

CAYUCOS PORTAL

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SWISS-ITALIANS WITH CALIFORNIA DREAMS

Many thanks to Sandy Peterson, of the Santa Maria Valley Genealogical Society, who contributed this article.

In the tiny town of Cayucos, California, you'll hear of many Swiss Italian families. These are names that originated in the Maggia valley and Ticino Canton in Switzerland. Ticino is the canton in Switzerland where Italian is the primary language. So, what brought this Swiss-Italian influence to this and various parts of California's central coast?



Swiss Italian dairy ranch on San Geronimo creek

Looking back at records and family stories from both California and the Ticino Canton of Switzerland, you'll find that a surge of immigrants looking for new opportunities arrived on the coast of California in the mid- to late-1800s. Ticino parish record books containing baptism, marriage and death records sporadically record that a person or family left the area and later "died in California".

Some of those emigrating were sons following their fathers across the sea, while others were setting out on their own to find work or land to purchase. According to a 2009 article at swissinfo.ch, approximately 27,000 Ticinese emigrated to California. While many arrived in California harbors by ships, others first stepped onto American soil in New York, then traveled by train to the golden state.

Several of the California counties with a strong Swiss-Italian influence are Marin, Monterey, San Luis Obispo, Madera, Plumas, Santa Barbara, as well as Sonoma. Dairies, large and small, could be found all along the coastal and in-land valleys of our lovely state. Historically, the Swiss-Italians who arrived here made their living in the dairy industry. Interestingly, in the pages of the book, *The Purple Cow*, written by Laura Lee Tognazzini Dias, you'll find that some of the men who arrived had no experience with dairy life. But because a dairy-owning relative had a job lined up for them, and for the sake of survival, they worked hard to learn the job and to succeed at skimming cream, churning butter, making cheese. That's not to say that all of the dairies in the state were owned or operated by Swiss-Italian families. Dairying on a commercial scale dates back over 150 years in the Cayucos Area.

Regarding the climate in Switzerland compared with the California climate, there is one 1908 article at Google books, (Carnegie Institution of Washington Publication, Vol. 220, page 148), which states, "The returning emigrants are

called Californians (Californese), not Americans. Most of those that revisit their home in Ticino (and the most desirable class) return to California. The climate of California and the means of livelihood correspond most closely to conditions at home."

The Italian-Swiss were a large part of early Cayucos. They built homes, started businesses, farmed and raised families. A visit to the Cayucos Cemetery shows the names and dates for many of these early Cayucans. Their influence lives today, not only in current families, but also as a critical part of the history of our town.

THANK YOU

Our newsletter is dedicated to the Swiss Italian Heritage of Cayucos as a thank you to Dana and John Mattison. John is a descendent of Ercole and Josephina Biaggini, one of the original Swiss- Italian families to settle in Cayucos. The Biaggini's came to the area in the mid 1800's, ranched and farmed up Cayucos Creek and ran the butcher shop in town.

The Mattison's have very generously donated a storage unit for CHS to use. This a great savings to our organization and very much appreciated, Thank you!



Ercole Biaggini in front of his butcher shop on Cayucos drive. This building is now the Beachside rentals. The accompanying children were part of the large Biaggini family

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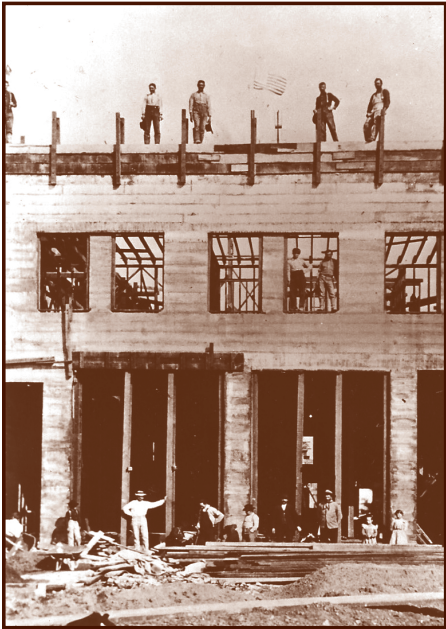


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The Board and its members are ever so grateful to Lisa and Kevin McClory, owners of the Cayucos Surf Company, for allowing the Historical Museum to have a happy new home. Come visit us upstairs. Be sure to give them a great big thank you when you go inside.

THANK YOU

The Board would like to thank everyone for supporting the museum and our programs. We are looking forward many successful years with new exhibits and continuing our popular newsletter, which gives people a glimpse into Cayucos' past.

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