

Patriotism surged when US entered the war

WARS World War I

(Fourth in a series)

By CAROLYN SWIFT

Live Oak farmers and members of the PTA and Improvement Club all became patriots when American troops entered World War I in April, 1917.

Live Oak PTA signed petitions urging the appointment of a county farm advisor, and Henry Washburn obtained that position the following December. Farmers followed advice of the newly-organized Farm Bureau, which helped coordinate and direct wartime farm production.

In 1917, PTA and Improvement Club minutes contain few notes on social and educational affairs, but a full list detailing war-related service.

Members worked twice each month for the Red Cross Society, collected clothing for Belgian and Armenian Relief, donated for a soldier's home in Washington D.C., and taxed members two cents each to buy Liberty Bonds in every campaign.

Sacrifices were made. Refreshments were no longer served at meetings and newspaper ads were dropped from the club budget. Funds

previously spent for delegates to state conferences were used instead for war service projects such as the "Children's Liberty Loan Fund."

PTA minutes reflect some dejection by the spring of 1918 — although there was no slackening of patriotic service. The secretary's notes were short, direct and free of embellishment.

Chairmen were appointed on war service and patriotism committees. A flag was sewn for second district soldiers, with a star for each Live Oak husband and son overseas. Members canvassed local farms in behalf of the Farm Bureau; supervised a "social circus," at the armory in Santa Cruz; made personal loans to cover war bond obligations, and heard talks on food preservation by a county director for food conservation.

Toward the end of the war, there were brief mentions in PTA minutes of a decline in attendance — but no explanation. Several events, including regular dances, were cancelled. In October, two members were appointed to a "permanent floral committee," with the duty of sending floral arrangements to

bereaved local families.

There was no mention in the 1918 club minutes of the flu epidemic that year. It was only when the school year ended that a note was made by the club historian, who wrote: "The Epidemic of Influenza that swept over all parts of the world, taking many lives, hindered the club's activities, as all gatherings were prohibited for a number of weeks."

Conditions of World War I — emphasis on coordinated production of "essential goods," and community unity earned through organized hardship — gave Live Oak an identity. With establishment of the Farm Bureau and later the Grange, Live Oak was at last able to organize for economic need, a role the school had been unable to fill.

As an ill-defined territory with second-rate amenities and fringe social status, Live Oak lands had less value before the war. But by accepting what Santa Cruz would never allow — slaughter houses, chicken ranches and truck farms — Live Oak worked its way up in county production tables. With egg-laying contests that at-

tracted statewide attention, the area found a unique listing in county tourist brochures.

Live Oak PTA and Improvement Club formed an alliance with the Farm Bureau, which held monthly meetings at the clubhouse. Ranchers followed the advice of County Farm Advisor Washburn, who led demonstrations on care and vaccination of poultry.

This cooperation aided Live Oak's reputation as a major producer of eggs and high quality hens. Scattered between chicken ranches were the small truck farmers that shipped products by highway rather than by rail, and bulb ranching in Live Oak was expanding along with its worldwide reputation.

Live Oak of 1919 had some cohesiveness — but it was gained at a compromise. The community became a carpet under which its neighbors could sweep unwanted industry — and by the 1960s, unwanted housing and people as well. At the same time, Live Oak did without the variety of businesses it needed to create a town center. People continued to buy supplies in Santa Cruz or Soquel.

The community never gained its own movie theater or opera house, and never had an amusement park or casino to compete with Santa Cruz. It had no professional complex for lawyers, dentists and doctors. There was no street with a church, a barbershop, a bar and a library near the same intersection. New development along the coast only created more enclaves.

Because of its dependence, Live Oak helped make the difference for Santa Cruz merchants in lean times. When tourists drifted home in the winter, commercial business in town still counted on Live Oak consumers.

Poultry ranchers of Live Oak and Santa Cruz began lobbying as early as 1915 for a poultry plant that would make the area a statewide center for the industry.

A.W. Robinson, secretary of the Santa Cruz Poultry Association, wrote in the 1915 chamber of commerce report that, "In choosing a locality for establishing a poultry plant the first thing to take into consideration is the climate prevailing during the entire year,

