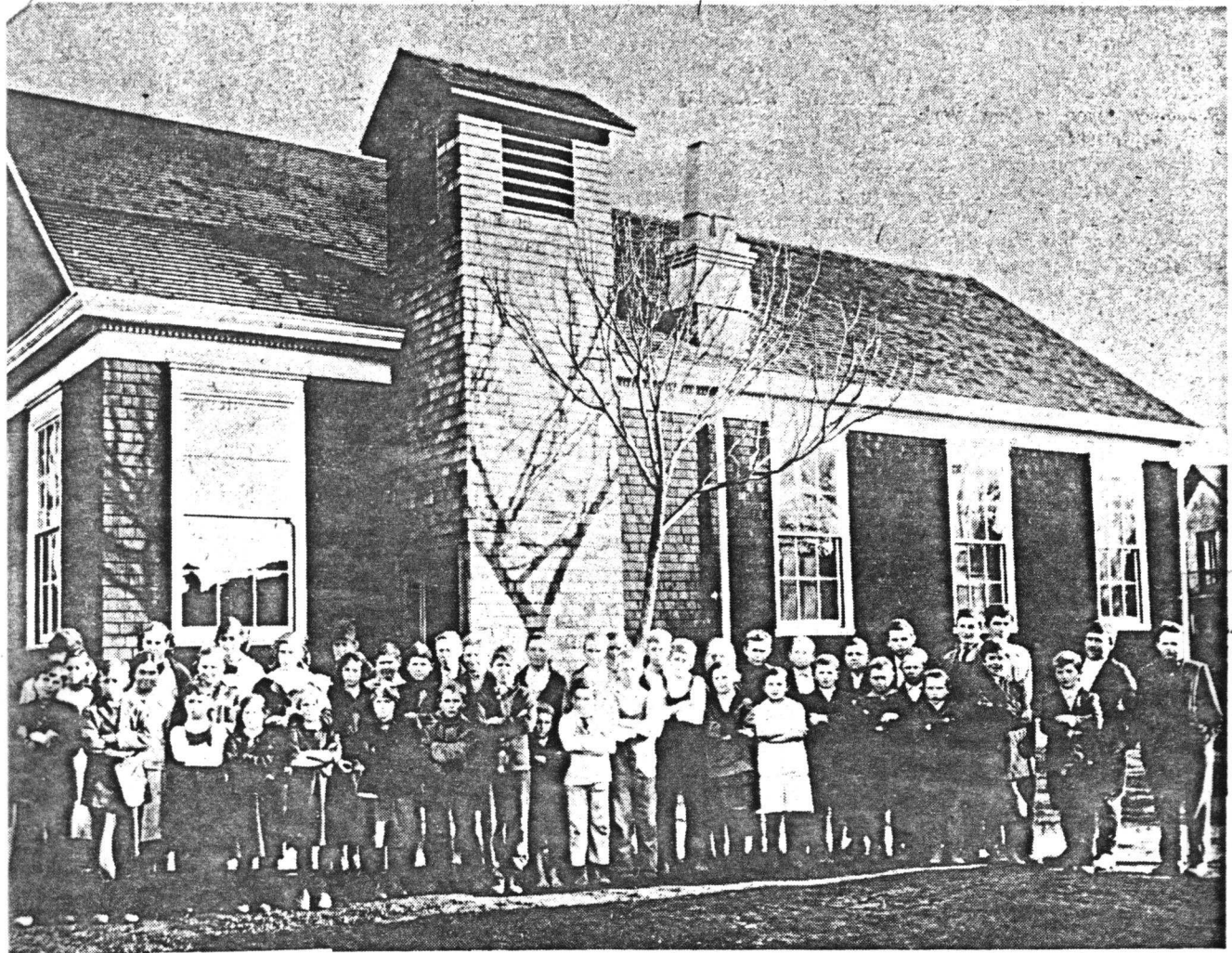


of days in Aptos are



Students at school in Aptos in 1916

n't what they used to be

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Prior to 1866, children in the Aptos area either received their education at home or were sent to board with relatives in towns that had schools.

Many, of course, remained unlettered, so that well into the 1900's local merchants were accustomed to cashing paychecks signed with the "X" of the illiterate.

In 1866, J. Phillips, a retired teacher, turned one room of his home into a schoolroom and accepted students for a fee. The home stood near the present Rio Del Mar overpass.

Two years later, the first public school was opened in a rather dilapidated house that had just been vacated by a family named Labish, and a Miss Lizzie Schir was engaged as a teacher. The building proved unsafe. People refused to send their children. The only available alternative was a small one-room building that had served first as a saloon, then as a bachelor's cabin, and that stood on Soquel Drive about 100 feet north of the railroad trestle.

By the end of 1869, Miss Jennie Fallon, the new teacher, pronounced the building too small. The desperate trustees could find space only in a barn on the Vicente Castro property, across Soquel Drive from the Rancho Del Mar Shopping Center. On clear days, teacher and pupils left the dark barn to meet under a giant sycamore in the bed of Aptos Creek. To make matters more interesting, political maneuvering had ousted Miss Fallon and replaced her with the teenage daughter of a county supervisor named Parsons.

Beautiful and brainy, by all accounts, Miss Parsons was still child enough to tire of teaching by mid-day. She spent most afternoons giving her pupils turns at riding behind her on her saddle horse. And, since there was no school clock and the teacher had

no watch, students took turns going to the nearby Joseph Arano Grocery to get the time. The school proved so unsatisfactory that the trustees cut two months from its schedule.

Vicente Castro donated the land and the A. W. Nichols mill the lumber for the first school house. The school lot measured 100 by 100 feet, and was near the site of the present John Anthony Tavern. The building was a square board-and-batten affair. Desks and benches were built by local carpenters. There was no plumbing. Water was brought in a big bucket from the creek and a tin dipper served all the thirsty. Toilets of "chick sales" variety stood at the rear of the lot.

A teacher who was to remain in Aptos many years and to remain a beloved visitor to the village for decades, James Brady, took

charge. Born in Canada, Brady had been horribly crippled from birth. His odd-shaped fingers were webbed together. One leg was normal in length, the other very short. He moved on crutches.

On the plus side, he was handsome and well groomed, he was highly educated, and he had a well-trained baritone voice.

A friend had built him a revolving stool, which he kept in the classroom. The first part of each school morning was the singing lesson. With his short leg on the stool, Brady would hop around and around, the beat of his foot and of his baton guiding the singers. Under his guidance, the school grew, added a ninth year to train bookkeepers, and it became necessary to hire a second teacher, a Mrs. Sisson, who taught the overflow in the

private skating rink of the Castro home.

A fixed disciplinary system grew up during this period. A pupil who broke the rules was called upon to apologize before the school. If he refused, he was sent home until he was ready to apologize. If a week passed without an apology, his books were stacked at the school door. This constituted expulsion for the year.

The old school served until 1899, when Mr. and Mrs. Claus Spreckels presented the trustees with a neat red schoolhouse with white trim and classical portico, complete with cloakrooms and modern washrooms, and surrounded by a high white fence.