

The Original Downtown Aptos

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Aptos 2000

Aptos Times 11-1-13

The development of Aptos has been a topic of debate for many years. Recently, we have seen an increase of activity. The Aptos Blue housing project, built on the historic Vicente Castro property, is nearing completion. The Rancho Del Mar Shopping Center, who celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2012, was recently purchased by Safeway who plans on expanding its grocery store and



Joseph Arano

gas station in addition to doing a major remodel of the shopping center. The plan to develop Aptos Village, which was first proposed over 30 years ago, appears closer than ever to begin operations. With all of the recent activity, I think it is a good time to reflect on the development of the first business district in Aptos.

While there is no official "downtown" Aptos, I think most people would consider downtown to be today's Aptos Village where the Aptos Station Center and Bay View Hotel are located. The Village is a very old part of town with some great original retail buildings and some wonderful stories. For example, Café Sparrow is housed in the Aptos Cash Store building built in 1899. It served as a general store and post office run by Kess and Agnes Van Kaathoven in the 1920s. Most people referred to them as "Mr. and Mrs. Van" and they referred to the store as "Vans Store" since Van Kaathoven was too difficult to pronounce! The Village, however, is not the original "downtown." The original center of town was just up the road where the Aptos Village Square (7960 Soquel Dr.) is located today.

When Rafael Castro was granted over 5,500-acres of land from the Mexican government in 1833, he became the first private

landowner in Aptos. The Rancho Aptos was perfect for Castro, who was a very intelligent businessman in many fields but was primarily a cattle-rancher who made his fortune raising cattle for their hides. In fact, early passers-by were permitted to kill the cattle for meat, so long as they left the hides.

In the early 1850s, Castro built the first wharf in Aptos where Aptos Creek empties into the bay. The wharf was used to ship hides, flour, redwood lumber, and eventually oak firewood and agriculture. Aptos Wharf Road at the east end of Aptos Village Square served as the connection between the pier and the town of Aptos. It was the area's first commercial street and still exists today as the shortest road in Aptos. Its direct access to the bay was blocked when the Highway 1 freeway was built in the late 1940s.

At the top of Aptos Wharf Road is a small white house with red shutters on the windows. This house is where the first retail business in Aptos began. The home was constructed around 1867 for its original tenants Joseph and Augustia Arano. Augustia was one of Rafael Castro's daughters. The two-story home was built to serve as a grocery store on the bottom floor with living quarters on the second



The Arano Store

floor. In 1870, it served as the town's first post office with Joseph acting as the town's first postmaster.

The store also served as a town clock for some folks. The first official Aptos School was a one-room schoolhouse built in 1871 on land that was donated by Rafael Castro. It was located just off the county road at today's 7851 Soquel Drive. The teacher used to send students to the Arano general store to get the time as the school had no clock and the teacher could not afford a watch!

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The railroad built in the mid-1870s encouraged lumbering in the Aptos hills in today's Nisene Marks State Park. The town expanded across the creek to support the industry. Joseph Arano decided to build a grand hotel in the center of the new part of town. He used the profits he had made at his store to purchase the property at the corner of the county road (Soquel Drive) and Trout Street (Trout Gulch Rd) from his sister in law, Maria Antonia Castro. The Anchor House, whose name would later be changed to The Bay View Hotel, was completed in 1878.

Upon completion, The Arano family moved their general store and living quarters from Aptos Wharf Road into the Bay View Hotel, thus ending the building's role as the town's first main business center.

The Arano house and general store still exists today as the oldest house in Aptos and serves as a private residence.

For more information about the Aptos History Museum, upcoming events, or becoming a member of the museum, please visit www.aptohistory.org. Purchase your own copy of "Images of America:



Augustia Arano

Aptos" by Kevin Newhouse at the Aptos Chamber Office 7605-A Old Dominion Court for \$22 with proceeds going to Aptos History Museum. ■

Photos courtesy of the Aptos History Museum.