

CHAPTER 2

INTRODUCTION TO HISTORIC CONTEXTS

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The following Historic Contexts were developed to reflect the chronological development of the area, thematic developments over time, and the connection of these themes to the Cultural Resources which can still be found within the City of Santa Cruz.

Because there are few specific identified resources associated with the Prehistoric and Hispanic Periods, the following material has been included by way of introduction to the three fully developed Historic Contexts that follow.

PREHISTORIC PERIOD

Anthropologists estimate that when the Spanish came to California in 1769, the native population was somewhere between 133,000 and 310,000. The area between San Francisco Bay and Monterey Bay was occupied by the Costanoan Indian "tribe" which numbered about 10,000. The term Costanoan is a linguistic one used by anthropologists that designates a family of eight languages. It was derived from the Spanish word *Costeños* meaning "coast people." The people did not think of themselves as Costanoan since they were not a single ethnic group nor a political entity. Today, descendants of these native people prefer to be called Ohlone, a word whose origins are uncertain but may have come from the name of a settlement located near San Gregorio Creek in San Mateo County.

Careful management of the land was an important part of the native culture. The Ohlone people carried out controlled burning of large areas to facilitate the growth of seed bearing annuals, to remove dead leaves that could become a fire hazard and to increase grazing areas for deer, elk and antelope. Game was an important part of the Ohlone diet which also consisted of acorn meal; fruit (which included blackberries, elderberries, strawberries and wild grapes); and fish. With the coming of the Spanish, the self-sufficient practices of California native Americans were brought to an end.

HISPANIC PERIOD

Missions—The Hispanic Period in Santa Cruz County began in 1769 when a Spanish expedition led by Captain Gaspar de Portolá, governor of Baja California, was sent to locate Monterey Bay. Although the coast of Alta California had been the subject of previous exploration as early as 1542, Spanish Colonial efforts for over two hundred years were centered in other parts of the world. Threats of colonization by both Russia and England in the 1760s refocused attention on California and, as a result, Spain designed a plan to occupy and settle the area. A key element of the plan was the establishment of a series of missions that would eventually stretch the entire length of California. The institution served both secular and religious purposes. In addition to the conversion of native people to Christianity, these frontier outposts were to provide supplies and support to the military presidios built to protect Spanish interests in the new world. Using Indian labor, the goal was not only to make the missions self-sufficient but to produce enough surplus goods to provide food and basic commodities such as leather goods, candles and clothing to the local military.

As a result of Portolá's visit to the area, a site was chosen on the banks of the San Lorenzo River for the twelfth mission, Santa Cruz or Holy Cross. The mission was begun in 1791 and the first annual report listed an Indian population of 89. This population reached its peak in 1796 with

523 neophytes (converted Indians). Disease, poor nutrition and fugitivism eventually took its toll and by the time the Missions were secularized in 1833, few members of the native population were left.

At the peak of its operation, Mission Santa Cruz ran 8,000 head of cattle which produced hide and tallow which were traded to foreign merchants for necessary supplies. Agriculture was also important to the Mission community's well being. With Indian labor, the Mission padres raised wheat, barley, beans, corn and lentils which were both consumed and traded. The missions also produced olives, fruit, berries and grapes for wine primarily for their own use.

Some of the Spanish missions in California were more successful than others. Santa Cruz, from the beginning was beset by problems. In 1793, factions of the native population assaulted guards and set fire to the guard house and corrals. In spite of the fact that the first temporary structures had been replaced by more substantial adobe buildings, the harsh, wet winters played havoc on the mission complex and, in 1796, the annual report stated that "the entire Mission was rendered unfit for use." In 1798, Father Manuel Fernandez wrote to his superiors that 189 neophytes had deserted, leaving only 30 or 40 to do all the work, the live stock were dying, and an unusual number of wolves and bears were menacing the outpost. The annual report for the same year said that a mill and hen coop had fallen, and although the ceiling of the church was built and rebuilt, it had once again come down in a storm.

