

by Barbara Giffen

The northwestern area of Santa Cruz County is a strip of coastal land approximately 15 miles long and from 1 to 4 miles wide. It is transversed, north to south, by Highway 1 from the San Mateo County line north of Waddell Creek to the Santa Cruz City Limits. It is bounded on the east by the lower slopes of the Coast Range and on the west by the Pacific Ocean. Small streams cut through the level plateau and run out on half moon shaped beaches whose sands occasionally build up bars and form lagoons at the mouths of the creeks. Most of the plateau ends in abrupt cliffs of sandstone and shale which are subject to the constant erosion of the waves and of the prevailing westerlies.

The Coast Range is an old mountain system with a granite formation as base. Above this, and running toward the west, are equidistant layers of metamorphic rock, limestone, sandstone, shale and conglomerate rock topped by a layer of soil and alluvium.<sup>1</sup>

The climate of this area may be called cool summer Mediterranean with a relative uniform temperature.<sup>2</sup> The rainy season begins in October and extends through April with an average fall of 20 to 25 inches. Characteristic are the summer coastal fogs which hang over the mountains 'like gigantic billowy blankets'.<sup>3</sup> These fogs usually begin to burn off before noon and are dispersed by the strong west wind that usually arises about that time. As the land cools during the dark, the fog gently drifts in again.

The coastal strand lies in the Transition life zone. Agricultural areas are located on the coastal headlands. Dr. C. L. Anderson found 76 different varieties of grasses. Native grasses have roots to withstand long dry seasons.<sup>4</sup> A few evergreens and other trees are found in areas where there is some protection from the wind, but the headlands supported only grasses, some scrub vegetation and plants that live near sand dunes, salt marshes, or fresh water ponds.

The earliest inhabitants of this area were tribes of Costanoan Indians notable mainly for their lack of notability. They survived on seeds, seaweed and the animals of the sea. Nothing remains of them but a few shell mounds, attesting to the availability of mussels.<sup>5</sup>

Juan Rodrigues Cabrillo, during his exploratory voyage of 1542, might have anchored near the 'steep and scarped' coast at the northwestern extremity of

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1. Elliot, p. 46

2. Thomas, p. 10

3. op cit., p. 11

4. Harrison, p. 190

5 (Unreadable from text being copied)

Monterey Bay,<sup>1</sup> but the first definitive knowledge we have of the area appears in the diary of Father Crespi. He and other men of Gaspar de Portola's expedition camped overnight on the San Lorenzo River and on the next day, October 18, 1769, crossed mesas about a league wide which ended in cliffs at the sea, and ascended and descended four deep watercourses. There the only trees were seen, elsewhere there was nothing but grass.<sup>2</sup>

The first European settlement near this coastal area was Mission Santa Cruz, established in 1791. The mission lands extended along the coast and the longhorned cattle of the mission herds grazed there. Later the land was parceled out to Mexican citizens as grants. Rancho Agua Puerca y Las Trancas, 4,421 acres, went to Roman Rodrigues in 1843. Rancho San Vicente, 10,802 acres, to Blas Escamilla in 1846. Rancho Arroyo de la Laguna to Gil Sanchez in 1841, Rancho Refugio to three Castro sisters, 12, 147 acres, in 1841.<sup>3</sup> The hills and mesas were still covered with cattle, their hides destined for Yankee traders.

The winds of change blew through California in the next three decades, and along the coast they blew as strong as the westerlies, obliterating the Spanish names and replacing them, by 1878, with the names of Archibald, Laird, Brangon, Gushee, Almstead, Baldwin, Wilder, Merrill, Moore, Hall.<sup>4</sup> Only Castro dependents remained - and they were named Majors.

According to Elliott, in 1879 there were dairy farms along various streams and bottomlands in the county, and a small section along the coast was "devoted exclusively to dairying extending from the city along the coast to the San Mateo County line." He claimed that most of the owners had come from Marin County where the climate conditions were similar and the "cool temperature, fresh breezy air, good sweet grasses and pure water were ideal for making butter."<sup>5</sup> Over 100,000 pounds of butter, he claimed, came from eight dairy ranches.

In his report, there are three items significant of the next change to come to the coast lands. Also listed as an owner was "Z. Moretta". Also mentioned were 60,000 pounds of cheese. And Mrs. Archibald leased her upper dairy to Ambrose Geanona [sic] where he made 10,000 pounds of Swiss cheese.

There are some errors in this report, but the trend is apparent. Z. Moretta is probably Moretti, who with T. Respini started the Coast Dairies and Land Co. which is still in existence, and the Yellow Bank Dairy. Ambrose Geanona was Ambrogia Gianone<sup>6</sup> and while he was Swiss, his cheese was American.

