



HISTORY CENTER

SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY

Captain James Cass and St. Joseph's Church in Cayucos





James Cass in full Mason regalia, likely photographed between 1890 and 1910

Captain James Cass

The curator of your County Museum is often asked about the Captain Cass home in Cayucos. Visitors to the museum say: "Can you tell us anything about the two story house on the main street in the center of Cayucos facing the ocean?" And this, of course, was the residence of Captain James Cass. Elegant in its day, elaborate, Victorian, and the show place of Cayucos.



Cayucos postcard, postmarked 1912

The San Luis Obispo County Historical Society placed one of its handsome historical markers on the Cass residence in 1967, at the time of the Cayucos Centennial. The house was truly deserving of this recognition as Captain Cass was the early developer of Cayucos.

The home was built of lumber which was shipped to Cayucos from San Francisco. All of the other things necessary for a building also came from the City by the Golden Gate - as well as materials for the inside decor. The home was built between 1867 and 1875.

Captain Cass was an Englishman who had migrated to California from England. He went to Sacramento County in 1849, by ship around Cape Horn. The ship was named "Orpheus".

Captain Cass came to Cayucos from Sacramento County in 1867 by covered wagon. He built the Cayucos wharf and warehouse and his house was built directly across from those buildings. His home was the hub of all cultural and social life in Cayucos in those years.

Myron Angel tells us in his History of San Luis Obispo County "In 1875, there were these places in Cayucos - the Captain Cass Store, warehouse, private dwelling and a wharf". So at least we know that the home was standing in 1875. The house was originally painted a very light buff with brown trim.

The beautiful wall paper in the downstairs rooms was embossed with gold. There is a handsome marble fireplace still intact and wonderful glass doors with etched panes, brought over from England, it is said. The home had elaborate light fixtures, all fed by kerosene. These are no longer there.



St Joseph's Church in 1968, two years before it burned down

Captain Cass was very fond of the combination of black and white. He always drove show white horses and a shining black surrey or other horse drawn equipage. He himself dressed in black and white. He had white Spitz dogs, highly pedigreed, and they were allowed to romp on his immaculate and manicured lawns much to the enjoyment of the townspeople.

Captain Cass did much for Cayucos in many ways. As an example of his altruistic generosity to the little seacoast town - may we cite St. Joseph's Catholic Church? This was made possible through his generosity. Captain Cass was not a Catholic but felt the need of the church for the many people of that faith in the little village of Cayucos, and so gave generously to the building. Construction began about 1895 and the church was completed in 1900. It was built with volunteer labor under the supervision of Manuel Dughi, a member of a pioneer family.

The church was dedicated on July 6th, 1900 and the first mass was celebrated on Sunday, July 15, 1900 by Fr. Valentin Aguilera from Mission San Luis Obispo. He went by horse and buggy from San Luis Obispo as he later did to conduct weddings and funerals.

When the church was completed, there was but one main altar. The two smaller ones were added later.

An early resident of Cayucos tells us that the church and rectory were enclosed by the same type of picket fence and border of cypress trees as were used at the Cass home. The lumber for the church was also brought in by boat, as it was for the captain's elegant mansion.

It is interesting to note that many of the parishioners of the little church facing the sea were baptized, confirmed, married, and buried from the same quaint little church. St. Joseph's was abandoned as a place of worship in 1965. Although many of the historically-minded people of Cayucos tried to save it as an early landmark, it was sold and was to be done away with in the not-too-distant future, alas! You know what finally happened - the church burned to the ground on Wednesday, September 30th, 1970.

Captain James Cass and his wife are buried in the old section of the Odd Fellows Cemetery in San Luis Obispo. She died in 1910 at the age of 91 and he died in 1917 at 92. Have you seen his house? Do you know the one I'm talking about? It is now over a century old.

Written by Louisiana Clayton Dart in 1978. The Cass House is currently operating as a boutique hotel and restaurant. You can learn more [here](#).

May Flowers

We are thrilled to be taking part in Downtown SLO's #TheMayFlowerInitiative. We will be projecting the works of the incredible artist [Liz Maruska](#) onto our windows after dark. Check out [Downtown SLO's website](#) for more information.



Crown of Roses by Liz Maruska

Looking for more to do?

- Follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), or [Instagram](#). In addition to our regular Theme Monday and Throwback Thursday posts, we'll now be posting every weekday with photos from our collection that will inspire activities you can try in your very own homes.
- Take a [virtual walking tour](#) of historic San Luis Obispo. These video series feature short vignettes about significant local landmarks.

If you have any ideas of content you'd like to see, share it with us! And if you enjoy what we share with you, and if you are able to, would you please consider [supporting us](#)?

Thank you for being a part of our community. Everybody stay healthy and safe.

Sincerely,



Thomas Kessler
Executive Director

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