

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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More About Monterey Jack Cheese

The history of the name and process of making Jack Cheese is still interesting many of our readers and so today we are repeating some data told to us by Mrs. William Kneass, the curator of the Stevenson House in Monterey.

Mrs. Kneass has been using some spare time since the first articles on the subject of Jack Cheese appeared, to look over various old records and record when the first cheese was shipped from Monterey and when the pioneer families first sold cheese in Monterey.

Mrs. Kneass writes:

"May I add a few bits of information to your articles on cheese. The present so called jack cheese is almost identical with the queso del pais still made by the country folk of Sinaloa, Mexico. Many of the first families of this area came from Sinaloa, and as cattle were brought with them, we may surmise that they made their cheese as their fathers had before them.

With the influx of the Americans in the 1840's and 1850's commercial dairies were established and many of the Spanish- Mexicans went to work for the newcomers as vaqueros and farm hands. Perhaps they even showed the new landholders how they made cheese.

"Curtis and Conover store records give us certain definite records. The store handled many affairs for their customers, including their transaction with the Monterey Wharf Company in the 1850's. The wharf was then a busy place with regular arrivals and departures to San Francisco and Santa Cruz.

"A. W. Billings shipped out five boxes of cheese on August 27, 1859, and paid \$1 to have them hauled to the wharf and shipped. The next month he shipped again, paying the same costs. Third month, he shipped more cheese, and also some butter. Also, in October he ordered 'one large cheese tub' and paid \$6 for the tub; \$1.50 for freight charges; and 63 cents for drayage. Drayage costs in San Francisco were charged to the receiver.

"Two other local people were also shipped cheese by schooner in September 1859, and Miguel Allen (of the Boronda family) bought '1 cheese hoop' for \$2.

"Remember that these few notes are from one store. There were several other flourishing stores who also handled the accounts for their own customers; Francisco Palacio de Miranda, Honore Escolle, and the Abregos had stores open in the 1850's.

"After the 1850's commercial dairies developed in the Carmel Valley, and by the time of the publication of the Monterey Handbook in 1875 the editors boasted of the products of the valley. They mentioned the McDonald dairy on the Haight ranch near the lower end of the valley; the Snively Brothers just beyond the Berwick ranch, and the dairyman in Chupinos Canyon. I believe this was Charles Bonifacio and Mr. Ougheltree.

"One of the important indications that cheese was made and sold commercially from the 1850's is that in glancing over the records of the Curtis and Conover store for almost an entire year we do not find one single record of the sale of cheese or portion of cheese to any individual. Now many people probably made their own, but not many town families, surely. So there must have been dairies that sold house to house as today.

"The story of the cheese will probably be pushed back before the 1850's when all records are searched. I feel sure that when the first trade ships came into port for hides and tallow that they also brought local garden products and cheese. When the picture is complete perhaps we will find that cheese from Monterey (which today we call jack cheese) went to the far ports of the Pacific with the Yankee sails and the foreign ships of war that visited here."

Tomorrow we will tell you more about the Curtis and Conover store in early Monterey. The store was located on Calle Principal about where Winston Garage is and the Conover family lived next door.