1. Alex. S. Taylor, as quoted in Torchiana, p. 35

2. Torchiana, p. 68

3. Rowland, p. 10-11

4. Elliot, p. 50

5. op. cit. p. 48-51

6. Hoover, p. 472

By 1900, the coastal lands were owned by James Filippini, Ambrogia Gianone, Lombard, Pio Scaroni, and the dairies were managed by men named Mottechini and Mattei. Only Wilder and Majors remain of the earlier names. Cheese - American, California, and Monterey Jack - was the leading product supplemented by butter and cream. In 1907-1908, 475,000 pounds of cheese; 245,535 pounds of butter; and 11,195 gallons of cream were produced in Santa Cruz County.<sup>1</sup>

Ambrogia Gianone was born in Airola, Switzerland, in 1844. He came to the coast in 1868, a cheesemaker, and worker for the Archibalds at Agua Puerca. In 1884, he leased the Scott's Creek Ranch from Joseph Bloom, and in 1901 he bought 1,892 acres. He sent for his sister to keep house for him; later he married Augustina Dotta; they had two sons and two daughters.<sup>2</sup> Today a grandson, Harold Gianone, and a granddaughter, Mrs. Helen West, live on some of the property but most of it is leased for cattle.

Pio Scaroni was born in Gordola, Switzerland [1851] and came to the coast because someone he knew told him about it [1869]. He went to work for Mr. Gianone and in a short time married his sister, Felicita. Later he purchased some of the land Mr. Gianone had obtained from Mr. Bloom. He prospered making and selling butter and later cheese. He and his son, Joseph, acquired other lands. Today the property has again changed hands and is leased for sprouts.<sup>3</sup>

Mr. and Mrs. Victor Scaroni were also born in Gordola, but were not related to the family of Pio Scaroni. They had lived in Lompoc, and in 1904 purchased the Sylvee property. They sold both Monterey Jack and California cheese and later milk and cream. When the ranch was sold in 1965 and Miss Katie Scaroni moved into town, she was the last of the first generation born in the United States to leave the area.<sup>4</sup>

One hundred years is a relative statement of time. In a little less than that, these Swiss immigrants had owned and used the land, had raised families and prospered, and released their characteristics of practicality, honesty and diligence into the bloodstream of America. And already they have moved on - but they stayed longer than anyone else, except the Indians.

The Canton Ticino, Switzerland, is almost contiguous with the Lepontine Alps. Situated in the southern escarpment of the Alps, it is an area of deep narrow valleys, steep stone cliffs, tumbling white water, severe weather, poor soil, and scenic grandeur. The people of the Ticino speak Italian, bear Italian

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1. Martin

2. Information from the files of Leon Rowland, by Ernest Otto

3. Mrs. S. K. Annand

4. Miss Katie Scaroni

Gordola, Canton Ticino, is a village that has become a suburb of the lake town, Locarno. Some of its stone houses and slate roofs are still visible in the 20th Century town. From this place came Pio Scaroni, he returned there to visit, and he named a small depot on his ranch after it.<sup>1</sup>

He came to Santa Cruz when he was 21 years old. He walked to the Gianone ranch, making an over-night stop at a ranch that he was one day to own. And he went to work, the next day, on another ranch that would also be his. He arose around four o'clock to milk the Holsteins. There were probably about five milkers. Then they came in for a hearty breakfast - bacon, ham, fried potatoes, eggs. For the rest of the morning, they would make the butter (later the cheese), work in the fields where they raised hay and corn for the cattle and vegetables and chickens for the family. After another big meal at noon, they finished those chores and might have an hour or so to rest before the cows had to be milked again. Every night for the evening meal they would have minestra, the rich soup. They would have polenta, or spaghetti, or macaroni; vegetables; meat - beef, chicken, or perhaps game -- rabbit, quail, robins, larks, blackbirds. Wine, cheese, homemade bread. A good night's sleep in the bunkhouse, and \$30.00 a month.<sup>2</sup>

The milk was kept at the ranch and made into butter. At first they used a large churn run by horse power. The horse was hitched to a long pole which was in turn hitched to a paddle that agitated the cream as the horse walked in a circle. The butter was then taken to a windowless dairy that had a belfry on top to let air through. This kept the butter cool until it was packed into wooden boxes and taken to Santa Cruz every week.

Mr. Scaroni would load his wagon with the boxes of butter and take it down to Cowell's Wharf where the "Gypsy Queen" was anchored. This power-driven ship would make the trip up to San Francisco and back in a week.<sup>3</sup>

In the early 1900's Mr. Respini hired Ricardo Mattei of Covio, Canton Ticino, to come to his ranch to make Swiss cheese. Upon his arrival, Mr. Mattei found that conditions were not right for the production of this kind of cheese. He felt that because of the lower altitude, the grasses were not of the proper kind, and the cheese didn't get the characteristic holes in it. He became one of the managers of the Yellow Bank Dairy, and later ran a resort in Swanton.<sup>4</sup>

Mr. Gianone built a stone cheese house (which is still standing), and Mr. Pio Scaroni taught Mr. Maccettini to make cheese on his ranch. Mr. Maccettini, also from Canton Ticino, was a dairyman. He married Mrs. Scaroni's sister,

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1. Mrs. Katie Scaroni

2. Mrs. Annand

3. Mrs. Annand

4. Miss Rita Mattei

Elizabeth Gianone, who had come to help take care of the eight Scaroni children.<sup>1</sup> Later they leased land from the Coast Dairies and Land Co., and ran their own dairy.

