

## The Spirit of Aptos: 116-Year-Old Hotel to Become Landmark

*By Ross Eric Gibson*

The ghosts of the 116-year-old Aptos Bayview Hotel have been good hosts, only said to move things around on occasion. But after May 4, [1994,] they may rest easier when a longstanding oversight is corrected.

This is not an exorcism, but an awards ceremony, where the Bayview will receive a blue plaque recognizing it as a Santa Cruz County landmark. It is overdue for the county's oldest operating hotel, which has been a State Historic Monument since 1974 and listed on the National Register of Historic Places since 1993.

From their gentle behavior, the identity of these unknown ghosts could be Jose Arano, who built the hotel, or his wife, Augustia Castro, whose histories take us back to the very origins of Aptos.

Augustia's grandfather was a 1798 Branciforte settler, Joaquin Castro, and her father, Rafael, received Rancho Aptos in 1833 as the county's first Spanish land grant. Rafael Castro's adobe stood where the railroad bridge crosses the freeway southwest of today's village.

Jose Arano was a cultured Basque forty-niner. He was raised in New Orleans and spoke four languages. Around 1850, on a site purchased from Rafael Castro, Arano built a grocery store that still stands at Wharf Road and Soquel Drive. Wharf Road was the original main street, connecting the lumber mills to the shipping wharf. In 1851, Jose became the first postmaster of Aptos, with the office at his store.

When lumberman F.A. Hihn couldn't entice Southern Pacific to extend its tracks into the county, Hihn built his own Santa Cruz-to-Watsonville railroad. In 1875, this allowed Hihn and lumberman Claus Spreckels to loop the coastal railway inland at Aptos to reach their remote landholdings. Up until that time, the site of today's Aptos Village was isolated and largely inaccessible.

Jose Arano, who by this time was known as Joseph, intended his store to mark the heart of Aptos but was now bypassed by the railroad. In 1878, he constructed a handsome 28-room hotel at Aptos Depot, where he moved his store and post office and added an elegant Victorian saloon.

The stately French mansarded hotel and formal gardens gave an air of dignity to the town. His New Orleans-bred taste for French culture led to installation of marble fireplaces from France and massive furniture from his native Spain. Its original name was the "Anchor House," but it was soon changed to Bayview Hotel.

In the mid-1890s, Arano traveled for several years, in part to collect a \$1,000 debt. Succeeding, he returned to discover his wife had died in his absence in 1896, leaving the hotel in the hands of their children, Amelia and Ed.

In 1898, the post office moved across the street to the general store of James Leonard, with son Thomas Leonard the new postmaster. The Leonard building burned the same year and was replaced in 1899 with a new structure financed by Leonard's gold mine, which was located a half mile east of La Selva Beach. (This building will also receive a county landmark plaque on May 4.)

As Arano became an invalid, he was cared for by daughter Amelia, who ran the hotel. As Aptos historian John Hibble relates, the hotel's fortunes diminished with the lumber industry. In 1915, Amelia converted the hotel into a boarding house, where Joseph resided until his death in 1928 at the age of 91. That year, the service wing in back of the hotel caught fire, and all local firemen could do was cut it loose from the main building and let it burn.

Amelia sold the Bayview in 1942 to hardware merchant Fred Toney and his wife, "Babe." They moved the hotel onto the formal gardens, and constructed their hardware store in its place. Toney converted the hotel's grocery store into a popular restaurant, and Babe had an antique and gift shop there. This inspired them to establish the Village Fair antiques cooperative in the 1960s, in a nearby apple-packing shed where Babe had once worked.

Fred Toney suffered health problems in the 1970s and leased the hotel to a series of people who restored and lovingly preserved the stately old building. Fred Toney and Babe were killed in a car accident in 1979. Their daughters kept the hotel until 1989 when it was sold to Bayview Partners, who now operate it as a bed-and-breakfast and restaurant.

Whoever the gentle ghosts are that still reside at the Bayview Hotel, their spirit and legacy will be honored by the County Landmark award, in gratitude to all those who keep their precious memory alive.

## Sources

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