

HISTORY CENTER

SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY

Casa Grande



In 1856, itinerant artist Henry Miller sketched the Casa Grande seen at the extreme right of this image.

By Joe Carotenuti

Ever wonder what's beneath your feet? Quite often, it's history...some buried for eons as time and civilization rolls across any landscape. Fortunately, for the relatively new community of San Luis Obispo (officially declared the county seat in 1850), history is not buried too deep.



The site of the Casa Grande, c. 1880

Begin by walking or sitting in the vicinity of Monterey and Court Streets. Embellished by relatively recent construction, four layers deep, it once was the site of a structure referred to as the Casa Grande erected next to the community plaza. Built by the legendary William Goodwin Dana in 1851, it housed a variety of functions in its near quarter century history. Today, visitors still gather at the other Dana Adobe in Nipomo, the home of the former sea captain and his wife, Maria Josefa of the pioneer Carrillo family, and their 21 children.

Some point to the local Dana building as a hotel for the sparsely populated county of 336 residents (according to the official 1850 Census...taken in the winter of 1851). However, needing a place to conduct official county business, part of the building was soon rented for court proceedings (thus Court Street). It remained so until the first county courthouse was opened in 1878 on the site of the current one.



The site of the Casa Grande today

Various scraps of historical information elate its construction was of wood and adobe. The walls were two feet thick and “solid as a rock” with a cost of 35 to 40 thousand dollars. A newspaper article when it was razed in 1876 relates the contractor would take all the doors, windows and umber while the adobe would be used as landfill for a nearby bridge.

Dana never recouped the cost of construction as he died in 1858 and the building was sold until its last owner, William J. Graves, sold the property in 1875 to the Bank of San Luis Obispo for \$13,000. The bank suffered severe damage from the famous Andrews Hotel fire in 1886, was restored and lasted until the Obispo Theatre occupied the site until it, too, was destroyed by another fire in 1975.

Joe was the recipient of the History Center's 2020 Award for Historic Preservation Advocacy. You can read more about Joe's research on the Casa Grande in the March 2021 edition of the Central Coast Journal, found online at www.slojournal.com



Soup's back on the menu!

We don't think it's just us, this has been a terribly long winter. But spring is on the horizon, the Dallidet Gardens are continuing to grow some of the finest produce you'll find - and [we want to share with you!](#)

If you joined us in November, you know the quality of the Dallidet produce. If you missed out, [act fast so you don't miss out again!](#)

We'll be returning to the same winning formula - two savory soups, a dessert soup, bread, salad, and cookies for dessert, plus a bottle of wine. A takeout feast for two for just \$50.

Plus, we'll be raffling a deluxe picnic basket, and the exclusive opportunity to enjoy your meal in the Dallidet Gardens.

Sunday, April 18
noon to 2 pm
1185 Pacific Street

[Click here to learn more and to buy your ticket!](#)

Did you miss our Carnegie Lecture? Do you want to know more about the events of 1858, up close and personal?

Check out our Self-Guided Walking Tour!

We have signs on Mission Plaza with a QR



code so you can read about the events on your phone, while standing in the spot where they took place.



[You can also download the tour from our website.](#)

Our February 27, 2021 newsletter had some poorly-chosen language that could be read to imply that the History Center was the only organization in the whole county that cared about history. We apologize - we know very well that there are [many such groups](#) found from San Miguel to Nipomo, and everywhere in between.

We at the History Center were saddened to learn of the passing of former San Luis Obispo County Supervisor [Shirley Bianchi](#). Our deepest condolences to her family and friends.

Thomas Kessler
Executive Director



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