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# South Bay Historical Society Bulletin

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The children in this photo of the Otay School in 1897 appear to be mostly white, from the Anglo families who had homesteaded the valley since the 1870s. They had names like Perry and Downs who built the town of Otay in 1887. Some with names like Poggi and Daneri, were from the Italian families east of the town who built prosperous farms and wineries. A few had names like Huot and Jausaud who were from the shepherd families in the valley. However, this would change beginning in the 1920s. The old school building was torn down and replaced by the modern Montgomery School. The children would increasingly come from Mexican families. The Great Flood of 1916 wiped out much of the town and forced many families to move away. The gravel and sand mining companies of Henry Fenton and Nelson & Sloan replaced farms and

offered employment to migrants from Mexico, as did Fenton's Western Salt Company. During World War II, the labor shortage caused landowners to use seasonal Mexican contract labor to harvest crops. The bracero program from 1942 to 1964 brought thousands from Mexico to San Diego County, as did the expansion of military bases at Brown Field and Ream Field.

In this issue of the Bulletin, Cesar Castro tells the story of his family that came to the valley in 1921. Barbara Zaragoza has been interviewing Mexican families since she began working on her book, *San Ysidro and the Tijuana River Valley*, that was published in 2014. These family histories tell the story of social change and community rebirth, a story that rings true throughout the South Bay today.

## Otay and the Castros

By Ceasar Castro

I grew up in a neighborhood called Otay (pronounced Oh-Tie). The name is an Indian word from the Kumeyaay language. The meaning is unclear because the word may come from “Otai” (Bushy), “Tou-ti” (big mountain) or “etaay” (big).

Otay was destined to become a city. In 1890 the town had a watch factory (the Otay Watch Factory), a hotel (Hotel Otay), a school (the Otay School), a newspaper (The Otay Press) and a railroad (the National City and Otay Railroad) which came straight through the center of the town. It came down Third Avenue and turned west at Main Street, continued through Palm City and ended in San Ysidro.

However, the flood of 1916 terminated that destiny. The torrential rains of 1916 caused the Otay dam to collapse and a raging wave of water came down the Otay valley, flooding the area. Farms were destroyed. The railroad tracks of the Otay and National City Railroad were washed out. The small town of Otay was decimated. The railroad tracks were never replaced. Otay became an unincorporated neighborhood until 1985 when it was annexed into the city of Chula Vista .



Back in the 1950s, the Otay community was about 60% Hispanic, 35% Anglo and 5% African-American. I grew up in Otay in the 1950s. I lived at 314 Zenith Street from 1943 to 1958. The Baptist church on the corner of Zenith Street and 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue was a half block away. It was one of the oldest churches in San Diego County. Although my parents were Catholic, my mother sent us to the Baptist Church because it was only a half a block away. I was a Cub Scout and a Boy Scout at that church. The church building still stands but it is not a Baptist Church anymore. It is an empty building that belongs to the San Diego Christian Fellowship.



Figure 1 – Otay Baptist Church Boy and Cub Scouts on a 1952 train trip to San Juan Capistrano (I am the Boy Scout on the far left, next to my brother, Gilbert)

Kitty corner to the Baptist church was the bracero camp. In Figure 2, the buildings in the background which look like military barracks was the bracero camp. In the 1950s the United States had a work program with Mexico where the Mexican farm workers would come to the United State and work on farms. The word bracero is the Spanish word for farm laborer. The buildings have been torn down and there is now just an empty corner lot now. Even the eucalyptus trees are gone.



Figure 2 – Ceasar (left) and Gilbert (right) Castro on Bikes. The bracero camp is in background.

My father, Raul Castro came to the United States when he was 11 years old. He came with his mother, Jesus Cosio Castro plus 4 bothers and 2 sisters to Otay in 1921. They came from Eureka, Baja California Sur. Eureka is on the Gulf of California about 50 miles south of La Paz. His father, Antonio Castro was already in Otay when his mother and her 7 children came to Otay.

