

## 150 Years in Half Moon Bay: I.D.E.S. and the Holy Ghost Festival

—Ellen Chiri, with thanks to Bob Fernandez

In 1871, The Brotherhood of the I.D.E.S. Society, a Portuguese fraternal organization, was organized in Half Moon Bay. I.D.E.S. stands for Sociedade Da Irmandade do Divino Espirito Santo—the Society of the Divine Holy Spirit.

Portugal's Queen Isabel, born in 1271, was very devout, and spent her life helping the poor and sick. She introduced celebrations of the Holy Spirit to Portugal, and its traditions became widespread in the Azore Islands. It is said that Queen Isabel would lead a procession to the church to celebrate Mass, carrying her crown, showing her submission to the will of God. People emulated these processions when in difficult situations, carrying a crown to the church to ask for God's help.

The Half Moon Bay I.D.E.S. Holy Ghost celebration follows a tradition rooted in the Azore Islands. A violent earthquake in the 19<sup>th</sup> century left the people without food and shelter. In a procession, they carried a crown to the church and celebrated Mass, asking the help of the Holy Spirit. Soon after their desperate plea for help, a ship arrived with sustenance for the people.

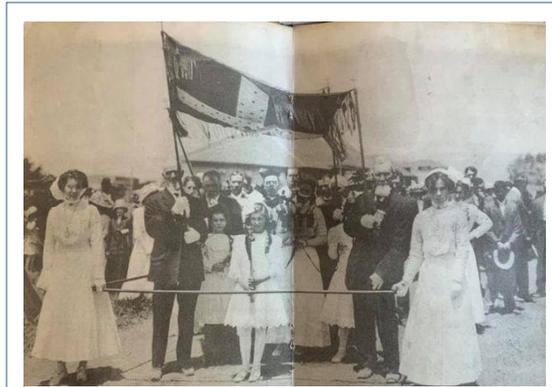
Holy Ghost celebrations of thankfulness are today held in Portuguese communities around the world. In Half Moon Bay on Pentecost Sunday, the seventh Sunday after Easter, a procession leaves the I.D.E.S. grounds and walks through town to Our Lady of the Pillar.

A Queen, representing Queen Isabel, carries the crown and is accompanied by her Maids and a Little Queen. The crown and scepter, symbols of thankfulness, are blessed. After the service, the Queen and her Maids lead the procession to the I.D.E.S. Chapel. Tradition tells us that in 1896, each of the then-100 I.D.E.S. members contributed four silver dollars to have a crown made. A San Francisco silversmith made the crown, which weighs eight pounds. That crown and the accompanying scepter have been used in the Holy Ghost festivals since.

At noon on Pentecost Sunday the great feast begins. The tradition of thanksgiving includes welcoming everyone, and supplying all with generous portions of meat, bread, and wine. I.D.E.S. 1994 Past-President Bob Fernandez remembers, "Early on, the local farmers used to donate cattle to the I.D.E.S. for the Celebration." The members slaughtered and butchered the cattle, and "the meat was cooked and served to the people at the Celebration." Today, several thousand pounds of beef, blessed by a priest, are cooked in the large brick ovens on the I.D.E.S. grounds "...in a sauce made of wine, water, and a variety of spices and secret ingredients known only to the head cook."

The Chamarita Dance begins after the feast, with people of all ages joining in. The dancers form a circle and a caller gives directions for the dancers to follow as the music plays. The dance sings Chama Rita! Chama Rosa! Que Bonita!... (Call Rita! Call Rosa! How pretty!...)

The Holy Ghost Festival continues to honor the Holy Spirit and give thanks, but it has become more celebratory than somber. Bob Fernandez remembers, "In earlier times like the 1950s and 1960s, students of the local schools had a minimum day on the Monday after the Celebration. This was so they could go to the Celebration, enjoy the rides the carnival had and have the traditional meal."



Early 1900s Festival  
--Photo thanks to HMB I.D.E.S.

This article first appeared in the May 2021 edition of *Coastside Chronicles*