

PRESS RELEASE

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### SAN PEDRO FESTIVAL HISTORIC EXHIBITION

The West Sacramento Historical Society Museum and Visitors Center, (324 Third St., in the Broderick district of West Sacramento, 916-374-1849) in cooperation with the San Pedro Annual Festival Association will have an exhibit on the San Pedro historical festival that began in 1922 and were held each June for 55 years. The annual San Pedro festival was held in the Bryte district of West Sacramento and began as a fund raising event to build a church on Madeira Island, Portugal where many of the Portuguese Bryte residents were born. Everyone is invited to the opening reception at the museum and visitors center on Sunday, August 14, 2005, from 12 noon to 5:00 p.m. The dates for the show are from August 14 thru November 30, 2005.

A small chapel was built in San Pedro Park and each year there was a parade with a queen selected for the celebration. It was an event that brought the community together and involved all the community.

The display highlights photos and artifacts from the celebration that made the community of Bryte known throughout the state.

The San Pedro Association was organized in 1922 in honor of Saint Peter when a Portuguese priest visited Madeira Island immigrant families living in the East Yolo area which is now part of West Sacramento. He had traveled from Portugal to raise funds to build a church on the "Monte" near the City of Funchal, Madeira Island. A gathering to solicit donations was held under the large oak trees where the current VFW Hall now stands on Lisbon Avenue in Bryte. The priest was successful and the church that was built on Madeira Island still stands today. The gathering, later known as the San Pedro Festa, was held in Bryte and became an annual local event featuring two days of carne espito (barbeque beef), games, a traditional auction, religious procession and various social activities.

The original grounds dedicated to the *festa* were on the banks of the Sacramento River in the township of Riverbank and in the 20s, the *festa* was called the Riverbank Festa. First the group utilized an old barn that belonged to the Russian community, later property was acquired along side the Russian Hall on the levee, located on what is now Riverbank Avenue. The federal government acquired the riverbank grounds in the early 1940s forcing the San Pedro Association to move the festa grounds to the present location on North Hobson Avenue in Bryte, previously the homestead of Mr. Antonio Silva, owner and proprietor of the Mecca Bar.

The annual event, which was discontinued during the war years of the 1940s, was re-established in 1950. As per Madeiran custom, a new chapel was built on the North Hobson property and the San Pedro Annual Festa continued again until 1979 when, due to local dispersing of the Madeiran community, the public festa was discontinued. The annual festa was not only a Madeiran event, it was considered by the townsfolk as a Bryte community event. Many families used the annual event as an informal reunion to renew old acquaintances and talk about " the good old days". For many years, a spectacular fireworks display was provided each evening. Members of the San Pedro Association prepared 2,000 pounds of prime beef, quartered into small chunks and soaked in a special Madeiran marinade of wine, spices and bay leaf sprigs, and placed on iron spits. Once purchased, attendees cooked their skewered beef to their own liking, and enjoyed an abundance of cold beer, soda, French bread, salads and mixed drinks.

Sunday was the big day with participants in the parade including the Bryte Volunteer Fire Department, the Boy Scouts, Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Manhart Legion Drum and Bugle Corp, the Cameron Bagpipe Band, the Camilla City Band, and Little League groups. Children were recruited from most of the families in Bryte to ride on the floats, carrying flags and banners. The stronger teenage boys had the honor of carrying the statue of Saint Peter in its' flower bedecked carrier to and from the church. Of course the glory was always in being selected the junior and senior San Pedro Festa queens. The honor was bestowed on member families with girls of suitable ages, although young girls were selected on occasion outside of the immediate organization. On Saturday evening the queens were honored by a coronation, after which followed a dance on the open-air dance floor under the stars. A live band was always present. The parade would form in front of the park and march off to Holy Cross Church for the mass in honor of Saint Peter. Visiting queens, their families and officers from the other Portuguese organizations from Freeport, Lincoln, Rio Vista, and Sacramento were invited and participated in the festivities. See the San Pedro Association website for more details. [www.SanPedroAssociation.org](http://www.SanPedroAssociation.org)