



# Santa Barbara Trust for Historic Preservation

## PRESS RELEASE

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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ADDITIONAL PHOTOS AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST

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## ***“Ceramics Rediscovered: Science Reshapes Understanding of Hispanic Life in Early California”***

*New exhibit at El Presidio de Santa Bárbara State Historic Park uses science to trace history of early California material culture through ceramics*



(Santa Barbara, CA)—Discover how ceramics were made, used and traded in early California with the newest exhibit at **El Presidio de Santa Bárbara State Historic Park, *Ceramics Rediscovered: Science Reshapes Understanding of Hispanic Life in Early California***. Based on a decade-long investigation of ceramic production using archaeological evidence and scientific analysis, the exhibit offers a rare glimpse into daily life during California’s Spanish and Mexican periods (1769-1848). **Featuring period artifacts and reproduction pottery, this groundbreaking exhibit traces the evolution of California’s earliest potters and the material culture they helped shape.**

In 1999, **Dr. Ronald Bishop and Dr. M. James Blackman from the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of Natural**

**History** partnered with **Dr. Russell Skowronek and Santa Clara University** to study the production and distribution of locally created earthenware at California missions, presidios, pueblos and ranchos. Working to

answer fundamental questions about the way ceramics were made, used and traded during the Spanish and Mexican period, the team used broad research methods, including documentary and archaeological evidence, as well as the scientific examination of the chemical makeup of ceramic fragments—work conducted in partnership with the **National Institute of Standards and Technology**. In 2004, **Master Potter Ruben Reyes** joined the team to replicate theorized pottery production techniques, and in 2006, the **Santa Barbara Trust for Historic Preservation** and **California State Parks** helped recreate historic firing technologies by building and using a wood-fired, Spanish colonial-style updraft kiln at El Presidio de Santa Bárbara SHP.



Master Potter Ruben Reyes supervises the wood-fired kiln during a ceramic firing at El Presidio de Santa Barbara SHP.

**Opening November 14, 2009, at El Presidio de Santa Bárbara SHP**, the exhibit showcases the research team’s findings, which overturn previous assumptions, including the idea that ceramics were produced solely by skilled Spanish potters and that only unglazed earthenware was made in Alta California. Further examination has proven that a variety of ceramics were made throughout California’s missions and presidios rather than just at a few major production centers as was previously thought. Archaeological evidence has also confirmed that some clear lead-glazed ceramics were produced in Alta California. By recreating and firing ceramics vessels using period techniques in what has been described as “experimental archaeology,” the group was able to gain a better understanding of the depth of knowledge and skill of California’s early potters—many of whom were Indian neophytes. These talented craftsmen created much of the material culture necessary for survival in early California. **Adds SBTHP archaeologist Michael H. Imwalle, “This exhibit fosters a**

**greater appreciation for the early California ceramic production process. Most archaeology focuses on identifying types of pottery and then determining the date of its manufacturing. We were looking at the entire process, asking: Where did the clay come from? How was the pottery produced and fired? Who made it? This broad approach helps us better understand and relate to the culture at the time.”**

Featuring tools, reproduction pottery and artifacts from El Presidio de Santa Barbara SHP’s archaeology collection, *Ceramics Rediscovered* presents visitors with a rare view of the complexities of daily life in Alta California as they follow the footsteps of early California potters and the diverse research team who worked to uncover their history. **As part of the opening reception at El Presidio de Santa Barbara SHP on Saturday, November 14, a pottery and firing demonstration will be held at 1:00 PM, followed by a presentation at 4:00 PM in the Presidio Chapel by members of the research team who will discuss the project in greater detail. Public welcomed. Free admission.**

\* This exhibit has been developed by the Santa Barbara Trust for Historic Preservation in collaboration with the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, Santa Clara University, California State Parks, the National Institute of Standards and Technology, and the University of Texas-Pan American. The exhibit received generous support from the Smithsonian Latino Center.



Smithsonian  
*National Museum of Natural History*



Santa Barbara Trust  
for Historic Preservation



*California State Parks*



Santa Clara  
University

NIST

National Institute of  
Standards and Technology  
U.S. Department of Commerce



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## CALENDAR LISTING

### Opening Reception:

*"Ceramics Rediscovered: Science Reshapes Understanding of Hispanic Life in Early California"*

Saturday, November 14, 2009

1:00 PM pottery and firing demonstration

4:00 PM a presentation in the Presidio Chapel

El Presidio de Santa Bárbara State Historic Park

123 East Canon Perdido Street, Santa Barbara, CA

Public welcomed

For more information [www.sbthp.org](http://www.sbthp.org) or (805) 965-0093

### Exhibition Dates:

Saturday, November 14 - January 28, 2011

10:30 AM to 4:30 PM

El Presidio de Santa Bárbara State Historic Park

123 East Canon Perdido Street, Santa Barbara, CA

FREE with museum admission (\$5/adults, \$4/seniors (62+), Free/children 16 & under & SBTHP members)

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**ABOUT Santa Barbara Trust for Historic Preservation (SBTHP)**— The Santa Barbara Trust for Historic Preservation (SBTHP) works to *protect, preserve, restore, reconstruct, and interpret historic sites in Santa Barbara County*. Founded in 1963 by Dr. Pearl Chase and other concerned community leaders, SBTHP operates El Presidio de Santa Bárbara State Historic Park—Santa Barbara’s 18<sup>th</sup> century birthplace—under a unique agreement with California State Parks and recently purchased the neighboring building that housed Jimmy’s Oriental Gardens, providing an opportunity to interpret the history of Santa Barbara’s Asian American community in the Presidio Neighborhood. SBTHP owns and operates Casa de la Guerra, the 1820s home of Presidio Comandante José de la Guerra and his family—the restored home is now a museum featuring original furnishings and rotating exhibits. Recently, SBTHP signed an agreement with State Parks to manage and develop the Santa Inés Mission Mills, located near the town of Solvang, as a future California State Park. With the help of continuing education programs and exhibits, SBTHP strives to encourage community involvement and foster an appreciation for Santa Barbara County’s distinct history. Learn more at [www.sbthp.org](http://www.sbthp.org).

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