They first lived on Fresno Street, across the street from the abandoned Otay Watch factory building and on the same block as the Otay Elementary school. (See Figure 3) Eventually my grandparents, Antonio and Jesus Castro, would buy land and build a house across the street from the Otay Elementary school on Montgomery Street. I attended John J Montgomery Elementary School. My father also attended John J Montgomery as well as his brothers and sisters. However, when my dad attended the school, the school was called Otay Elementary School. The next photos below show one of my dad's brothers, Rodolpho (everyone called him Chico) in the



Figure 3 – Aerial Few of Otay 1928 (abandoned Otay Watch factory building in center of photo).

playground of Otay Elementary School. He is the one with the big O on his shirt. It appears that they had just completed some kind of athletic competition because they all have ribbons on their shirts. The Otay Elementary school is shown on the left of the photos. Notice the large buildings in background. They are the abandoned buildings of the Otay Watch Factory which closed down in 1890. The photos are from the late 1920s.



After attending Otay Elementary School my father attended Sweetwater High School. He graduated from Sweetwater High School in 1931. His bothers also attended Sweetwater High School. My sister still has my father's school annual from 1931. My dad was very proud that he graduated from high school. He was on the track team. There were 15 members



Figure 4 - Otay Elementary School athletic competition

on the track team. He was the only Hispanic. At that time, Hispanics did not typically attend high school. He would have loved to have gone to college. However there was no way his parents could afford

it. I think that is why, as I grew up there was no statement like “we hope you go to college”; it was always, when you attend college.

I did attend college. I attended Southwestern College the first year it existed in September 1961 and graduated from San Diego State College in 1967 with a bachelor’s degree in Electrical Engineering. I later attended Purdue University and graduated in 1971 with a Master’s Degree in engineering.

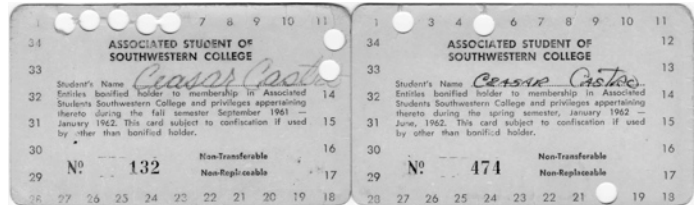


Figure 6 – Cesar Castro’s Southwestern College 1961-1962 student body cards.

