

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

July 28, 1965

Interesting Old Document

"For Sale; 7,800 acre cattle and grain ranch, 1,700 cattle, 300 horses. Price \$9,000." The foregoing are the headline of an article published in the Beef Breeder News sent to me through the kindness of Frank Work.

If you were to buy a cattle ranch in the Californians in the year 1773 with all its equipment, cattle, horses and buildings here is the item-by-item bill of sale as found in handwritten Spanish "deed" of that year. After you read the inventory what would you offer, asked the editor, Robert D. Moore? Could you operate a 7,800 acre cattle and grain ranch with less than \$150 worth of tools? Or plow 160 acres with a forked stick and two oxen or, market cattle for a dollar a head: you can? Then buy this ranch!

The inventory of ranch house and corral: "An adobe house, well roofed with tiles, corrals made of palms belonging to the ranch, five saddles for the cowboys, much used, with their leather shirts and hats, in the same condition. Two javelins (something like a cattle prod). Two knives for hamstringing. A pack saddle with its equipment, for carrying the supplies of the cowboys. Two small oilas of copper. Three and a half sets of iron stirrups, new whips, five used bridles. Three branding irons. Total value: 190 pesos."

That was the sum and total of tools to run a seventy-eight hundred acre ranch in California. If a plow point broke, how long would it take to get a new one from Mexico?

Under crops the writer states: "The working ground bears eighteen bushels of wheat per acre—40 acres planted to wheat; and 60 acres are planted to barley which yields twenty-five bushels to the acre. There are also sown in said fields - corn which produces twenty-four bushels to the acre - 30 acres planted."

In the granary, of stone and mud, there are at present (1773) 251 bags of seed wheat in the ear and 168 of barley in the ear, 48 of corn in the grain.

"The threshing floor circular, is 60' in diameter enclosed in a palisade entirely paved with smooth round stones"

(After sufficient grain had been piled on the floor, mares from the ranch were driven in and the gate secured. Perched on the top of the wall, Indians howled

and waved the mares in wild dashing circle until the grain was threshed. Mares were used for threshing because they were never ridden. Thereafter, if their legs were injured in threshing, they could still be used as breeding animals.)

The owner of the ranch for sale reports that "1,648 head of cattle branded, with a lot of calves. These cattle are mottled and black, of good size—weighing about 500 or 600 lbs, at 3 years of age. Total value: 3,200 pesos."

"Tame horses, 38 colts, broken and unbroken; 37 yearlings, 20 brood mares, 120 fillies of 2 to 3 years, yearlings, 22. These are the finest breeding, many are solid gold color; others of solid black, and of wonderful endurance. Total value: 740 pesos.

"Two wells of stone and clay, large and good with stone lined irrigation ditches producing water to land beside the ranch house 900 varas long and 250 varas wide (vara was just under 3 feet) everything well plowed for the sowing of corn and wheat. Seven Indian families work the ranch and go with it, whose names are: Jorge and his wife Maria Antonia; Everado and his wife Petra; Joseph and Simphonosa; Estevan and his wife Clara with daughter named Brigida, Nicolas and Gertrude; Antonio and Maria Salome; Joseph Borjino and Gertrude; and four bachelors, who are Fabian, Gaspar, Joseph, and Saturnino, all healthy cowboys and robust, capable of labor of plowing and planting. Total: 19 persons."

Translated from Spanish the sale notice relates: "Along the irrigation ditch already mentioned there is planted 103 fig trees, already successful; 203 pomegranate trees, already successful; 108 cotton plants. The Indian girls are good weavers of cotton cloth. On land less moist and nearly useless for sowing have been planted and grown 204 grape stocks, most of them having borne grapes—and there are plenty at present.

This interesting old document gives an insight to Spanish ranching—one of the first ranches in the Californians—land held little value—the entire 7,800 acres carried a price of \$500.00, cattle at 5 pesos per head, live, 1 peso head hides. California ranchers at that time discussed one dollar cattle for next season. (1773) Sheep sold at less than \$1.00. This ranch was a good buy at 9,060 pesos total—if you could afford to market 500 cattle a year as hides and tallow going to Peru.

Life could be so simple. No spraying of crops or cattle, for there were no sprays. No mowing or curing of hay. No supplemental feeding, for there were no

supplements. And finely, no repair of mechanical equipment, and no fences to ride.