

# Aptos, too, was melting pot for immigrants

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Aptos attained permanent status as a community over the span of years that marked the heaviest immigration into the United States.

The township, already host to refugees from the Irish famine and the unrest in the German states, added to its babble of accents the tones and rhythms of the Scandinavian countries; also Holland, France, Portugal, Italy, Greece, China, Japan, and finally, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia.

At least one third of the adults in the community at the turn of the century spoke English fluently, but with an identifiable accent. A few, notably the Japanese woodcutters and charcoal markers and the group of Basques who worked on the railroad, still communicated largely in sign language. And dozens of families spoke with a Yankee twang, a Southern accent, or a Hoosier accent.

Everyone in the community found himself in some sort of ethnic minority, for to the differences imposed by racial and regional origin were added differences in religion. Though the Know-Nothing Party had died in the 1850's, much of the anti-foreigner, anti-Catholic sentiment it had fostered lingered on.

A militant Catholicism in the Irish, who had just got out of a country cursed with 600 years of religious persecution, and the Californians, who feared for their Catholic culture under their American conquerors, fanned the fears of doubtful Protestants. Every wave of immigrants brought with it its own fears and prejudices, based on "the tale of an ancient wrong."

It was, moreover, an age that assumed, simply and without any feeling of guilt, the freedom of outspoken prejudice. Spaniards were labeled Dago, Italians were called Wops, Irishmen were Harps or Micks or Paddies, Scandinavians were Squareheads—every nationality was given a similar label.

Stereotypes were the order of the day—the drunken Irishman, the lazy Mexican, the stubborn German, the licentious Frenchman. And the Negro was,

neighbors would determine in no small degree their place in the pecking order. So T. A. Daly could write, about 1900:

"Ees no so hard for Dago man To be ze good American; Too burn, too slow you theenka me,

But I am sharp enough for see The firsta theeng what you must know

Ees how to speak ze Eenglis so That you can wave your hat and say,

"The reda, whita, blue— hooray!"

The many skills which the immigrants brought with them also served to ingratiate them with native Americans and with each other. The Japanese skill in fruit and berry culture, the advanced farming methods brought in by the Germans and Scandinavians, and the proficiency of the Portuguese in dairying, fishing and carpentry,

for instance, were quickly acknowledged by the whole community.

Every hotel and several big families treasured their Chinese cooks. Big ranches boasted of the skills of their English, Irish, and Welch specialists in the raising of cattle and horses.

Then, as the newcomers acquired land, they became neighbors who exchanged farm equipment, offered help with harvests with no thought of remuneration, and brought over generous pieces of fresh meat when a pig, calf, or sheep had been slaughtered.

The neighborhood children grew up together, attending the same school, hunting, fishing, swimming together in the long vacation period. Life-long friendships, enduring partnerships, and most importantly, marriages that ignored differences in national

origin and in religion were the result. Terms like Harp and Wop lost their pejorative connotations, and the populace learned that to be proud of the land of their ancestors only enhanced their pride in being citizens of this nation of nations.

Aptosians whose memories go back to the 1890's and early 1900's

Aptosians whose memories go back to the 1890's and early 1900's remember with respect and affection the elders whose tongues betrayed a place of birth far from California—the patriarch of the Freitas clan, for instance, in his beautiful garden, holding a group of youngsters spell-bound with tales of the Azores; or "Uncle Bill" Verhoeff, apostle of moderation, condemning heavy drinking to the village philosophers gathered about the stove in the general store, but opining that a stiff drink was good for a man "so vunce a vile"; or "Flip" Hulsman reporting, with a straight face that his rented horse had run away while he had his Dutch-English dictionary out trying to find out how to say "Whoa!" or Captain Dye, forgetting his pain, telling from his bed in picturesque Hoosier dialect of the Battle of the Wilderness.



The Freitas granddaughters: from left, Margaret, Mamie, Virginia and Ida; three of these four girls married 'outside' their Portuguese nationality.

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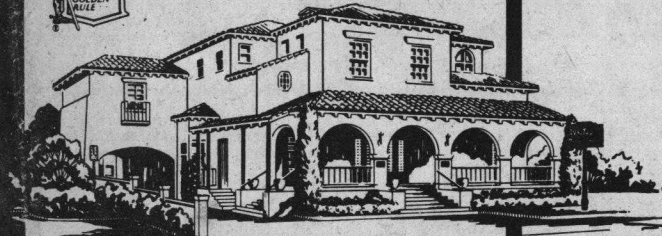
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## BRAND NEW



In most instances, the Rastus of the minstrel show, a comic buffoon who rolled his eyes, slavered at the mention of "possum," and always carried a pair of dice. No ethnic group escaped somebody's stereotype. To make matters worse, the Hearst papers carried dire warnings of "The Yellow Peril" that caused many to view every Japanese as a potential spy or saboteur, every Chinese as a fore-runner of a smothering wave of immigrants from the Orient.

Happily, out of this welter of misunderstandings came little harm, except for a few hurt feelings, and a very few embittered individuals. Perhaps nothing truly came of the situation because one group attempted to "put another down" only to prove itself superior in patriotic fervor. This young giant of a nation, flexing its growing muscles before the world, inspired in its native citizens a fiery loyalty and kept their eyes fastened on its "manifest destiny."

Immigrants quickly sensed that the speed with which they could emulate their American