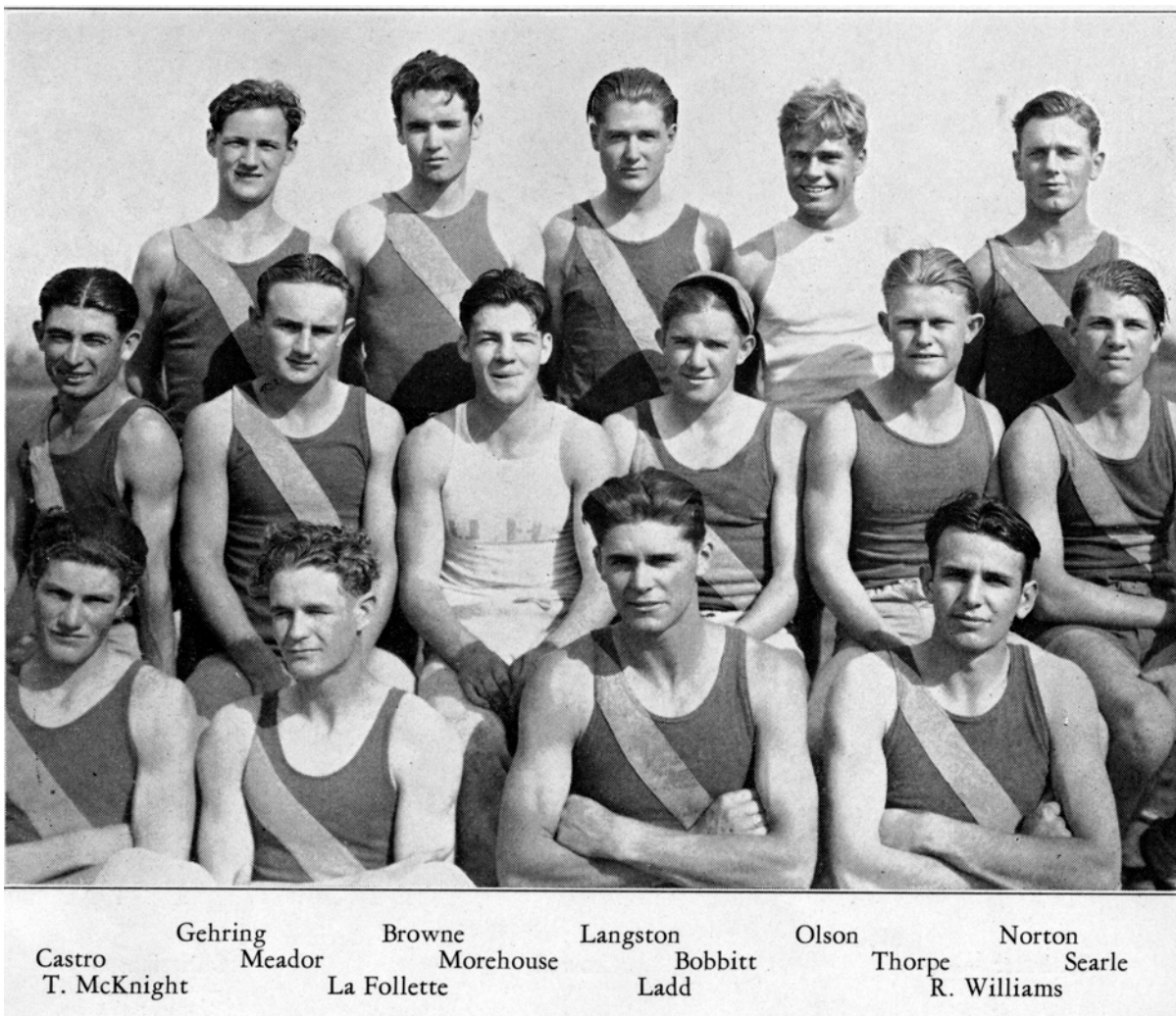


Figure 5 - 1931 Sweetwater High School Track Team (Raul Castro in middle row on the far left).

My dad helped build the house we lived in before I was born. It was a small two bedroom house. The house was made of mainly redwood. The framing was redwood and the siding was redwood. I remember about every 6 or 7 years we would get on the roof to replace the asphalt roof shingles. The house had a detached garage. However, I never remember a car ever being in it.



Figure 7 - Our house with my father Raul holding me with my sister Mary Christine standing in front.



Figure 8 - My two dogs (Blackie and Scare-a-moochie) and I (wearing my elementary school Safety Patrol uniform).

We had quite a few birthday parties at our house. The photo below shows one of the parties. I cannot remember if the party was for me or my sister, Mary Christine or my brother, Gilbert. However, I am related to everyone in the picture.



Figure 9 - Clyde Gonzales my cousin and myself playing cowboys in front of our garage.

We had a large backyard. We had 6 fruit trees: apple, pomegranate, peach, plume, apricot and cumquat. For a while my dad raised rabbits. We had rabbit hutches in the back yard. At one time he had over a hundred rabbits. He raised the rabbits for their fur

and would sell the fur. We ate a lot of rabbit when I was little. I still enjoy rabbit. However, nowadays you do not find it very often and if you do, it is rather expensive.



Figure 10 - Birthday Party Picture (with the bracero camp in background) Top row (R to L): Eddie Gonzalez, Jeannie Chavez; Middle row (R to L): Joe Adame, Rudy Gonzales, Gilbert Castro, Ceasar Castro, Martha Adame, Olivia Castro, Mary Christine Castro; Bottom row: (R to L): Clyde Gonzalez, ?, ?

