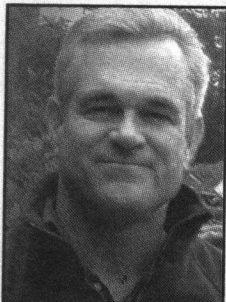


HISTORY CORNER



By John Hibble
Call: 688-1467

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Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church and Cemetery

Churches 200: Aptos Life

Many of our communities have pioneer cemeteries where the early settlers are buried. In Aptos, our pioneer cemetery is on Soquel Drive invisibly nestled between Resurrection Catholic Church and Aptos Center, directly across the street from the library. This is also where the first church was erected.

In 1868, Raphael Castro deeded two acres of land, which is the corner of today's Soquel Drive and State Park Drive, to the Roman Catholic Church for a church and cemetery. Before the chapel was built, rooms in private Aptos homes had been used for services.

Prominent citizens of the town subscribed donations to erect the chapel including: Claus Spreckels, \$100; Patrick Walsh, \$100; Rafael Castro, \$100; Patrick Leonard, \$100; Joseph Arano, \$100; Guadalupe Bernal, \$100; Thomas Leonard, \$100; Vicente Castro, \$25; Soledad Castro, \$20; B. C. Nichols, \$25;

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History Corner

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James Corcoran, \$10; and James Leonard, \$25.

The first Mass was celebrated in the chapel by Rev. Father Joaquin Adam on Nov. 17, 1874. The building was not finished on the inside or furnished. At that point the chapel had cost \$799.50. It was not completed and dedicated until October 1875. Mass was celebrated every first and third Sunday. The first internment in the cemetery was five-month-old Josefa Arano on Sept. 14, 1875.

The following year, Cypress trees were planted around the cemetery and down the Santa Cruz Watsonville Road, (Soquel Drive) and the road to the beach (State Park Drive), many of which still survive.

Supposedly, about the time the chapel was being built, Indian bones were discovered near Aptos Creek where Claus Spreckels was building his Aptos Hotel. It was reported that these bones were interred in the new cemetery near the chapel. This seems unlikely as the Indians were not Christian and the cemetery was consecrated ground.

The chapel served the community well but was vandalized in the early 1900s and ultimately deteriorated and was condemned. The altar, two side altars and the bell were distributed to other parts of the diocese. The church was torn down in 1935. Eventually graves were permitted where it had stood.

Of interest in the original structure was the beautiful hand-carved statue of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, secured from Spain and presented to the chapel by the Santa Cruz pastor. It was created by a celebrated artist and enclosed in a walnut shrine. It has crystal eyes, coat of arms and gold-leaf decorations. It now resides in St. Joseph's Catholic Church on Monterey Avenue in Capitola.

Rafael Castro died on May 14, 1878, and was buried at Mount Carmel Cemetery.

The intersection of State Park Drive and Soquel Drive is shown in 1926. Aptos History Museum collection

His children erected a 16-foot marble monument with a bust of Castro's likeness at a cost of \$1,015. His grave marker is inscribed in Spanish. He refused to speak English.

Over the years the cemetery has been called Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, Mt. Calvary Cemetery, Calvary Cemetery, Aptos Cemetery, St. Joseph's Cemetery, and Resurrection Cemetery. In 2002,

Phyllis Casey and Dorothy Garske compiled a definitive list of those who are interred there, a copy of which is in the Aptos History Museum library.

Until recently, the only pictures that we had of the chapel were long distance aerial photographs, but on Oct. 8, 2013, Gerald and Joanne Epperson of Crockett, Calif. brought in more than 50 historic photographs of Seaclyff from their

grandmother, Frances Jordan Stules, who owned one of the first houses on the cliff.

The photograph, about 1926, shows the intersection of State Park Drive and Soquel Drive. There is an entrance trellis for the Seaclyff Park development at the intersection. You can just make out Raphael Castro's grave marker to the left of the chapel.

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