

CAYUCOS PORTAL

Spring 2023

Issue 14

Lets Celebrate! Portuguese History on the Central Coast.



In front of the old catholic church before the parade.

There are more than 350,000 Americans of Portuguese ancestry living in the state of California, according to recent census records. The majority of them trace their ancestry to the Portuguese Azores islands, in the mid-Atlantic, rather than to mainland Portugal.

Many Portuguese settled here, in the central coast. While some may have migrated into the central valley, especially into Tulare, Kings and Fresno counties, where land was available and cheap, some stayed here. But, even those that left for the valley remain connected to our lovely community and the surrounding area, owning homes they use to escape the valley heat, or to settle in after retirement.

The Portuguese, and especially the Azoreans, were always a group of people who migrated. Beginning in the mid 1880's, land became more and more difficult to obtain as the Azorean population outgrew the nine tiny islands. In the typically large families, where the land owned by parents went only to the oldest son, the younger sons and daughters eventually had to consider leaving for other parts in order to be able to make a living and provide for a family.

The earliest recorded Portuguese arrivals in the US were men who were hired by American whaling ships when they stopped at the islands to replenish supplies. Young, eager Azoreans lined up for the jobs available, and earned the reputation of being excellent seafaring sailors, experienced in fishing, whaling and navigation.

The whaling ships navigated throughout the Atlantic and the Pacific and, when they docked, many a young Azorean left ship for opportunity in the US.

Many who did settle along the California coast engaged in fishing; the tuna fishing industry in San Diego was long dominated by the Portuguese.

When it came to dairying, a Portuguese man would hire on at a dairy, and save enough money to send for a brother or cousin to come join him. He wrote letters home to tell others about the opportunity to work here.

Once here, brothers or cousins or friends would work together, saving as much money as possible until they could afford to buy a few cows of their own. Eventually, they could rent a small farm, and – finally – leave working for others to begin their own dairies. In addition to dairying, their small farms included growing corn and fava beans, and they raised pigs, sheep and chickens for family consuming as well.

The Portuguese who settled here organized and joined local “brotherhood” organizations, which were essentially paid memberships and insurance societies that would provide burial in the event of an untimely death. Through these organizations, they met other members when a dance or dinner was organized for socializing with other Azoreans. Many a local family got their start from an invitation to dance at one of these events.

By 1900, there were Azorean communities in every town of San Luis Obispo County. Cayucos had an I.D.E.S. council.

Most citizens of Cayucos today recall the days of the annual Portuguese celebration, which included mass, followed by a parade of young girls dressed as queens, and adults carrying banners and flags from the church to the Veteran's Hall, where a free meal of Portuguese soup was fed to all. These “festas” continue in many towns along the coast and in the central valley.

The names of many of these early Azorean immigrants to the greater Cayucos area can be found on grave markers at the Cayucos cemetery.

Authored by

-- *Kathi Mendes Gulley is a genealogist and author. She grew up in the central valley community of Riverdale, on her Portuguese grandfather's dairy farm. Today, she lives with her husband in Morro Bay.*



From The Tribune, Sunday, May 20, 1900



Crowd after the parade by the "Beach Hall" now Vets Hall.



Bringing in the hay on a local Protugues ranch.



Bar-B-Quing after the parade.



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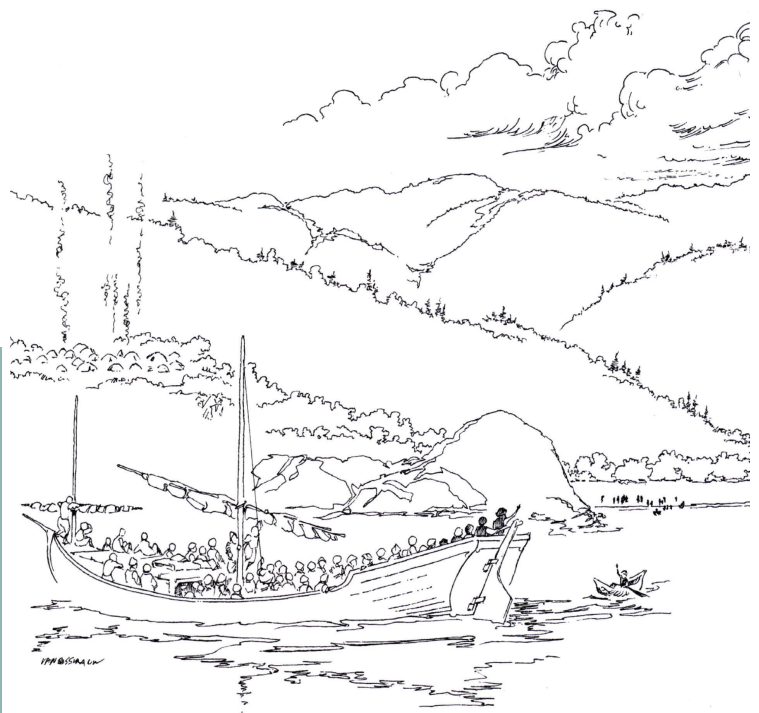
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