My first job was selling fresh corn. My dad was a farmer. He was the foreman on the farm which was owned by his half-brother, Jesus Cosio Arballo. People called him J.C. The farm consisted of about

200 acres. The property was leased from Henry Clay George. Henry George lived and died in Nestor. He is buried at Mount Olivet Cemetery in Nestor CA. The farm was in the Tijuana Valley. The ranch was on the U.S. side of the U.S.-Mexican border. The ranch was just south of a small town called Nestor, named after Nestor A. Young. I always found it interesting that it was named after his first name rather than his last name. My dad set up a corn stand in an old barn on Grove Avenue in Nestor and in the summer of 1955 and 1956 my sister and I sold corn. I remember at the end of summer, my mother telling me that the money we made was going to be used to buy clothes for my sister because she was in high school and needed to buy new clothes.

I worked on the farm for three summers. I usually got the easier jobs. However, one summer I remember picking tomatoes, that was the hardest job I ever had. I learned to drive tractors and trucks on the farm. I really enjoyed driving those big Caterpillars. The farm is gone. There is a housing track now on most of the land. Today, Susie's Farm at the corner of Hollister Street and Sunset Avenue is on part of the land my father farmed. The land my

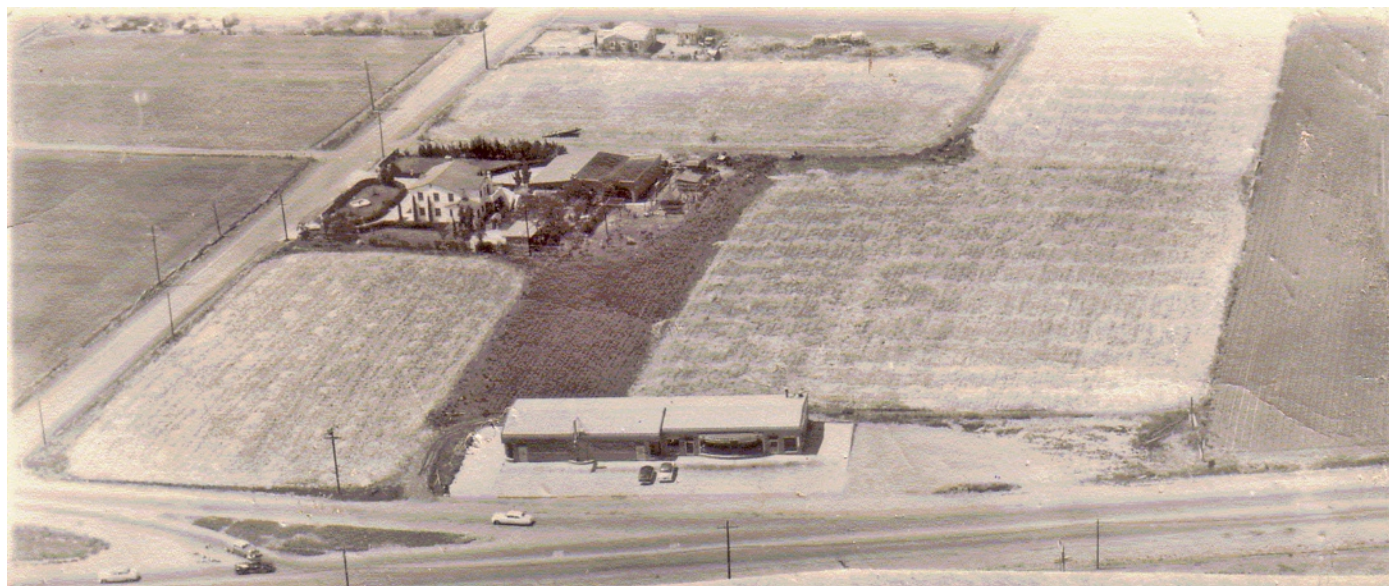


Figure 11 – The Claudio Gonzales farm was located on Anita Street (left). The Hayloft is the long building in the center along National Avenue. At lower left is the split in National Avenue known as the “Palm City Y” or “Coronado Cutoff.” The bottom part of the split continued south as Highway 101. The top part of the split in the photo (now Silva St.) went to Main Street where it divided into a Y shape and the west wing of the Y led to Palm City and Coronado.

father farmed ran from Sunset Avenue to the Grove Avenue next to the Interstate 5 Freeway.

