

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **Years of Drought**

In 1823 or 1824 occurred a very dry season in which very little rain fell. The animals suffered dreadfully and thousands of them died, so the records tell us. It was about this time that at the Mission of Soledad an immense number of horses some say 6,000 and over were obliged to be slaughtered to preserve the pasturage for the cattle. Not even the hides of these slaughtered animals were cared for, so immediate was the necessity for their disposal.

Bands of brood mares or "manadas" were known to have been sold as low as 25 cents a head in these times and the cash price for the best broke riding horse was not over \$1, according to published statements in the 1856 Monterey Sentinel.

A friend, who had resided in Monterey since 1825 reported to The Sentinel that he knew two or three hundred brood mares to have been sold to the ranchero on the Pajaro for 25 cents apiece. He himself, had been offered in 1829 by the padre at Purisima Mission three to four hundred head of mares if he would take them away from the mission pastures so as to save the cattle, but he refused to take them for lack of feed.

In one dry season, about 1833, the padre of Purisima had a large number of unbroken horses driven by his vaqueros over the cliffs into the sea at Point Sal, on the coast of Santa Barbara County. In Jo Mora's "Californios" there is a drawing by this noted artist of such a thing being done. The caption under the illustration reads: "At times of severe drought, hundreds of roving mestenos, unbranded and unknown, were destroyed to conserve pasture."

From Monterey north the pasture was better and fewer cattle died. In 1828 and '29 occurred the visitation of 22 months of scarcity of agua-seras. For that period of time, not enough rain fell to sustain the crops or pastures throughout the whole settled extent of the country, we read in The Sentinel.

In 1833 and 1834 occurred another season of drought in which the wells in Monterey nearly all ran dry, and very little water was to be had even at the springs near the Encinal Cemetery (Monterey). The families had to send to Carmelo for drinking water, and the

washerwomen of the town had to go out to the Mission Carmelo to wash the dirty clothes of the Pueblo.

The cattle in some parts were saved from starvation by feeding on the leaves of the oaks and trees, and scattered all over the hills looking for food and sustenance. It is said by the Indians that in the dry seasons the oaks yield acorns more abundantly than in the wet seasons. In the season of 1846 the oaks were covered with blossoms which was said to be an indication of drought, by the native Californian.

In 1829 the priest at the Mission Soledad, offered to anyone who chose to accept the gift, as many mares as they wanted free of charge.

During the drought of 1856 all the wells on the upper mesas of Monterey had nearly run out of water. From the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup>, the weather had again become very dry and the thermometer in the shade on those days at 1 p.m. stood at 66 and 68 degrees, The Sentinel reported to the readers of this early Monterey weekly newspaper.

News item concerning the observance of Lent quoted eggs at 30 cents a dozen on March 22, 1856.