

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

May 27, 1959

Ben Harrison, Buffalo

Benjamin Harrison one of the buffalo from the Copper ranch down the coast, has been made the subject for an exciting story told by the late Frank Post of the Big Sur country. The buffalo on the ranch, also known as the Molera ranch, were being driven-up the coast to the Cooper ranch at Morra Cojo when the story begins.

A little way beyond Seaside old Ben, as he was called by the ranch hands, nearly pulled the porch off a house as he caught his horns in a vine and walked out of the yard with the vine trailing behind him and the owner screaming from her home.

"A little way beyond old Ben sniffed the air. Some cattle were off the road about half a mile. He refused to go further. Here they had a time with him" Post wrote.

"All he would do was to walk around and was ready at any moment to make a lunge and charge at the vaqueros.

"At last Joe and Jim managed to get a length of barb wire off a fence about 40 feet long. They tied the ends of the wire to their riatas, one on each side of the buffalo.

"Pulled by the pummel of the saddle, the wire was pulled, against his heels. From there it slipped up until the barbed wire got under his tail. Then Joe and Jim everlastingly sawed him. That is the way they got him in with the rest of the herd.

"All went well until near the Cooper ranch. Here old Ben stalled on the track of the narrow-gauge railway that ran between Salinas and Watsonville.

"Here comes the train while Ben was examining the rails. The engineer gave short blasts. Ben stood his ground until the train stopped, then started very slowly toward old Ben when within a few feet of him the engineer opened up a valve of hot hissing steam. Old Ben got some of it, I guess, anyway he stepped off the track and the train passed on.

"At last they reached their destination at Gaffey's Morro Cojo, where Joe delivered them to Gaffey and his foreman.

"In turning over the herd into a field, a young bull came trotting and bellowing to meet the newcomers. Old Ben

was waiting for him. When near the young bull turned broadside, eyed the buffalo with the corner of his eye. Old Ben edged up to him slowly, stiff legged, then all of a sudden, he picked up the young bull, tossed him in the air.

"The bull managed to land on all fours and started to run in the direction he came from with old Ben punching him viciously in the rear. Old Ben twice stood the bull right on his head, with heels straight up in the air.

"Joe was mighty glad the buffalos were off his hands, and didn't care if he never saw another buffalo."

At the conclusion of his letter Post said:"

"We are like the trees of the forest. When the woodsman marks his trees, they are soon brought down to mother earth. Mr. Molera and his son, Andrew, each gone to better land. So comes the ones that gave Joe a hand with the buffalo - Juan Artellan, Juanito, his boy, Solomon Orantas, Abalaro Cooper, Sylvester Gilkey, Manuel Mesquita, Jim Meadows, Lizzie, Joe's wife. All gone to a better land. Joe late yet in the land of living (in 1940) but in darkness for over 39 years."

"There is now a great race on between Joe and myself to see which one of the two will get there first."

Mr. Post died several years ago but we do not know about Joe. Neither do we have the address of the gentleman who wrote a few years ago asking for information about "a herd of buffalo on an old Spanish ranch in Monterey County."