

End Of An Era For Dairies Up The Coast

Sunday, March 22, 1964

Santa Cruz Sentinel 25

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Two weeks ago, when Pete Arvelas and his father, Nick, sold their 60 milk cows to a southern California firm, an era of coastal milk, butter and cheese production became official history.

There was a time when the lowing of thousands of cows mingled with the lofty screams of the seagulls, starting in the early 1800s.

Up to 1933, one ranch after another, from Santa Cruz to Half Moon Bay produced almost exclusively a product that challenged the freshness of the salt air — cheese.

From 1933 to the last of the dairies the farmers stuck almost solely to milk.

But one by one, the little man was priced or legislated out of business. And now one can drive along Highway 1 and see ghostly dairy barns and cheese houses along the isolated coastal strip.

The Arvelas family had leased

ed the Pio Scaroni estate, 4.5 miles north of Santa Cruz, since 1951 and at one time milked 170 cows. But, Pete Arvelas said, what with the low price of milk and the high price of hay, he just couldn't make it. Lost \$10,000 last year, he said.

But to go back. Alvin Gregory of Davenport took a silent roll call of the now defunct dairies north of Santa Cruz.

Younger ranch, Wilder ranch (they made butter), Joe Scaroni dairy, Annand Dairy, Eagle Glen Dairy (Victor Scaroni ranch); Laguna ranch owned by Tom and the late Joseph Majors; Yellowbank, formerly used by Jeromia Respini and a man named Fistolera; Mocettini Dairy just north of Davenport; Weidemann Goat dairy, slightly inland on Swanton road; Molineo ranch, James Filippini ranch near Scotts Creek, the Gianone ranch and the William Steele ranch.

Most of the land, about 24 square miles in the Davenport region, is owned by the Coast Dairies and Land company with the principal stockholders living in Switzerland.

A few of the old timers who were once a part of this vigorous industry still retain the highlights of that era in their minds.

Tom Majors, now 88, 5500 Coast road, made California cream cheese. Started in 1918.

"We made it in nine and ten pound rounds, about 350 pounds a day.

"In the early days we shipped it to San Francisco to the Commission House by the old steamer Gypsy that used to call at the Cowell wharf in Santa Cruz three times a week.

"If we got 12 cents a pound we thought we were big shots.

"We made wonderful cheese on the coast. Much better than the cheese they make today.

"We'd milk 100 cows a day. Got the milk by 7 a.m. and by 1:30 it would be cooked and salted down and put through

several other processes before putting it into the press.

"The next day it would come out of the press ready for curing for two to three weeks.

"But they started making all kinds of laws and the ranches started selling milk instead of making cheese. Then the big dairies came along and put the small ones out of business," he said.

Now Majors runs 75 beef cattle in partnership with Richard Burns.

The Scaroni clan were cheese makers, too. Joe Scaroni said he made California Fancy Flat cheese — sort of a cheddar.

"Cheddar is not cured in cold storage. In those days we cured it in warm rooms. The rounds weighed 24 pounds," he said.

The ranchers shipped their cheese by the steamer Gypsy until she sank in an accident. Then it went by rail. At one time the spring shipment at the Scaroni ranch was 300 pounds a day.

Katherine Steele, 65, of Santa Cruz told of the huge cheese the Steele brothers made for the state sanitary commission in San Francisco which was raising funds for the Red Cross.

It was made in 1865 on the Steele ranch 10 miles north of Davenport, now located just over the San Mateo county line.

She has a certificate saying that the two-ton piece brought \$2800 for charity. Mrs. Steele has the original crate which she had made into picnic tables.

