

GUIDE TO THE SAN JUAN BAUTISTA STATE HISTORIC PARK
PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION

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SAN JUAN BAUTISTA STATE HISTORIC PARK PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION

Park History

San Juan Bautista State Historic Park contains roughly six acres of historical resources. Located in San Benito County, the park encompasses the San Juan Bautista Historic District in the city of San Juan Bautista at 3rd Street, directly adjacent to Mission San Juan Bautista. The park is accessible by car and by foot via 2nd Street.

For thousands of years prior to the Spanish conquest, the area containing the present-day park served as home to the Mutsun tribe, which called the region "*Popeloutchom*." Hunter-gatherers, the Mutsun people established numerous contiguous villages consisting of dome-shaped tule homes, granaries, a sweat house, and outlying encampments in the area. Having suffered a devastating demographic decline during the Spanish, Mexican, and American periods, the Mutsun people, banding together with other regional indigenous groups to form the federally recognized Amah Mutsun Tribal Band, have nonetheless survived into the present and actively preserve their cultural traditions and lifeways.

On June 24, 1797, Father Fermin Lasuén founded Mission San Juan Bautista (named for Saint John the Baptist) as the 15th of 21 missions in the California mission system (**Figure 1**). Using local Mutsun and imported Yokut and Miwok labor, the Spanish missionaries erected numerous adobe-brick buildings and raised crops and livestock. However, following Mexico's successful revolution against Spain for independence, the California missions were ultimately secularized.



Figure 1. Sketch of Mission San Juan Bautista, ca. 1812-1865. Catalog # 090-13007.

By the 1830s, a pueblo emerged alongside Mission San Juan Bautista. As a major transportation hub along El Camino Real between San Francisco and Los Angeles, the city of San Juan Bautista soon thrived from the regular influx of merchants and other travelers. One of the buildings included in the present-day historic district was a two-story Monterey Colonial-style adobe house commissioned by regional civil administrator and former interim Mexican Governor, José Tibúrcio Castro, for his son, General José Antonio Castro (**Figure 2**). Completed in 1841, the Castro adobe rarely housed the

general as his administrative duties occupied him elsewhere. But in 1848, the house became the longtime residence of the Breen family, recent survivors of the ill-fated Donner Party (**Figure 3**). That year, when the Breens' 16-year-old son, John, returned from the gold fields with over \$10,000 in gold dust, the family purchased the home from Castro along with 400 acres of prime farmland nearby. The Breens and their descendants owned the property until 1933, when it was acquired by the State of California.

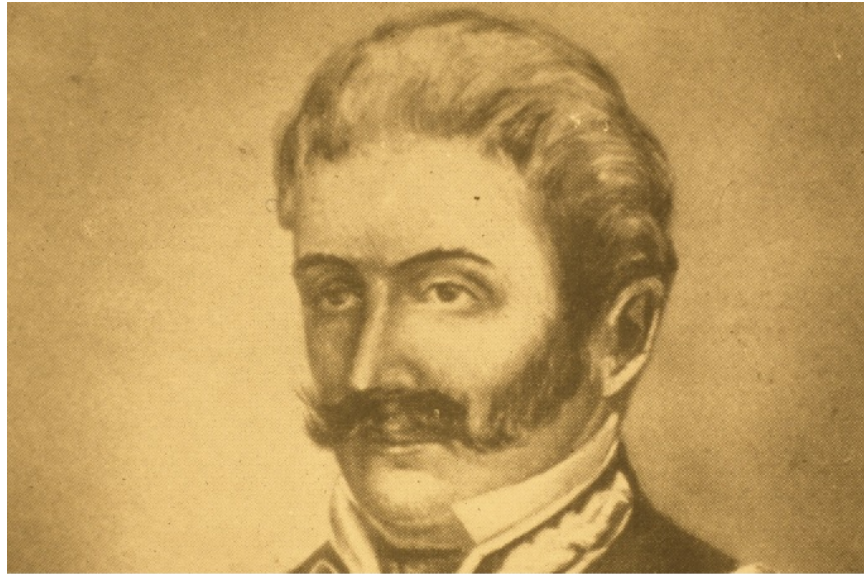


Figure 2. Portrait of General José Antonio Castro, ca. 1800s. Catalog # 090-S22203.

