

Old title abstract sheds light on all sorts of Aptos history

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On November 7, 1904, Joseph E. Martin, a Portuguese immigrant, purchased the land bordered on the west by Aptos Creek, on the east by the Aptos General Store and the Patrick K. Walsh properties, on the south by the Valencia Creek, and on the north by the County Road (now Soquel Drive). Within a year he found himself involved in boundary disputes with his neighbors.

And when news of these disputes got about, he began to receive letters from lawyers for heirs to former owners of the property, strongly suggesting that his title to some of the land was clouded and that they would soon start lawsuits.

Understandably alarmed, Mr. Martin had the property resurveyed and had a Santa Cruz firm prepare an abstract of all previous deeds. This \$175 document, now in the possession of Paul D. Johnston, present owner of the property, is interesting, not only as the record of former owners, but also for the

many bits of Aptos history it throws light on.

First, there is the matter of names of geographical features. Valencia Creek is called Arroyo De Chino and Aptos Creek, Canada De Nobilles in deeds dated earlier than 1870. It is apparent that the Watsonville-Santa Cruz Road mentioned in several deeds followed what is now called Spreckels Drive to a point near the confluence of the two creeks, then followed the south bank of the Valencia Creek on a course parallel to that of the present Cabrillo Highway. Some documents refer to it as the Coach Road and indicate that a branch road was cut into the bank below the recently-abandoned Postoffice to enter the site of Aptos Village just east of the building now housing "Pampered Pets."

The property was first detached from the Rancho Aptos in 1855, when Rafael Castro divided it among his daughter Maria and sons Vicente and Francisco.

One of the points of reference used by the surveyors at that

time was "the flour mill," which apparently stood on the knoll just east of the point where Moosehead Drive intersects Spreckels Drive, the site in the 1880's of Spreckel's short-lived hotel. The mill is next mentioned in October, 1859, when Sheriff John Porter sold the Cascade Mills at auction to satisfy the unpaid taxes of one Charles L. Thomas. Charles Bern made the high bid — \$400.

In June, 1861, Bern sold part of his holdings to Pedro Biscara for \$900 and in December, 1862, a smaller segment of the flat land to Brigado Cordoba for \$300. Land values must have boomed in the next few years, for in August, 1866, Cordoba sold his holding to Conrad Bush for \$1,300. Bush heirs still hold a part of this purchase, on the south side of Valencia Creek.

Curiously, the deeds state the dimensions in chains. Nowhere is any acreage given. And the measurements are taken from "the largest sycamore tree," to a "redwood emblazoned with a certain sign," to the "foot of the bluff on the east side." Quite certainly, no permanent

surveyor's stakes were used. Since trees are cut down, since their bark tends to obliterate emblazonings in a few years' time, since the route of the Santa Cruz-Watsonville Road was changed radically several times, and since bluffs crumble and streams change their courses in soft bottom land, it is not surprising that boundary disputes lasted well into this century.

The flour mill makes a second appearance in the record, for on February 18, 1867, Sheriff Albert Jones auctioned off the holdings of James Brennan and John McHugh, doing business as the Aptos Steam Flouring Mill, to satisfy creditors. Edward Porter bought the land for \$1,200. For some reason not explained in the abstract, the sheriff sold the mill property again in February, 1868, to John O'Farrel, who resold it to Rafael Castro for \$300 less than a month later.

Between 1872 and 1875, Claus Spreckels expanded his holdings by purchasing all the land in the arroyo of the Aptos Creek, except for a part of the Bush property. The largest parcel, for which he paid \$4,500, was that of Mrs. Esperidion Hippolito (nee Maria Castro, widow of Carlos Valencia). Other parcels were those of Rafael Castro and his son Vicente, and Bishop Thaddeus Amat of Monterey. Spreckels held this property until April, 1891, when he sold the present fan-shaped tract between the Aptos Creek and the bluff on the east to H. L. Jessen, blacksmith, for \$500.

Spreckels had developed one public service in the flat near the creek. He had dug a deep well and beside it put a mule-powered pump that filled two big tanks, one behind the Live Oak House and one behind the Bay View Hotel, to bring the village its first water system.

Mrs. Jessen erected a smithy on pilings on the steep bank across the County Road from the S.P. Station and two houses on the present site of the Village Garage and the Mobil Service Station. The blacksmith shop later served as the Martin feed and grain store, and its platform was used in the 1920's to store the first Aptos fire engine.

Manuel de Souza da Silva bought out Mr. Jessen in September, 1901, and, in turn, sold to Joseph E. Martin in 1904. Mr. Martin extended the platform along the bluff and on it constructed a bar and pool room, a barber shop and a store building that became the Aptos Postoffice when Paul Johnston took over as Postmaster in 1930's. The barber shop is still in use. The poolroom has become an antique shop, and the store building, much extended, houses the Aptos Market.