Subsequent reports were more positive. Between 1810 and 1817, new buildings were constructed including an infirmary, a granary, a laundry and a tannery. In addition, improvements such as new roofs were made to the church and other existing buildings. More ill-fortune returned in 1818 when the mission was evacuated because of reports that a French pirate, Hippolyte de Bouchard, had raided Monterey. Although the mission was never attacked, the villagers of nearby Branciforte, who had been called on to remove and secure the mission's assets, reportedly used the opportunity to loot the premises taking everything of value including iron utensils, furniture and doors. During the confusion, 190 of the mission's 410 Indians fled the mission never to return.

New construction was once again reported in 1822. At that time a long block of adobe houses with tile roofs was built part of which was used for storing grain and farm utensils, the rest was divided into ten apartments with half lofts for the neophytes. Another seven units were added to this structure in 1824. This is believed to be the last major new construction done at the Santa Cruz site and today is the only remaining structure from the mission.

In 1833, the now independent Mexican government, decreed that all the missions were to be secularized thus converting them to civilian communities. One of the provisions of secularization was that all land and communal property was to be legally held in trust for Indians and was to be distributed to them. In Santa Cruz few Indians had survived missionization long enough to be acculturated. Two years before secularization, the Indian population at Santa Cruz mission was 284 and by 1839 the number had dwindled to 71. The decline resulted from smallpox epidemic in 1838 and endemic syphilis. During the active period of the mission, many Indians had left and, at the beginning of secularization, most of those remaining departed to find work in the civilian settlements and ranches — particularly in and near Branciforte.

Mission assets were disbursed, between 1834 and 1839 by three successive administrators, mostly to the administrators' friends and relatives. Parts of the mission complex itself, including the roof tiles, were used at local ranches and, as a result, most of the mission buildings collapsed during heavy rains 1839. The following year, the mission tower fell as the result of an earthquake. What remained of the mission church crumbled in another earthquake in 1857, and in 1886, the last of the adobe walls were razed.

Little remain of the records of secularization, but from those found, we know that some of adobe houses on mission property as well as outlying land were given by the last administrator, Bolcoff, to mission employees and to mission Indians. Records show that of 25 Indians held real property between 1834-1849.

Lorenzo Asisara, a mission Indian, recalled the last days of the mission in his remembrances (quoted in *Restoration Research Santa Cruz Mission Adobe.*): "Bolcoff, finding nothing else to appropriate, carried off to his rancho the bricks, tile, supports and old beams from the Mission. Thus the Mission property disintegrated. The lands were distributed to the Indians. Those who survived sold their parcels for liquor, those who died left theirs and others took possession."

Villa Branciforte—In addition to the Santa Cruz mission, another colonial institution was established nearby. In 1797, officials ordered the founding of a non-Indian community across the San Lorenzo River from the mission, called Villa Branciforte. Local lore has characterized the inhabitants of this early town as petty criminals and ruffians who looted the mission, stole its cattle and caused discontent with the native population. While the colorful legend has become a part of local history, the reality uncovered by later historians, was more complex. The concept of the villa, as envisioned by the Spanish colonial government, was to populate outposts in alta California with retired soldiers, civilian craftsmen and farmers who eventually could be self-sufficient and be mobilized to defend the coastal region in case of foreign invasion. Villas were different from presidios (such as those established in Santa Barbara and Monterey) which were military and pueblos (like those in Los Angeles and San Jose) that populated by civilians.

To encourage settlement, the government promised transportation north, 430 pesos spread over five years, houses of adobe and tile, and farm tools to be paid in installment. Recruitment from Central Mexico and the two existing pueblos proved to be more difficult than anticipated and, when a contingent to Santa Cruz of 14 men 7 women and 19 children arrived in 1797, the promised livestock, tools and supplies by the government of Mexico were nowhere in evidence. Not only were there no permanent houses, but no means or supplies to build them. Left to their own devices, the settlers built huts of split redwood and tule thatching. By 1803 Branciforte had twenty five houses, only one of which was built of adobe.

