

Room
4



Intrigue and Confrontation: The Castros of California

Room 4: The Castro Room

As visitors enter the Castro Room, their eyes are immediately drawn to the south wall where the richly dressed cutout figures of Jose Antonio and Modesta Castro are positioned at **Station 3 (4C)**. Dressed in the Californio style of the 1840s, the two are posed in a way that suggests he is telling her a secret. Behind them and to the left is a mural of the plaza during the 1840s. We see Indian children in peasant clothes, Castro children more finely dressed, animals, a priest. A festival is taking place.

Behind the couple and to the right, a scrim covers the window admitting light into the room. A quote is screened onto the scrim that captures the Californio/Mexican sensibility.

Before they move across the room, however, visitors pause to glance through a short glass wall. Screened onto the glass is a title:

Jose Tiburcio Castro's Last Will

The will appears as a series of swiveling pages on a reader rail. On one side it is in its original Spanish; on the other it is in English.

A text panel asks visitors:

What happens to the things that people own when they die? In some cultures, they are burned or buried with the body. In others, people write a will to give or "bequeath" their property to family or friends.

Historians learn a lot by reading wills. They provide clues about how people lived, what their families were like, what they owned, and what they valued.

What does the will of Jose Tiburcio Castro teach you about the Castro-Breen Adobe and life in Mexican California in the 1840s?

Key Objectives

Address Key Concepts:

- 1) secularization of the missions
- 2) liberalism; political economy
- 3) emergence of a trade economy
- 4) political tensions: US/Mexico; Mexico/California; Southern California/Northern California; local rivalries
- 5) patriarchy & social hierarchy

Engage the visitor in the Castro & family story.

The primary interpretive language in this room is Spanish. English is secondary.

In the name of Almighty God – Amen.

Take notice, all that may see these presents. That I, Jose Tiburcio Castro, native of the town of Huasave, Jurisdiction of Sinaloa, Mexico, living in California for the last 64 years, now resident of the town of San Juan Bautista, legitimate son of Macario Castro and Marie Potenciana Ramirez now dead, being sick abed with the infirmity that God, our Lord has been pleased to send me,...

I declare having been married according to the rites of our Holy Mother Church with Maria Rufina Alvarez, now demised. From which union two children were born, the eldest being Jose Antonio Maria de Jesus and Maria de la Cruz Francisca...

Also my son Jose Antonio as Prefect of the First District having decided to build a house at this point for Don Jose Ma Corarrubias I undertook to furnish it with the precise understanding that 200 were to be given to the Indians who built it and a hundred dollars for personal labor. It is my will that my hundred dollars be equally shared by my two children and the balance of \$200. I particularly ask my son Jose Antonio to distribute among the Indians who worked on the house and are from this town...



A replica of the will is displayed on a panel that can be rotated to display either English or Spanish. The document is annotated with images and text bubbles that explain important elements (Harpers style). The will becomes a way for teachers/interpreters to explore the material culture and property of the Mexican Californio culture with their students.

Through the glass wall and on the floor beneath the window seat, visitors can see various small items mentioned in Jose Tiburcio’s will: cattle hides and sheepskins; loom accessories; a copper kettle; an iron pot; an ox yoke; a cattle brand; baskets of wheat, corn, beans. There may also be a statue of the Virgin Mary or a crucifix.

Who Were the Castros?

As visitors turn right (4B), they are introduced to the Castro family. Were they Spanish? American? Indian? A panel provides an overview of their family history. A map shows where they came from — Sinaloa, Mexico. Visitors are introduced to Jose’s father, Jose Tiburcio Castro, Maria Modesta Victorina Castro (Jose Antonio’s wife), and Jose Antonio’s sister. Visitors also learn about the Castros’ relationships to the Indians, as employers and hacenderos and as godparents. A flip book replicates baptismal records from the Mission. In this flip book, the discerning visitor can discover the Castros listed as godparents. We also find Librata’s record.

What’s in a Name? A small exhibit helps visitors understand why many of the Castro family members had very similar names. (Jose Antonio, Jose Tiburcio (father), Jose Antonio Castro (father-in-law). Modesta and Jose Castro named a daughter Modesta.

A Founding Father? (4B) As young men, Jose Castro and his friends Alvarado and Vallejo had read many of the books that inspired Thomas Jefferson when he wrote the Declaration of Independence. They had to read those books in secret because they were banned by the Catholic Church. Castro and Alvarado acted on these ideas in 1836, when they led a revolt of Californios against the Mexican governor. Their revolt was successful, but it did not lead to independence. Californios won a stronger voice in their own government, but the revolt also led to arguments between people in southern California and northern California over who should be governor. Although Jose Castro served briefly as governor, he was succeeded by Alvarado. Castro, however, was appointed head of the county or “prefecture” around San Juan Bautista. In 1844, Castro led a similar revolt against the Mexican governor.

Main themes:

- 1) The Spanish/Mexican/ Californio era set the stage for patterns of land ownership
- 2) It had a major impact on native people in California
- 3) It laid the foundation for patterns of cooperation, competition and discrimination between Anglos and Hispanics



Who Were These Americans?

Scientists? Soldiers? Invaders?
Over the years, a great deal of mystery has surrounded Fremont's expedition. What were his orders? Did he have secret orders as well? What did he and his father-in-law talk about? Who was Fremont? Who were his men?

**Intrigue and Confrontation:
The Castros of California
Station 3**

Against the south wall visitors encounter the cutout figures of Jose Antonio and Modesta Castro (4C). Jose Castro wears a blue velvet cloak with a small cape of blue with yellow velvet and a dagger in his wrapped waist band. Behind the couple and to the right, a scrim covers the window admitting light into the room. A quote is screened onto the scrim.

Integrated into this display is a pictorial commentary from Librata. The pictures suggest questions: Where am I in this scene? Why isn't my mother in my grandfather's will? What about me? Can you find me in the baptismal records?

As visitors turn back to (4E) they find exhibits that help them understand the legacies of Spanish colonization in Californio culture. These are represented by the pear orchard, which becomes a symbol of the enduring quality of environment and place in San Juan Bautista.

Confrontation at Gavilan Peak

At (4D) visitors discover the confrontation between Jose Castro and John C. Fremont. It is March 8, 1846. John C. Fremont and his band of American soldier engineers are camped somewhere up on Gavilan Peak. Jose Castro has rallied soldiers and citizenry to drive the Americans away by force. He calls Fremont and his men a band of robbers which "sallies forth, committing depredations and making scandalous skirmishes." He asks his countrymen to volunteer under his orders or risk losing their liberty and independence. Visitors understand that this confrontation, comic at times for the blustering and posturing of both sides, represents a critical moment in history. The U.S. and Mexico, after all, are already on the verge of war over Texas.

The Story a House Tells (4E). Also in this room visitors find a panel that tells them about the room and its uses. The panel describes the Castro family's use of the house, explaining that they lived primarily in Monterey, that the adobe functioned almost as an office when Castro was in San Juan Bautista to take care of personal or government business.