On both the Pio Scaroni and the Victor Scaroni ranches were big cheese vats, 4 feet by 6 feet, that looked like double boilers. The milk was poured into these and a big fire was built under the tank. The heated water circulated around the vat and heated the milk. When it reached a certain temperature, one gallon of whey left over from the day before and the liquid rennet was added. Rennet, a substance from the cow's stomach, was used to solidify the milk.

The milk was pushed back and forth with a big dipper. Coloring was added and mixed through, and after the milk had again reached the proper temperature, it was let stand until it clabbered. A special knife with many blades attached to the handle was whipped through the curd horizontally and cut through vertically to make bars. This helped the curd to form, and the whey to run out. At the Pio Scaroni's, a pipe connected to the vat carried the whey directly to the pigs.

The curd was then worked by hand until it squeaked. At the proper tone of the squeak, it was placed in an iron disk lined with cheese cloth. The cover of the disk was pressed down by screws on the top, and the rest of the whey was pressed out overnight. The next day the cheeses were removed, stored in the cheese house, and oiled and turned every day. This formed the rind. This process made a 22 pound cheese of the type called American, or California, and to which we usually refer as cheddar. A small 5 or 6 pound cheese was called the Young American.

Monterey Jack cheese is started the same way, but no coloring is added, and the milk isn't heated to as high a temperature or cooked as long. After the curds formed, it was poured into a 100 pound flour sack which was folded and tied at the top. This was hung up and the whey pressed itself out. This made a 7 or 8 pound cheese of a more rubbery consistency.

The rennet, the coloring, and the vats and other tools were purchased from a wholesale house. The Victor Scaroni's kept some cheese at the house, and people from town would come out and buy it for 21c a pound. Most of the cheese was sent to San Francisco, or to the California Cheese Factory in San Jose.

In the 1930's, the Victor Scaronis and the Gianones went into wholesale milk and cream. They both bought big separators and sold the cream to the Golden State Co. It was taken to San Francisco. Skim milk was fed to the pigs. On the Scaroni ranch, big tank trucks picked up the milk every day and took it to the Sego condensary at Salinas. People came from town to buy the rich cream

1. Mrs. Annand



for 25c a quart.<sup>1</sup>

The Pio Scaronis, the Abrogia Gianones, moved to town. The sons remained on the ranches until the advent of artichokes and later sprouts. Then the land was leased, and the sons moved into town. Harold Gianone, still living on the family land, in 1949 brought in Angus and Hereford for beef. Today most of the ranches are no longer in Swiss hands, sprouts are planted on the headlands, and cattle again roam the hills.

In the hundred years preceding the first World War, it has been calculated that about 250,000 Swiss emigrated to the United States. In 1928, 50,000; in 1946, 32,000.<sup>2</sup> In California, there were settlements of Swiss in Fresno, Marin, Monterey, and San Luis Obispo counties. They have "a good reputation, thanks to their hard work, reliability and loyalty towards their adopted country."<sup>3</sup>

The Swiss on the Coast Road were happy here, and felt they were much better off than they had been in their homeland. They became United States citizens as soon as they could. The men were interested in politics. Both Mr. Pio Scaroni and Mr. Gianone served as trustees on school boards. They learned to speak English quickly, and spoke it well, even in their own homes. They saw to it that their children were educated. Grade schools in Davenport, Swanton and Laguna had nine grades in one room. Some boarded in town while they attended high school. Later others took the Southern Pacific "commute" train that took workers to and from the cement plant at Davenport for \$2.80 a month.

They rode in the wagon or the buggy over the dirt road to Holy Cross Church in Santa Cruz every Sunday. They made a special trip in for the circus. They all dressed up and paraded on Columbus Day. They came in to shop - for special foods at Mr. Christophini's and at Mr. Jonas' or Mr. Snyder's or the Arcade for materials for clothes, and at Kate Handley's for hats. Any Swiss ranch hand who came to Santa Cruz looking for a job went to the Swiss Hotel on Water Street which was an unofficial hiring hall.

Because the trip to town was usually made for a business purpose, most of the social activities took place on the ranches and within the circle of these families. Two weeks before someone's Saint day or birthday, a wreath of flowers appeared on his door. This meant there had to be a party with all the neighbors invited. There would be fried chicken and pies and all the other good foods. Someone would bring a fiddle, and there would be dancing in the dairy.<sup>4</sup>

Sisters, brothers, cousins, friends were sent for. Some stayed, others went to other parts of California. Few returned to Switzerland. When things were going well, many went back to visit and returned satisfied they had made the right choice. Mrs. Annand remembers her father saying that when he used to think

1. Mrs. Gianone, Miss Scaroni

2. All about Switzerland, p. 32

3. Op cit

4. Mrs. Annand

of the Alps, he could never even look up to the top of them, but when he went back, "They aren't any bigger than our own hills."<sup>1</sup>

The man had grown to match his mountains.

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1. Mrs. Annand