The settlement was judged to be a failure by government. The inhabitants, however, were handicapped, not only by lack of materials, but also by the fact that they were predominantly retired soldiers and artisans and did not have the skills to become self-sufficient farmers. In spite of the hardships, the population grew from forty in 1797 to one hundred seven by 1802. At that point, the population of Branciforte began to decline. Many inhabitants either joined the army or looked for employment elsewhere when their terms of enlistment at the villa ended. By 1817 only fifty two people remained.

Between Mexican revolution of 1822, however, and the close of Hispanic period in 1850, Branciforte once again grew and prospered. Populated by a new generation of Californios, (children of original settlers that were born in California), who spread out on a number of land grants issued by the Mexican government, the villa became the center of a wide-spread ranching system. The municipal government expanded with an alcalde who was called upon to arbitrate disputes. During the rancho period, Branciforte was made up of twenty adobes most of which were positioned on Branciforte Avenue. Each house was surrounded by several acres of land on which vegetables and other provisions for the household were grown.

When, in 1834, secularization of missions occurred, mission lands passed to Branciforte. By all indications the community thrived through the early 1840s. At the time of the American takeover, the villa was still the center of activities for the region but Americans had begun to build their own town on the west bank of San Lorenzo River which they called Santa Cruz. On February 18, 1850, the State legislature of California designated the region between the Pajaro

River and site of present day Pescadero as Branciforte County. The American community petitioned to have it changed, and forty-six days later, it became Santa Cruz County. In 1905, what had been Villa Branciforte was incorporated into the City of Santa Cruz.

PREHISTORIC AND HISPANIC PERIOD CULTURAL RESOURCES

PROPERTY TYPES

Archaeological Sites

Twenty four archaeological sites have been identified within the city limits and are listed in the city's general plan (Volume I page 362). A map showing sensitive archaeological and paleontological areas can also be found in that document.

Hispanic Period Historical Structures

Only two standing structures have been identified in the City from the Hispanic Period: the Santa Cruz Mission Adobe, located in the city of Santa Cruz, and restored in 1990 and the Branciforte or Craig-Lorenzana Adobe also located in the City and presently under private ownership. That, and the wide, straight Branciforte Drive, where once horse races were held, are the last vestiges of early Hispanic community of Branciforte.

The Mission Adobe has been exhaustively researched in preparation for its restoration to the mission period which took place in 1990. This information can be found in the document: *Restoration Research Santa Cruz Mission Adobe, Santa Cruz Mission State Historic Park* (by Historical Investigations, Davenport, California for the Department of Parks and Recreation, Sacramento, 1985). In summary, the Mission Adobe is the last remaining standing structure that was part of the Santa Cruz Mission. Constructed in 1824, it was a seven room addition to a ten room building and granary built in 1822 and used for neophyte housing. Three of the units became the Rodriguez adobe, occupied by Roman Rodriguez and his family, who received title to the units 1839. Remodeled several times in the intervening years, the Rodriguez adobe was sold to the State of California in 1958 by Cornelia Hopcroft, who was adopted by the Rodriguez family in 1890.

The other four units of the structure were purchase by Felipe Armas in 1848 and remodeled into a one and a half story residence. This remained in the family until 1865 when it was purchased by Patrick Nolan who, in turn, sold half of it to his brother-in-law, James Neary. The Neary family bought out Nolan in 1870 and thereafter the building became known as the Neary Adobe. This section was also purchased by the state and is now part of the restored Mission Adobe which represents the last vestige of the Santa Cruz Mission.

The Craig-Lorenzana Adobe, located at 1351 North Branciforte Avenue, is also the last standing remnant of the Villa Branciforte. Built c.1797, it has always been a private residence and remains so to this day. It has been remodeled a number of times over the intervening years and is now surrounded by a high wall and fence which makes it no longer visible from the street.

The native American and early Hispanic history of the city of Santa Cruz play an important part in its heritage. Unfortunately, there is little in the built environment to serve as a reminder of that heritage.