

Green Sheet 12-31-70

Bits and pieces of old Aptos

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Aptos, Soquel, Santa Cruz and Branciforte were the only place names on the first official United States Government maps of what is now Santa Cruz County.

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Aptos was the name recorded for this area by a Spanish Padre in 1793. It was his understanding of "Owatos" or "Awatos", the local Indian's name for their village, an abbreviation of several words that meant, "meeting of two creeks."

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The Aptos Creek originally flowed down the center of the arroyo through which it enters the bay. Developers rechanneled it in 1924 to make room for the present esplanade. In the process, they removed a forest of small oaks about a quarter mile long and a hundred yards wide.

A dam and a retaining wall near the beach were built to create a lake for swimming and boating, but the dam was destroyed by a storm in 1930, soon after it was completed.

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Among the villagers' favorite raconteurs was sturdy, red-haired Jim Murphy, Southern Pacific section foreman, father of a recent District Attorney, and grandfather of our present Assemblyman.

He was coaxed again and again to repeat his hilarious tale of the behavior of his kitchen stove in the 1906 earthquake. As he told the tale, he was just about to lift the morning pot of coffee from the stove when the iron monster rose from its brick foundation, chased him out the kitchen door, then, belching smoke, barred the door against him.

The swamp below the Deer Park Tavern, recently partly restored to save its unique salamanders, was all but covered with large and beautiful weeping willows until the highway cut through it in the late 1940's. It was the source of a little stream that emptied into Valencia Creek near the Rio del Mar overpass.

Until about 1915, a proper Aptos lady's bathing dress covered her from neck to toe tip. The more daring young ladies dove into the breakers and swam out beyond them without even removing their bathing slippers.

They were frequently met at the water's edge by a disapproving elder with a blanket, for the wet bathing dress clung in revealing fashion.



Emma Berlin (left) and Emma Walsh model appropriate bathing attire, circa 1900