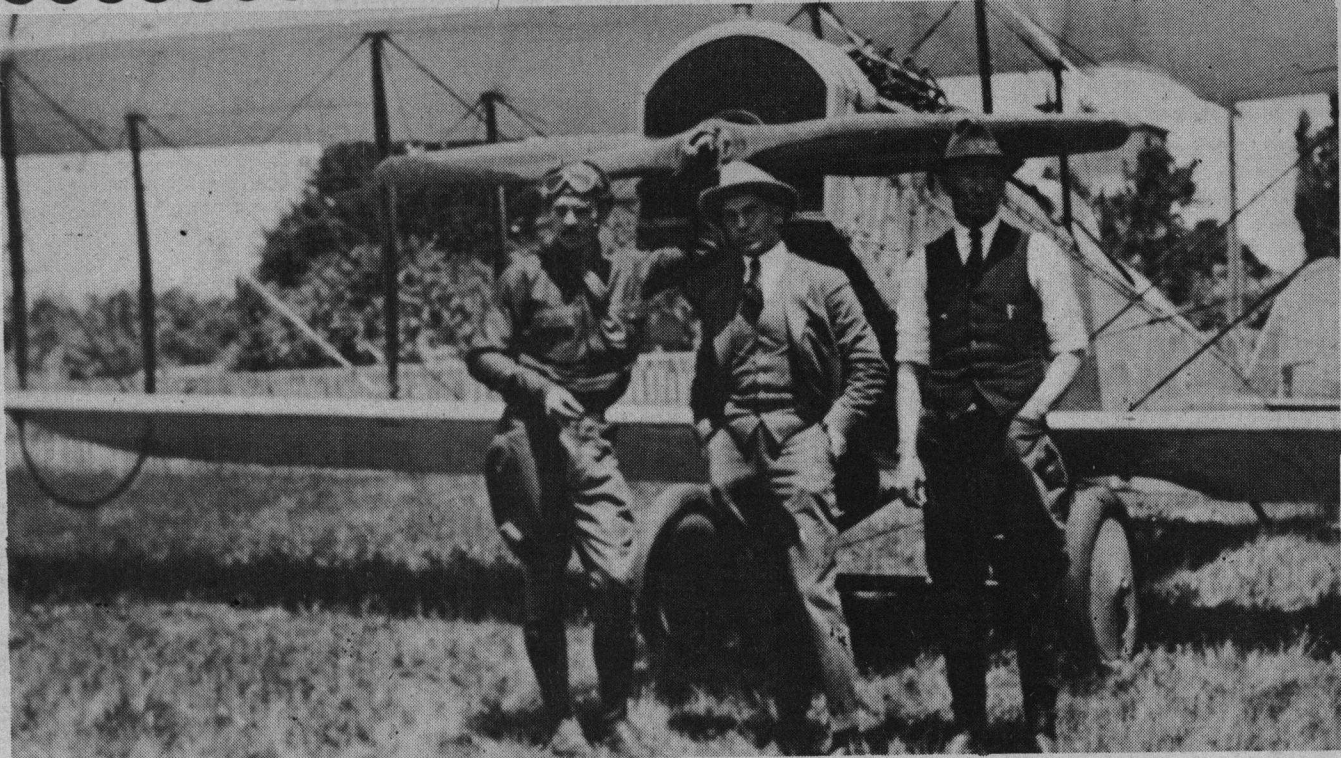
and numerous successful poultrymen agree that that of Santa Cruz is superior for this purpose, few localities equalling this county in this particular, none being superior."

By the early 1920s, success of the poultry business convinced the Santa Cruz Chamber of Commerce that chickens were a profitable investment, and the organization financed \$12,500 for construction of a plant for the "California Farm Bureau Egg Laying Contest," to be supervised each year by the poultry division of the University of California.

Live Oak neighborhoods gradually changed in appearance with the increased popularity of poultry ranching and the further subdivision of land into narrow lots. Home yards of the poultry ranchers were planted with alfalfa, barley and kale to be used for chicken feed. For a time, farmers supplemented egg enterprises by planting freesia bulbs, which were then sold to Brown's Blub Ranch and shipped east when they bloomed. The mini-industry lasted several years before farmers flooded the

(Continued on page 3)

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"Lt. Buckley" (with goggles) was one of the barnstormers who landed their planes in Martin Kinsley's pasture next to Live Oak School. In 1918, free airplane rides in an old (then new) Jennie was the prize for whoever sold the most war bonds.

Barnstormers came to LO

(Continued from page 1)

market.

By 1920, another novelty had appeared in Live Oak. Barnstorming pilots found Martin Kinsley's pasture next to Live Oak School a suitable air field. The open pasture continued as an informal runway until a recognized airport was established at Capitola.

Among newcomers to Live Oak in the 1920s were Japanese ranchers who turned to the truck garden industry after World War I.

During this decade, the Japanese were targets of discrimination from whites who wanted to exclude them from land ownership of any kind — and the racism included Japanese children who were native-born Americans. Much of the anti-Japanese sentiment immediately after World War I was led by the American Legion and white farmers who feared the efficient economics of the Japanese family farming unit.

A majority of the Japanese truck farmers who came in the early 1920s were land tenants, although by 1930, many had become land owners. These first residents received from Live Oak the same kind of welcome in 1922 that had been sanctioned by Legionnaires since the end of the war.

One anti-Japanese appeal was recorded in minutes of the Live Oak PTA and Improvement Club, and it illustrates the temperament of farming communities. On January 22, 1922, a PTA member urged the organization to refuse to sell or lease land to the Japanese.

"These people are getting quite a hold on this section of the county," the secretary wrote, "Much to the depreciation of adjoining properties."

A motion was passed "to appoint a committee to act with the Chamber of Commerce, Realty Board or any other organization to draft a petition pertaining to the elimination of the Jap in this section." The motion passed by unanimous vote.

Whether the appointed committee ever attempted to circulate a petition is unknown, but by 1930, Japanese residents of Live Oak were well enough coordinated to establish their own community center on 17th Ave., and Japanese children were becoming the top scholars

of Live Oak School.

At the end of World War II and after Japanese citizens had been sent to concentration camps, county maps still showed Japanese ownership of Land in Live Oak. Among property owners in 1945 were Kulchi Takei, 2.77 acres; George Orsuki, 8.16 acres; I. Kuraika, ½ acre; Massahara Iwanaga, 2.7 acres; T. Matsushita, three acres; and several others who owned ½-1 acres.



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