The following summer, I sold corn by myself but for Claudio Gonzales. Claudio was my dad's 3rd cousin by blood and an uncle by marriage. Claudio married



Figure 12 – The Otay General Store (center) and Shell Service Station (right) were at the corner of Main Street and Third Avenue. The Baptist Church can be seen behind the Otay General Store. The P.D.Q. Trading Post secondhand store is on the far left and the bracero camp and Eucalyptus trees are left center. (Photo ca. 1960 courtesy of the San Diego History Center)



Figure 13 - Corner of Main Street and Third Avenue (2011).

my dad's aunt, Angela Castro. Mr. Gonzales had a farm of about 50 acres west of Broadway between Anita Street and Main Street in Otay. The corn stand was on Main Street (today it would be located at 2488 Main street.). The farm is now gone. It is a business district now. Figure 11 is an aerial photo of his ranch and his house. Claudio also owned the

Hayloft restaurant on Broadway which is also shown in Figure 11. Claudio died in 1966 and the land was divided up by his children. Claudio and his wife had 11 children. Actually there was a legal battle over the land. The house was physically moved to 1350 Industrial Blvd, Chula Vista in 1978.



Figure 14 – Tony and Chico Crate Company (Chico next to second truck back and Tony next to third truck back).

My third job was working at the Otay General Store as a box boy. I would also stock shelves sometimes. My mom, Sarah Chavez Castro worked at the store as a cashier. She got me the job and also got a job for my sister. The Otay General Store was owned by Mr. Echelmen and Mr. Hart. They had bought it from Mr. Banks.

My mother, Sarah Chavez Castro came to the United States in 1922 with her parents, Carmen Cota and Manuel Chavez. They came up from El Alamo, Baja California where my mother was born. El Alamo is about 50 miles southeast of Ensenada, Baja California. My grandfather Manuel Chavez was a miner. Gold was discovered in the El Alamo area in the late 1800 hundreds. However by the early 1900s





Figure 15 – Photo on left - Uncle Alex on far right; Photo in center - Uncle Chico; and Photo on right - Uncle Tony.

gold mining had ended. From El Alamo, the Chavez family moved to Julian Avenue in San Diego where my grandmother's Cota relatives lived. They later moved to Irving Avenue.

The Otay General Store is gone now. Figure 12 is a photo ca 1960 of the Otay General Store. At one time the store had gas pumps. However, they were later taken out because everyone went to the Shell gas station across the street. The corner where the store was now has a strip mall as shown in Figure 13. Looking at the two photos, the only thing that is the same is the Baptist Church steeple in the background. Third Avenue now changes names at Main Street. North of Main, the street is Third Avenue. South of Main, the street is Beyer Way.

I had two uncles, Antonio (Tony) and Rodolpho (Chico) who had a crate company on Beyer Way that bought and sold crates to the local farms.

Tony and Chico served in WWII, along with a third uncle, Alejandro (Alex). Alex was a control tower operator but later in the war became a radio control operator on a B25 aircraft which also meant he was a waist gun operator. Chico was in the infantry and Tony was a medic. My father did not serve in WWII because he was a farmer and they did not draft farmers.

We moved to Chula Vista in 1958. My parents kept the house on Zenith for a while but finally sold it. The new owners immediately tore down the house and put in a two unit rental. Now all I have are old memories of Otay and a few photos.

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## Farmers in the Otay Valley Of Mexican Descent

By Barbara Zaragoza

Census records show that 11% of the Otay population in 1910 registered as having Mexican descent. In 1920, census records show 26% claiming some Mexican descent. Most started out as shovelers in the Western Salt Works or with the San Diego and Arizona Railroad. Some went on to become successful farmers. One of those successful farmers was Claudio Gonzales who had twelve children and came to own about 50 acres of land in the area that today belongs to southwestern Chula Vista around Main Street.



