

SEARCH: Hispanics rewarded for genealogical exploration

FROM 1

cousin, Juan Pablo Grijalva, owned Rancho Santiago of Santa Ana and the first adobe on what now is Hoyt Hill in Orange, Grijalva says.

After following the trail of his ancestor from Sonora, Mexico, to San Francisco to San Juan Capistrano, he visited the adobe remains — now part of a Hewes Street garage — in 1992 and went to the Orange County Historical Commission to ask for a plaque to commemorate the site. But the commission said he needed more proof of its significance.

"Documents must come from a reliable source," commission member Nancy Thatcher said.

After an additional three years of research, including a trip to the Bancroft Library in Berkeley, Grijalva found the documents that he believes prove that Juan Pablo Grijalva lived in the adobe. In a presentation held at the Bowers Museum in Santa Ana on Thursday evening, Grijalva displayed his evidence and left with six proclamations and awards. About 200 people attended, including Grijalva descendants, Spurgeon staff, Santa Ana Mayor Miguel Pulido and members of the Historical Commission.

"The county and the state cast themselves in the imagery of American pioneer imagery, often ignoring the hundreds of years of Hispanic and native

American experience that preceded the American period," said Paul Apodaca, curator of native American art at the Bowers Museum.

"Eddie's giving people the opportunity to see the original documents and open history to new interpretations."

Said Grijalva, the son of El Toro farmers: "I've accomplished something for my family and for the county. When I found my roots, I can look educated people and authority straight in the eye and say, 'I'm somebody and I'm worth something.'"

Senteno, 39, transcribes the stories of Mexico and migration told by his uncles and aunts. He shares these vignettes like a storyteller at a campfire.

In a soft voice, Senteno, of Garden Grove, tells of his Uncle Salvador Pedro, the sole survivor in a family of 15 boys after an epidemic hit Mexico around 1917.

"It's amazing when you learn about history from their stories," Senteno said of his relatives. "You can look in any medical journal and find that in 1917 there was a worldwide epidemic of influenza which killed 20 million people. My uncle was the only one in his family to survive it."

Senteno is married to a Japanese-American woman and has two children. He wants to provide the kids with all the history of their family that he can.

"Hearing their stories makes me appreciate the struggles my immediate ancestors went through for their families," Senteno said. "I enjoy sharing these stories with my family, because it seems so removed from our own experience."

Valdez, 48, was inspired to research her roots after reading the immigrant-family saga "Rain of Gold," by Victor Villasenor. A bilingual teacher for 26 years, she says she tries to instill pride about family, language and culture in her Mexican-American kindergartners.

When she studied her own family, she discovered a non-Hispanic bloodline, the Clifts. She said she had always wondered about the green eyes and light skin of several members of her family.

The Clifts settled in Chihuahua state, Mexico, and provided their village with electricity. When revolutionary leader Pancho Villa entered Chihuahua, the Clifts fled to El Paso, Texas. But Villa followed them, asking the Clift family to return to light the town. Half of the family went back; Valdez's half stayed in the United States.

"It reinforced my self-identity and reinforced my pride," said Valdez, of Huntington Beach. Valdez, named last year's Teacher of the Year by California Association of Bilingual Educators, said a fellowship visit to Spain was like going home.

Holtzman, 61, traced her lines back to King Ferdinand of Spain. "It was all happenstance," she said, throwing her hands in the air. "I didn't expect to find anything this important."

As one of four founders and the current president of the society, Holtzman is a veteran genealogist who has helped the Orange County organization grow from its humble beginnings of 25 members about nine years ago to the current 500 members nationwide.

"When I was studying history in school, I didn't see how the history of the United States had anything to do with me," said Holtzman, a second-generation Mexican-American who lives in Westminster. But when she researched her genealogy, she found that she qualified through a line of relatives from Texas to be a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution.

Society members say their genealogical research instills pride and a stronger sense of identity. For some, it's an opportunity to help other Americans understand the contributions of Hispanics.

"The heart of the organization is unifying people," Holtzman said.

Information about SHHAR is available by calling Mimi Lozano Holtzman at (714) 894-8161, or Register InfoLine at (714) 550-INFO, category 7690.