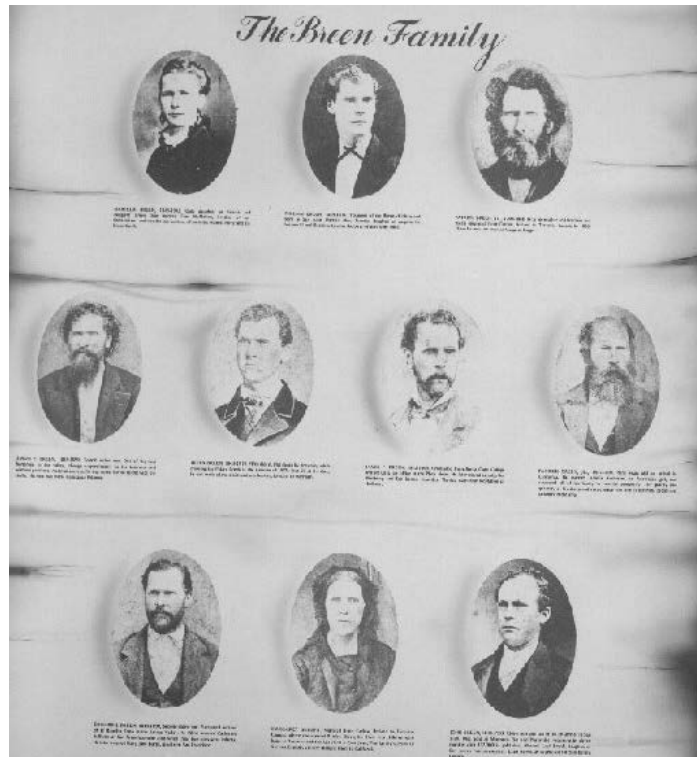


Figure 3. Breen Family, ca. 1865. Catalog # 090-12697.

Another notable building in the historic district is the Plaza Hotel. Originally constructed in 1814 as a one-story, Spanish Colonial-style military barracks, the building was purchased by Italian immigrant Angelo Zanetta in 1856 and soon converted into a hotel (**Figure 4**). Adding a second story finished in redwood, Zanetta also equipped the hotel with a restaurant and a saloon (**Figure 5**). Zanetta died in 1886, at which point the hotel was run by his wife and son until 1892, followed by a succession of four owners before it was acquired by the State of California in 1934.



Figure 4. Plaza Hotel, ca. 1870. Catalog # 090-12637.

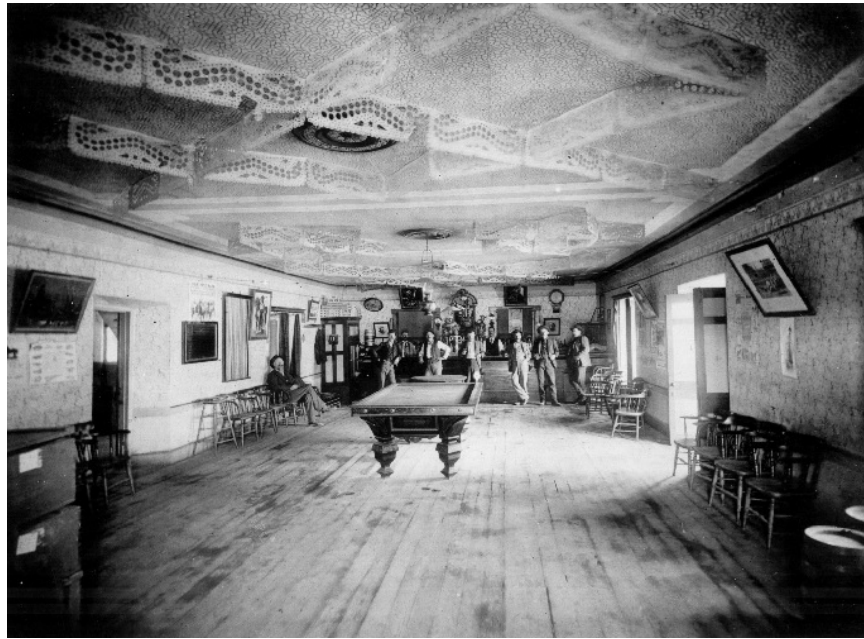


Figure 5. Plaza Hotel Saloon, ca. 1890. Catalog # 090-12769.

With the introduction of the railroad, stagecoach freight service began to decline throughout the region and the nation. When the Southern Pacific Railroad bypassed the city of San Juan Bautista in the 1870s, instead establishing a depot in the fast-growing city of Hollister, the once bustling city began an irreversible demographic and economic decline. Businesses closed down, the number of travelers dwindled, and the city lost its position as San Benito County Seat, another advantage that passed on to Hollister. As its commercial base disappeared, the city of San Juan Bautista grew increasingly reliant on agriculture.

Like many cities along the San Andreas Fault, San Juan Bautista suffered heavy damages during the 1906 earthquake. The area's large collection of historic adobe buildings made it particularly vulnerable. Consequently, dedicated citizens began to raise funds and implement restoration projects to repair the mission and other damaged buildings, resulting in the development of interpretive programs and the conversion of the Castro-Breen Adobe into a museum. The programs were so successful and ambitious that the State of California ultimately acquired many of the city's historic properties for inclusion in the California State Parks system in the early 1930s. Under state ownership, the park has seen several restoration, reconstruction, and archaeological excavation projects continuously launched up to the present day. Originally classified a state historic monument, the park was later reclassified a state historic park in 1963, declared a national historic landmark in 1970, and listed in the National Register of Historic Places as a historic district that same year.

