interviews, said Kimbro, "but what we didn't know was they also had bows and arrows, hooks and nets, and went out and got their traditional food."

She said archaeologists Hildebrand and Felton found bones and projectile points in the rooms, proving the Ohlone were "augmenting their official mission diets." They even found burnt seeds and clam shells in the fire pits that had simply been covered by subsequent owners.

Kimbro said the Spanish gave the Ohlones religious trinkets, but some of the old religion survived as evidenced by the things uncovered in the excavation.

"These were the kind of things the priests took away if they found them," said Kimbro.

Soot from the fire pits remains on walls uncovered in the restoration, said Kimbro, who is particularly intrigued by the actual Indian handprints that can be

seen in the soot.

It was these close quarters that helped wipe out much of the Indian population at Mission Santa Cruz, just like at the other missions, said Kimbro.

European diseases brought by the Spanish took their toll on the Indians, reducing the Indian population from a high of 523 in 1796 to 358 in 1816, wrote historian Robert H. Jackson.

He wrote that his research found that more than 2,000 Indians died in Santa Cruz between 1791 and 1846, and while 2,300 baptisms were recorded, only 550 births at the mission were reported.

The little 13-room adobe hospital was kept busy by the "huge losses," said Kimbro.

Many of those who didn't die became frightened and ran away, often over the hills and into the San Joaquin Valley. The priests were alarmed about the deaths, said Kimbro, but records show they were relieved the Indians "were Christian when they died so their souls went to heaven."

Such thoughts can be found in diaries and letters from the priests, but in the military records from the Presidio in nearby Monterey come records of other actions.

Kimbro said historians believe the church sent soldiers from the Presidio in Monterey across the mountains into what is now the Tulare County area in 1816.

The stated goal was to recapture some of the Ohlones who had fled disease and mission life, but, said Kimbro, military documents show many of those rounded up and brought back were Yokut Indians from the Tulares.

The captured Indians were divided among the Central Coast missions to replace the rapidly dwindling labor force, said Kimbro.

She said many of the artifacts uncovered at Mission Santa Cruz show the Yokut influence because they intermarried with the Ohlone and started new families.

"This was by far the most morally indefensible action taken by the church," said Kimbro about the capture of the Yokuts.

In 1834, when the Franciscan priests and Spanish government gave up on its effort to colonize and Christianize the Indians, the Santa Cruz mission was the first of the 21 to be secularized.

The Santa Cruz adobe passed into a succession of private hands, and different parts of the building were bought by different families.

Around 1840, the Armas family remodeled part of the adobe in a Mexican style, adding new plaster and double doors. In the 1850s, the Rodriguez family also remodeled extensively, using lath and plaster and wood moldings.

Remodeling continued during the tenure of the Irish-Catholic Neary family, and other owners. The last resident of the adobe was Cornelia Hopcroft, who moved there in 1890 and remained until her death in 1983 at the age of 105.

In 1986, the state Department of Parks and Recreation allocated \$1.5 million to restore the adobe to its original state, but the cost has hit nearer to \$3 million. Another \$715,000 was used to buy nearby land to serve as a buffer between the building and newer homes.

The original allocation capped a multi-year battle between groups that wanted the subsequent remodeling to be included in the restoration, and those who wanted the original mission state restored.

A life of drudgery, marked by beatings

By KAREN CLARK

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SANTA CRUZ — Life at the Santa Cruz mission for most Indians was filled with dawn-to-dusk drudgery punctuated by frequent beatings depending on the mood of the priest.

Although the Indian viewpoint on mission life during the 17th and 18th centuries in California is largely unchronicled, one interview with a Santa Cruz Ohlone who served at the mission survives.

The narrative of Lorenzo Asisara was taken in 1890 by historian E.L. Williams, who was helping E.S. Harrison compile a history of Santa Cruz County, published in 1896.

According to Edna Kimbro, a member of the Adobe Coalition, it not only tells of life at the Santa Cruz mission, but also is among the only writings that tell the Indians' version of the Catholic Church and Spain's colonization of California.

Williams wrote that Asisara was living in Santa Cruz in 1890, having been born at the mission on Aug. 10, 1819, and baptized there three days later. He had been educated by the priests, and sang in the choir.

"The Indians at the mission were very severely treated by the padres, often punished by 50 lashes on the bare back," Asisara told Williams. "They were governed somewhat in the military style, having sergeants, corporals and overseers who were Indians, and they reported to the padres any disobedience or infraction of the rules, and then came the lash without mercy, the women the same as the men."

The Indians at the Santa Cruz mission

got up at dawn, attended prayers at the church, got their orders for the day at the church door and then went to breakfast.

"(They) had their meal altogether of boiled barley, which was served out to them from two large caldrons by means of a copper ladle," said Asisara. "Boiled barley was all they had in the mornings. The labors were in the field mostly. All of the land where (downtown) Santa Cruz is was cultivated."

The lunch bell rang at 11 a.m., and the Indians got a mixture of cooked horse beans and peas, he said. They had an hour for lunch, and then worked until sunset, when each got a ration of boiled corn.

"Such of the Indians as had families were given meat, also," said Asisara. "A beef was killed every eight days."

The surplus from the fields was sold to Russian, Spanish and English vessels that sailed into the bay. Russians took the wheat and barley; Spanish took beans, corn, dried peas and dried horse beans; and the English sailed away with hides and tallow.

"The Indians were dressed with pantaloons of coarse wool, and a blanket over the shoulders," said Asisara. "The women wore a skirt of the same material and also a blanket. We had no shoes or hats. If any of us entered the church with a dirty blanket, he was punished with 50 lashes, men and women alike.

"We were always trembling with fear of the lash."

Asisara said that when he was in charge of the roll, 836 Indians received rations. By 1839, all but 70 had died of disease or had run away to the central part of California, said Kimbro.