The large home at 1350 Industrial Blvd was built ca 1930 by Claudio Gonzales.

Claudio built a large 8-bedroom home and at one point, he hired over 100 farm hands to help till the soil. Ceasar Castro's father, Raul Cosio Castro, became one of the farmers who worked on the Gonzales Farm.

I interviewed three descendants of the Claudio Gonzales line: Rosemarie Peralta Blanco (granddaughter), her son Joaquin Blanco and Lydia Arballo (granddaughter). They provided a history of their family as well as photographs. What follows is a description of Claudio's life as well as a history of his eldest daughter, Esperanza Gonzales. The

histories provide a colorful understanding of early farmers of Mexican descent in the Otay Valley.

## The Gonzales Family



Claudio and Angela Gonzales  
(Courtesy of Rosemarie Peralta Blanco)

Claudio Gonzales was born on October 29, 1882 in Santiago, Baja California Sur, Mexico. He had been part of the Federal Police force in Baja California in Mexico before the Pancho Villa era when the winds of war were circulating. To escape the mayhem, he went North. Claudio Gonzales came to the United States by ship (The Victoria) from Ensenada, Mexico on 1909. At first, Claudio worked as a foreman for the Western Salt Works.

Claudio returned to Mexico in order to marry Angela Beltran Castro on April 19, 1911 in San Jose de Cabo, Baja California Sur, Mexico. Angela then brought her mother, Jesus (Jesusita) Beltran, to the US in 1916. Jesusita was born in Baja California in 1854 and is buried at Mt. Olivet Cemetery. Some of the first Mexican-American families are buried in Nestor, California, at Mt. Olivet Cemetery, including Claudio's brother Rosendo Gonzales.

Angela and Jesusita were the descendants of the pioneer soldier Juan Carrillo – founder of the

Carrillo families of lower and upper California and part of the founding families in San Diego who, through descendant Hilario Carrillo, received the very first land grant in 1768 from the Marquee of Sonora Jose de Galves.



Jesusita Beltran Castro who came to Otay in 1916 and lived with Angela Castro Gonzales, wife of Claudio Gonzales. Buried at Mt. Olivet. (Courtesy of Ceasar Castro)

Another of Angela's ancestor, Jose Gabriel de Arce and Claudio Gonzales's ancestor Francisco Xavier Aguilar came with the Portola Expedition in 1769 expedition to found the Mission de Alcalá in San Diego.

Although born Catholic, because there were no churches close by, Claudio Gonzales helped establish the Apostolic Church, a branch of the Pentacostals that were Spanish speaking. The Church was located in Otay and two other men, Jesus Arballo and Juan Navarro, also helped establish the church. Claudio paid for the building in 1926.

The Apostolic Church was an offshoot of the Pentacostals, a church which held services in the Spanish language and spread throughout Mexico. Wikipedia explains, "The Apostolic Assembly of the Faith of Christ Jesus (Apostolic Assembly) is the oldest Spanish-speaking Oneness Pentecostal denomination in the United States. It is also the oldest primarily Hispanic denomination in the world and is also the eighth fastest growing Hispanic denomination. It was founded in 1925 and incorporated in California in 1930... The Apostolic Assembly is one of the many denominations that grew out of the Azusa Street Revival movement that emphasized unconventional and expressive forms of worship such as glossolalia or speaking in tongues...the Apostolic Assembly arose to meet the need to reach out to Mexican immigrants who were largely ignored by other Pentecostal denominations."

Dec. 10, 1949, Chula Vista Star

By the 1940s, Claudio owned about 50 acres of land and a restaurant called "The Hayloft" in the area



Foreign Club postcard ca. 1929 (Courtesy of Fotografía histórica de Baja California in Tijuana, Mexico.)

around where Main Street exists today. When his family lived in Baja, they had several ranches. They had sold everything before coming to Otay, thereby having some money to buy property. By 1920 Claudio and his brother Rosendo both owned their homes in Otay. Claudio boasted having eight rooms, a housekeeper and an adjacent cottage where eventually his daughter, Sara Gonzales, lived with granddaughter Rosemarie Peralta Blanco. Sara kept the books for her father.

