



California State Parks

Video Transcript



Perceptions from the Plaza: The Castro-Breen Adobe at San Juan Bautista State Historic Park

Hello, my name is Ranger Alexandra Ott, and I would like to welcome you to San Juan Bautista State Historic Park, where you can experience the different time periods of California history. Though the mission is not part of the state historic park, it is an important link to the Spanish time period. Founded in 1797, the mission belongs to the Catholic Church and is open to the public. During the Mexican time period, San Juan Bautista served as the military and commercial center of the San Benito Valley. The building that we will be featuring in this presentation is the Castro-Breen Adobe built in 1838.

José Tiburcio Castro was the civil, or secular, administrator of the mission. His son, José Antonio Castro, requested that this building serve as the judicial and administrative headquarters of a district that included the entire northern half of Alta California. Today, the Castro-Breen Adobe, with its red tile roof and full length balcony, looks much like it did when Castro first built it. Inside it has been furnished to represent the period ending in 1874.

Patrick and Margaret Breen and their seven children were members of the ill-fated Donner Party. They had been stranded in the Sierra Nevada without supplies for 111 days during the extraordinary snow storms of 1846. They arrived penniless in San Juan and were given free shelter in the mission. In 1848 sixteen-year-old John Breen set out for the gold fields and returned with \$10,000 in gold dust. With his wealth, the Breens purchased the Castro adobe in December 1848 and 400 acres of prime agricultural land in the San Juan Valley. From this time until it became part of the state historic park in 1933, the Castro-Breen Adobe was occupied by succeeding generations of the Breen family. Let's go and take a look at some of the rooms upstairs.

This is Isabella Breen's bedroom. She was born in Iowa in 1845 and was an infant in arms when the Breen family settled in San Juan Bautista. The hard work and prosperity of the Breens helped provide their only daughter with the privileged and proper upbringing typical of an upper class Catholic girl during the mid- to late-nineteenth century. When Isabella was 22 years old, she married Thomas McMahan, son of prominent pioneer merchant James McMahan, also an Irish Catholic. Just imagine Isabella Breen sitting here in June 1868, the month prior to her marriage and preparing her trousseau, bridal clothes and linens.

Now we're going to go see Margaret Breen's room.

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Life for the Breen family took a sad turn after Isabella's happy wedding; her father Patrick, Sr., died six months after her marriage. It was shock to the family. Margaret, Isabella's mother, lived in this room. Her bedroom is luxurious, as the Breen family fortune had prospered since their arrival in San Juan, and Margaret had become heir to the extensive family property. Her solace was the continual visits by her grown children and grandchildren and the success of her surviving children. Her room is furnished for winter with rugs and warm quilts covering the beds. Now, we're going to visit the miner's room in the United States Hotel.

We are standing in the miner's room of the United States Hotel. The United States Hotel was the first hotel in San Juan Bautista that the Breen family opened. This room depicts two miners sharing one room, one Californio and one forty-niner. This room, in contrast to the other two bedrooms that we have seen, is rough and sparsely furnished.

Thank you for touring the upstairs of the Castro-Breen Adobe in San Juan Bautista State Historic Park.

Running Time: 06:43

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