

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

November 8, 1950

Our Own Monterey Jack Cheese

Today we will take up the history and making of the famous Jack cheese. First of all the reasons for writing about it is because it was made here on the Peninsula as early as 1833 or '34; and because it was named by David Jacks, and last of all because J. Walter Thompson, advertising company of San Francisco, has written for the history of Jack cheese.

In an October issue of the Carmel Valley News, Joe Hitchcock, one of the early settlers of the Valley – in fact he was born there – wrote an article discussing this very same cheese. We enjoyed reading it and wished at the time we had thought of investigating the origin of the popular cheese first. So when the letter of inquiry came, we telephoned Mr. Hitchcock and he very kindly gave his permission for the use of his historical data.

“One of the earliest industries in the Valley was cheese making, introduced by the Boronda family after they settled here and built their old adobe. The Queso Del Pais as it was then called by all Spanish speaking pioneers, later names Jack cheese by David Jacks who first put it on the market.

“In those days there were no presses so anyone making cheese made their own presses. They made a press by installing at the proper height a 2x12 plank and above at the proper height a 2x4 scantling so as to give a place where another 2x4, four or six feet long could be placed under and still leave room to press a cheese to the proper thickness. The milk then heated to a proper heat with a solution of rennet to curdle the milk. Care had to be taken as over cooking made the cheese rubbery.

“When the curds were ready the whey was drawn off and after many washings with clean water the curds were then salted and put in clean cloths, usually made of flour sacks. After the proper amount of curd was placed on these cloths, all ends were held together and again they were rung out until all liquid was squeezed out. Then a heavy string was tied around the loose ends of the bag and pressed down by hand, then placed on the plank, placing the 12x12 piece of planking on top of the cheese, then inserting the 2x4 lever under the cross piece and on top of the 12x12. On the end of the lever was hung a sack containing sand or rocks to weight and

press the cheese to the proper thickness. Those were crude methods but the cheese tasted about the same.

“In later years the American cheese was introduced and made in two sizes. The smaller ones were called flats and were about 10 inches in diameter. The larger size, are what we see on the market today. The flats sold for about \$1.00 per cheese, the larger for about twice that much.

“Among the cheese factories were those of John Berta, Sargent Brothers at San Francisquito; the P.I. Company at Laureles and several smaller dairies which contributed only a small quantity in proportion to their holdings.”

My. Hitchcock thinks that the outstanding cheese maker was Jimmie McDonald of the Frank Hatton Ranch. We have also been told that this ranch contributed much of their output to Hotel Del Monte and it was not until that market was satisfied that the townspeople were able to buy Jack cheese.

The regular luncheon meeting of the California Historical Society will be held Thursday, November 16, 1950, in the Concert Room of the Palace Hotel in San Francisco. Preceding the luncheon a plaque in honor of Francois L.A. Pioche, which will be placed by the French Centennial Committee, under the auspices of the society, will be unveiled before the site of the firm of Pioche and Bayerque, established in February of 1850. M. Henry Bonnet, ambassador of France to the United States, will be present. Dr. Raoul H. Blanquie, who was the speaker in Monterey in 1947, is the active president of the French Society. He spoke at the time of the dedication of the French Plaque at Carmel Mission.

Invitations have been received by a number of interested persons in Monterey, to the Pioneer Exhibition “The French in California” at the Palace of the Legion of Honor, Friday, November 10, from 5 until 7 o'clock.