

THE RANCHO SAN ANDRÉS ADOBE

Evidence indicates that Joaquin Castro built the San Andrés Rancho adobe and his son, Juan José, expanded and enlarged it to its present thirty-by-one-hundred foot proportions. Edward "Ned" McGowan left a description of the interior of the house contemporary to Juan José's occupancy in 1857.

This hacienda was, in itself, quite a little village. The mansion, although built of adobes, was unlike the generality of California houses . . . It is a large, well-finished two story house. What particularly struck me about it was the ceiling of the upper rooms, which was composed of the most beautiful colored wood.¹

The adobe has survived but its future is uncertain. In 1975 historian Augusta Fink observed:

By 1915, the once proud house that had boasted a 30 by 50-foot fandango room on its second floor had degenerated in use to a hay barn and storage building. But a few years later, it was restored as a private residence. The collapsing southeast endwall was [reinforced] with [three] concrete . . . buttresses, and subsequent owners have continued discretely to improve without imparing its original proportions and appearance.²

That was before the Loma Prieta earthquake. The southeast endwall is again collapsing. The house is surrounded by an ugly cyclone fence and draped with plastic tarpaulins. Although the present owner has lovingly attended and protected the house, the

¹ Edward McGowan, Narrative of Edward McGowan, Including a Full Account of the Author's Adventures and Perils While Persecuted by the San Francisco Vigilance Committee of 1856 (San Francisco: Thomas C. Russell, 1917), p. 51.

² Morely Baer and Augusta Fink, Adobes in the Sun: Portraits of a Tranquil Era (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1972), p. 39; corrections made by author according to information supplied by the adobe's current owner, local historian Edna Kimbro.

cost of repairing the structural damage caused by the earthquake is beyond the financial resources of one family.

In a 1937 California Historical Landmark Survey, historian George Tays concluded the following about Joaquin Castro and the Rancho San Andrés adobe:

None of this branch of the great Castro family were prominent in public life in California . . . Nothing of any historical significance took place in that vicinity, nor was his [Joaquin's] particular family prominent from an historical standpoint. Therefore, there seems to be no special reason why the state should acquire the building as a monument.³

Tays, like other historians of his period, wrote and preserved history from an elitist perspective. Guided by a priority of "prominence," they glorified the Spanish mission and perpetuated the myth of the Spanish dons in textbooks and popular histories.

Fortunately, today's social historians use more enlightened criteria to analyze the historical significance of people, events, or structures. With a perspective that views history from the bottom up, and with an understanding that history results from complex interactions at all social levels, historians have reevaluated the significance of the Mexican period and the Mexican rancho in California history. The San Andrés Rancho adobe is, today, listed in the National Register of Historic Places, and is State Historic Landmark Number 998.⁴

³ George Tays, Report on the Joaquin Castro Adobe at Rancho San Andrés, manuscript, 1937, p. 2.

⁴ Information regarding the National Register and State Historic Landmark Number 998 supplied by historian Edna Kimbro, owner of the Rancho San Andrés Castro adobe.

Ideally, if the interest and the funds can be generated, the adobe will be repaired, restored, preserved, and historically interpreted to function as a historic house museum. The Rancho San Andrés Castro adobe, legacy of a California pioneer, is a physical reminder of California's Mexican past--the era of the ranchos.