

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Here Is More on Jack Cheese

Today we will return to the history of the manufacture of jack cheese. Two letters have arrived from old-timers of the Monterey Peninsula, each writer having something of interest to add to the data already related in the Peninsula Diary.

Mr. C.A. Metz writes: "While reading the article about jack cheese recently and although having seen it made upon many occasions I had not realized that I had seen it originated and that I could possibly have any information to add to the article. Now having read the article by Mr. Morse I seem to realize that I must now be accepted as an 'old-timer' of this vicinity.

"In the 1890's many families from Monterey and Salinas made camp at Eagle Camp about a mile above Camp Steffani (now Mathiots). There were around 20 or 30 families in the tent city and each day one or more from each camp walked to the Pedrazzi dairy to get milk, eggs and cheese. As a member of that caravan I continually saw the cheese in the making. I believe Eagle camp belonged to the Pedrazzis.

"Mr. Morse correctly describes the dairy and its location, but I did not see the cheese made as described by him. Enough curds were put in cheese cloth wrappings to make a cheese of the desired size and then a dozen or so were placed on a long bench. Over each cheese a flat board was placed. Then a long pole was placed over it with one end a short distance from the end attached to the bench. Attached to the other end was a heavy rock to give light but continuous pressure. This press was under oaks, in the open.

"This was the method used in the 1890's but as I understand Mr. Morse came here about 1915 it is quite possible that the house jack described by him had come into favor."

Thank you, Mr. Metz.

In another letter from Mr. Joseph J. Hitchcock, who was born and raised in the Carmel Valley and still lives there, he states: "Referring to the story of jack cheese I still say that what I said in my first story still is backed up by the records of the Mission Fathers as told me by Harry Downie, the curator at the Carmel Mission, plus my memory which dates back to the early 80's, which is a long time before 1915.

"It is true that Domingo Pedrazzi did move into the valley but it was not until 1891 or '92 and I know that they were making butter when they first got established. The Borondas did not sell to the Pacific Improvement Company but to a Mr. Spauling who was mayor of Oakland and had as his manager his brother-in-law, a Mr. Kemenbeard, who operated the Los Laureles and also planted the eucalyptus trees which border Boronda road.

"The P.I. Company bought the ranch about 1882 when they built the original Del Monte Hotel. I happened to be privileged to have known the youngest son of the Boronda family who was about 70 years old at the time and he told me many times of the cheese that his family made. It was called at that time, "El Queso del Pais,' He also told me how as a small boy he remembered the old Indian, Roman, when he came out of the hills and bought cheese to take to the mission and paid for it with silver that he always brought out with him.

"In the years that followed many diaries sprang up operated by the natives, the Portuguese, Germans, and the rank and file of the pioneers, whatever their nationality might be. This industry thrived from the lower coast country through the valley and extending up to the Jamesburg country and up and down the Salinas Valley.

"Whatever name the cheese went by did not change the origin of the fact that 'El Queso del Pais' dates back to our early civilization made possible by the many sacrifices made by the pioneer Mission Fathers."

Thank you again Mr. Hitchcock for your story.