

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Lore of the Branding Iron

By their brands ye shall know them! In the cattle country that's scripture and just as sacred in a way. So says the King City Rustler-Herald in the "Salt of the Earth." This headline started me on a search for more information on cattle brands and their history. Having been born a cattleman's daughter and having lived on a cattle range a number of years, I thought it was time that I knew more about this interesting part of California's customs.

In Bancroft's "California Pastoral" the first reference I found of any sort of brand was the following note under Stock Regulations: "One Villavicencio May 17th 1830, was given a permit to go after runaway cattle between the Pinal del Temascal and the Sierra de la Panocha. He was the report the events which might take place, names of those who accompanied him, and the marks on the ears, in order that he might be paid immediately according to custom."

In the San Diego, archives early as February, 1835, there appeared a notation in which the assembly declared that 150 head of cattle are needed to entitle the owner to a brand. The alcalde must determine who shall have the brand and who a mark.

It was also declared that any person desiring to make use of a particular iron for marking cattle petition the "juez de paz" to that effect; facsimiles of the fierre and venta to accompany the petitions. The judge then decreed in accordance with the petition and registered the marks.

The municipal regulations of San Jose in the early part of 1835 say that none might mark, brand or kill stock except on days designated by the ayuntamiento, and never without permit of the "juez de campo," who should in turn inform the alcalde of such. Penalty for the first offense 20 reales; whoever lassoed or saddled a beast not belonging to him should pay \$9, and as much more as the owner claimed in Justice, according to Bancroft.

As far back as 1770, every owner of horses, cattle, asses, mules, and sheep was by law compelled to brand his stock. Each rancher had two private brands, one called "el Fierro para herrat los gandos," the other fierro para ventear." No one could adopt or change his

branding-irons without permission of the governor of California. On May 17, 1834, Governor Figueroa issued a decree granting to M.G. Vallejo permission to use a new branding-iron for cattle and other animals on his estate.

Very often the ears of cattle are also marked and cut and his brand is also registered with the State along with facsimile of the mark.

Oftentimes the brand is even more important than the name of the owner. Ranch names are often called after the brand and cowboys often ride for a certain "iron," to quote from the "Salt of the Earth." The brand is a symbol, a way of life and a manifestation of history. Brands are passed from generation to generation. The brands familiar to the writer are the F.H. and the H. with a half circle above it—the memory of which brings back many happy days.

The oldest brand in the State originated in Monterey County on the ranch of Alberto Trescony in 1846. It is now registered to Julius Trescony, the present owner of Rancho San Lucas. It was approved by the Mexican government in Monterey and the original copy is still in the possession of the family. The Rafter J. Brand has been used on the Trescony ranch for more than 70 years.

Francis Doud of Monterey had an interesting brand, which is pictured in "Salt of the Earth." It was carried by Doud cattle in the early 1860s and was later registered to the late Tom Doud.