Granddaughter Rosemarie Peralta Blanco remembers there was a large packing shed where the semis came to pick up the produce. She also recalls that the border patrol would come by and poke the haystacks with pitchforks, looking for illegal immigrants.

Claudio was known to be a workaholic, up early and working his land. However, he didn't let his wife and daughters farm. At a certain point, he had hired 129 workers. They were mostly seasonal workers who came at 7am and then would leave at 3pm and catch

the bus back to Tijuana. Claudio also became well-known as the tomato king, the celery king and the bean king of the Otay valley.

For their social life, they would go every summer to Ensenada. Claudio's children would go to the Foreign Club in Tijuana on weekends, a popular place for locals, tourists and celebrities. Lydia Arballo, a granddaughter of Claudio, also remembers they were one of the first families to have refrigeration and a telephone.

Claudio held onto the farm until he died in 1966. His wife, Angela, died the very next year, in 1967.

(Interview on 2/19/2016 with Rosemarie Peralta Blanco, granddaughter of Claudio, born April 21, 1943 and a native of Chula Vista. Interview also with her son, Joaquin Blanco,.)

## The Arballo Family

Claudio Gonzales had 10 surviving children and 12 altogether. One of his daughters, Esperanza Gonzales married Jesus Cosio Arballo (also known as J.C.). Together J.C. and Esperanza had four children—Victor, Lydia, Mary Jane and Reyna.

Jesus Cosio Arballo was born March 13, 1903 in Santiago, Baja California. He arrived in the United States by boat in 1921.



Matrimonio con la señorita Esperanza Gonzales  
18 de noviembre de 1928

Wedding picture of Jesus “J.C.” Arballo and Esperanza Gonzales (Courtesy of Lydia Arballo)

J.C. was also a member of the Apostolic Assembly of the Faith in Christ Jesus starting in 1925. Lydia’s papers tell the story of how J.C.’s father was

murdered when he was only nine years old. Always seeking revenge and searching for the man who had killed his father, J.C. went to Mexicali where he met Antonio Nava and Ramon Ocampo. Nava and Ocampo convinced him to give up his quest for revenge and become a man devoted to Christ.

J.C. and Esperanza Gonzales married in November 1928 when Esperanza was only sixteen years old. J.C. began working for an English family on Third Avenue in Chula Vista as a gardener. Although not too far away, Esperanza wanted to live even closer to her family in Otay, so they moved into a little house on Montgomery Street. J.C. then built them a little house on 314 Zenith Street and began to work at the Western Salt Works. The work was heavy and difficult.

In 1937 J.C. came down with pneumonia. Esperanza needed to find employment and decided to open a grocery store. As Lydia explains, her mother Esperanza had befriended Howard and Violet Banks, owners of the Otay General Store. She asked them how she also could run a small business and they helped her open a small one-room grocery store of her own. The family then lived in the rooms behind the store.

Esperanza ran the grocery store until about 1945 when her fourth child was born breech. Both she and daughter Rena were injured due to the birthing process and Esperanza could no longer work.

In the meantime, J.C. recovered from pneumonia and began working for his father-in-law Claudio Gonzales. J.C. was in charge of irrigation.

Like Claudio, J.C. spoke Spanish to his children. Esperanza spoke Spanish to her husband, but English to her children. When Lydia first started school, she remembers her father saying: “You’re going to start

school. You're going to learn to read, to write and you're going to learn so many good things. And you're going to respect your teachers. But you must remember, you're Americans. Don't let anyone tell you, you're not American. You're American, but you have Mexican heritage. Always be proud of your Mexican heritage because I'm from Mexico."

Lydia remembers J.C. and Esperanza taking their children to Tijuana often in order to minister to the poor. Esperanza would bring clothing as well as other goods and J.C. would preach.