California State Parks, coordinating with the Plaza History Association, preserves and interprets significant historical resources at San Juan Bautista State Historic Park. In addition to the fully restored Castro-Breen Adobe and the Plaza Hotel, the park also includes the restored Zanetta House/Plaza Hall, Plaza Stable, Plaza Square, Spanish

Orchard, and Settler's Cabin (**Figures 6-12**). Additionally, the park hosts living history events every first Saturday of the month and at various times throughout the year. The park is open daily except for major holidays.



Figure 6. Castro-Breen Adobe, November 19, 2008. Catalog # 090-P60588.



Figure 7. Plaza Hotel, November 19, 2008. Catalog # 090-P60570.



Figure 8. Plaza Hotel (Saloon), November 19, 2008. Catalog # 090-P60586.



Figure 9. Zanetta House/Plaza Hall, November 19, 2008. Catalog # 090-P60691.



Figure 10. Plaza Stable, November 19, 2008. Catalog # 090-P60603.



Figure 11. Plaza Stable (interior), November 19, 2008. Catalog # 090-P60612.



Figure 12. Settler's Cabin, November 19, 2008. Catalog # 090-P60619.

Scope and Content

The San Juan Bautista State Historic Park Photographic Collection spans the years circa 1812 through 2013, with the bulk of the collection covering the years circa 1950-1986 and 2008. There is a total of 848 cataloged images, including 677 photographic prints, scans, and negatives, 122 35mm slides, and 49 born-digital images. Photographs originated from California State Parks staff along with donations from the San Juan Bautista Historical Society, the San Benito County Historical Society, and the National Park Service.

The collection mainly depicts interior and exterior views of the numerous historical resources contained throughout the park. Images include exterior views of the Flint-Bixby House, Settler's Cabin, San Juan Jail, Plaza Hotel, Castro-Breen Adobe, and the Plaza Stable. Additionally, the collection features extensive coverage of the Plaza Hotel's, Castro-Breen Adobe's, and the Plaza Stable's interiors. Interior views of the Plaza Hotel include the fully restored saloon and dining room with all attendant period furnishings; interior views of the Castro-Breen Adobe include the fully restored offices, bedrooms, storage room, parlor, and kitchen with all attendant period furnishings; and interior views of the Plaza Stable include extensive documentation of fully restored buggies.

The collection also provides thorough coverage of Mission San Juan Bautista, though it is not technically included within San Juan Bautista State Historic Park. Images feature various interior and exterior views of the historic property along with numerous reconstructed period-era furnishings contained therein.

Also included in the collection are images depicting the park's other features. Images include the fully restored Plaza Square and garden walkway, with tallow vats, cauldrons, and various floral features. Other park features include the park entrance, park signage posted throughout the property and alongside nearby U.S. Highway 101,

and various interpretive panels. The collection also provides several landscape and aerial views of the park in its entirety.

The collection also contains numerous historic portraits of prominent people. Images include portraits of General José Castro, Angelo Zanetta, Mark Regan (a famous stagecoach operator), and Antone Taix (a later proprietor of the Plaza Hotel) as well as group portraits of the San Juan Bautista Eagle Hook & Ladder Company (the local firefighting company) and the Breen Family.

The collection additionally documents various events in the park's history. Events include the 1959 Fiesta-Rodeo Parade, "Fiesta Time" and "Scout-O-Rama" held in the 1970s, the park's 50th anniversary celebration in the 1980s, living history interpretive programs conducted throughout the 1970s and 1980s, and a 1976 Plaza Hotel restoration project.

Also included in the collection are numerous historic and contemporary drawings, sketches, etchings, lithographs, and paintings of Mission San Juan Bautista, Castro-Breen Adobe, and other features found in the park unit.

Related Collections

Adherble T. D. Button Collection, California State Parks Archives.

Breen Family Papers, UC Berkeley: Bancroft Library.

California Mission and Church Miscellany, UC Berkeley: Bancroft Library.

El Camino Real Archive, UC Berkeley: Bancroft Library.

Louis Fleckenstein Pictorialist photographs of California Missions, Huntington Library: Photographic Archives.

Patrick Breen Diary, UC Berkeley: Bancroft Library.

San Juan Bautista State Historic Park Collection, California State Parks Archives.

William Henry Jackson Photographs of the California Missions, Huntington Library: Photographic Archives.

Catalog Subject Search Terms

50th anniversary celebration
Angelo Zanetta
Antone Taix
Barroom
Breen Family
Carriage(s)

Castro-Breen Adobe
Drawing
Eagle Hook and Ladder Company
El Camino Real
Exterior
Flint-Bixby House

Group portrait
Hook and ladder wagon
Horse(s)
Interior
Jail
Landscape view
Living history
Mark Regan
Mission San Juan Bautista

Painting
Plaza Hotel
Plaza Square
Plaza Stable
Portrait
San Juan Bautista
Settler's Cabin
Sign
Sketch