J.C. was very organized and adept at harvesting celery and understanding farming, so Esperanza

encouraged him to begin working his own farm. J.C. leased a farm in Jamul and then leased property from Will George in Nestor and started growing green beans, tomatoes and celery.

A native of Otay, Lydia first went to Montgomery School. In 1947 she was one of the first students to attend Chula Vista High School, the same year it opened. She graduated in 1950.

(Interview on 4/24/2016 with Lydia Arballo Rodriquez, granddaughter of Claudio Gonzales born September 23, 1932 in Otay CA.)



Two children of Claudio Gonzales: Sara and Esperanza (Courtesy of Rosemarie Peralta Blanco)



Zaragoza Gonzales  
Ramon Monche Gonzales  
Jose Gonzales  
Esperanza Gonzales  
Libby Gonzales (married a Palma)  
Sara Gonzales



The Castro & Arballo family



**Notes:**

1. Names above provided by Amelia Castro Adame.
2. Property for church donated by Antonio Castro. Church built by Claudio Gonzales, Jesus Arballo and Juan Navarro.



GRUPO JUVENIL DE OTAY, CALIFORNIA CON LOS MINISTROS BAUTISTA CASTRO Y JESUS ARBALLO EN 1930.

## NEXT MEETING.....

Our next meeting is tomorrow, Thursday, July 21, at 6pm in the auditorium of the Chula Vista Library at 365 F Street. Richard Pennick will speak on the history of the NC&O Railroad. Dick is a 70-year resident of San Diego and a 55-year member of the Pacific Southwest Railway Museum Assoc. He holds a Locomotive Engineer and Conductor license to operate the weekend excursion trains at the museum's Campo Living-History & Train-Operation Center. He has been a student of railroads, especially the railroads of San Diego County, for many years and owns the body of National City & Otay picnic car No. 2, built in 1887. He is retired and resides in Spring Valley. He has been a resident of the East County for 66 years.



The NC&O was an important reason for the creation of the town of Otay that is featured in this issue of the Bulletin. The railroad was one of the projects started by the San Diego Land and Town Company under Col. William Dickinson. The company was set up by the Santa Fe Railroad to develop the property it was given by Frank Kimball to bring the transcontinental railroad to

National City. Dickinson invested over \$1 million to build the Sweetwater Dam and a water pipeline network and to develop the new town of Chula Vista. He spent another \$230,000 to build the National City and Otay Railroad from San Diego to National City to the Sweetwater Dam and south to the border.



The depot of the NC&O that was built 1896 in downtown San Diego at the foot of 6th Ave. is today preserved as part of the Hard Rock Hotel next to Petco Park.

One month after the NC&O tracks came to the Otay Valley in June 1887, real estate investors bought 120 acres from Robert Perry and began selling lots in the new subdivision of Otay. At the western end of the valley, a spur line connected the NC&O with Elisha Babcock's Belt Line railroad that ran from San Diego to Coronado.

## NEW HISTORICAL SOCIETY...

The Imperial Beach Historical Society has been formed as a branch of the South Bay Historical Society. This new society grew out of the committee created by the city of Imperial Beach in February to prepare historical exhibits for the



celebration of the city's 60th anniversary during the Sun and Sea Festival July 15-16. Those exhibits were a great success and resulted in ten new paid memberships in the SBHS and the IBHS. Photos of the Festival can be seen on the SBHS web page at <http://sunnycv.com/southbay/activities/IB1.html>

The Board of Directors of the IBHS has elected Terry Walston as President, and Joyce Ward as Secretary/Treasurer. They have started a Facebook page under the name Imperial Beach Historical Society and I encourage everyone to join the page in support of their efforts. If you have old photos about Imperial Beach, please post them on this Facebook page.

### South Bay Historical Society

Bulletin No. 12, Apr., 2016

Editorial Board ..... Steve Schoenherr, Harry Orgovan

Board of Directors ..... Peter Watry, Steve Schoenherr, Patti Huffman, Mitch Beauchamp, Harry Orgovan, Shelley Rudd, Barbara Zaragoza

For more information, see our web page at .....

<http://sunnycv.com/southbay/>