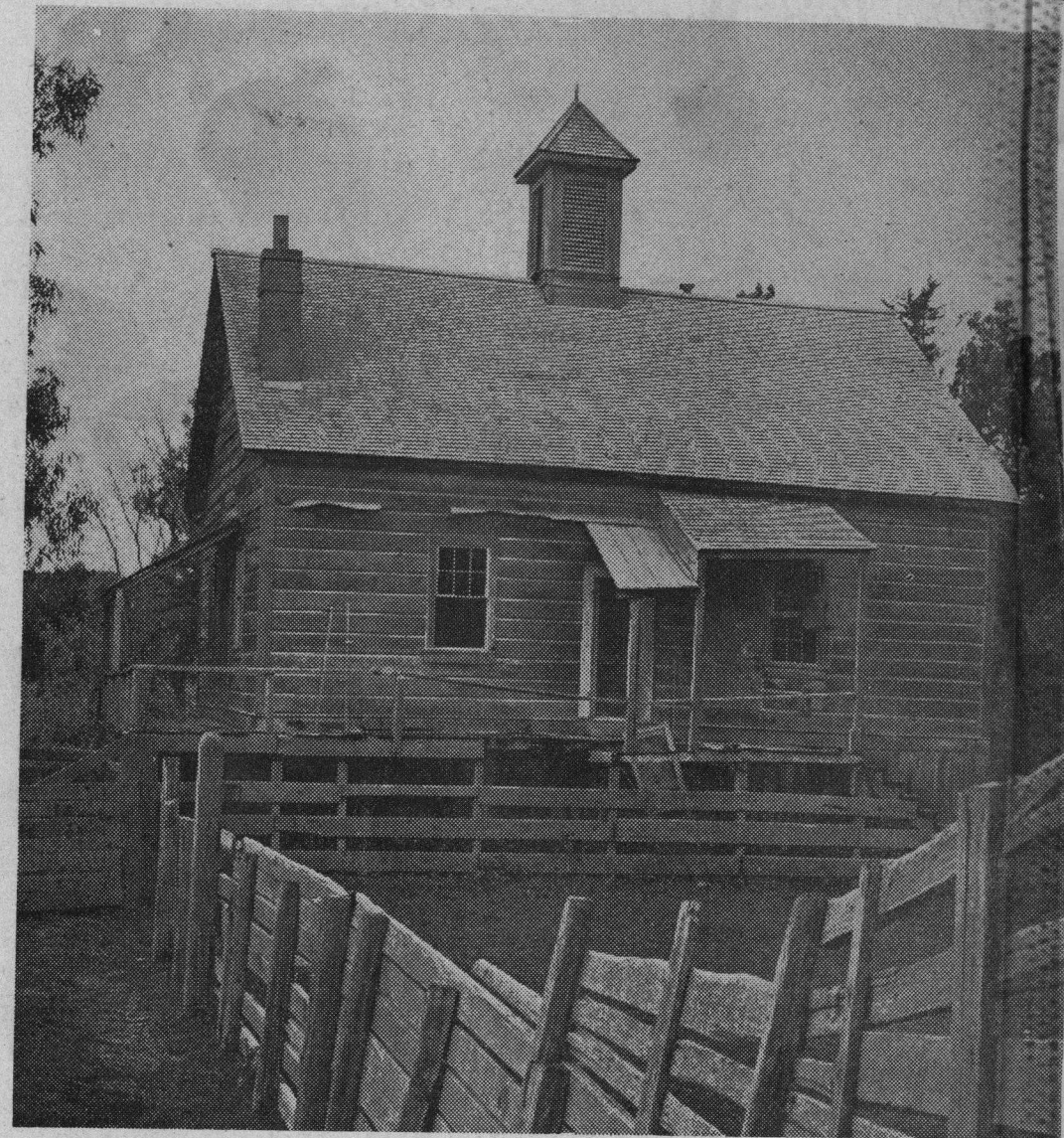
So with the Arvelas's going out of business, it leaves about 12 other dairies in the county, mostly inland between Santa Cruz and Watsonville.

They cannot produce enough dairy products to furnish the county, according to county farm advisor John Melendy.

Last year the dairy products value was about \$700,000. Production came to 119,000 100-weight (8 pounds per gallon) of market milk, and about 39,000 cwt. of manufacturing milk — that is grade B milk for cheese, butter, canned milk and other products.

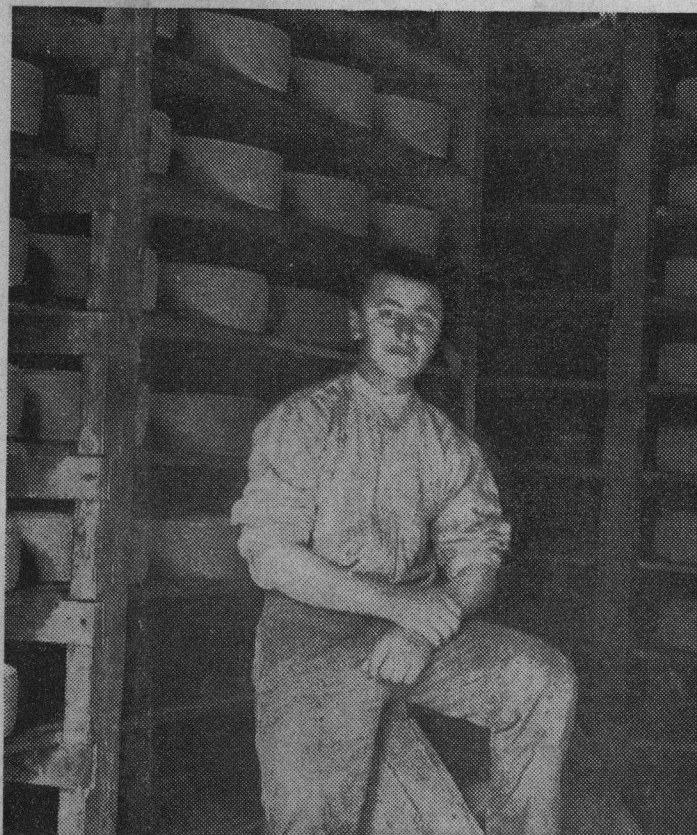
Now, most of the land is used for beef cattle, artichokes and sprouts.

Those who are still living in the area who were fortunate enough to have tasted the coastal ranch cheese, seem to smack their lips unconsciously when they talk about it.



PICTURESQUE CHEESE house is located on the old Mocettini Dairy on the northern outskirts of Davenport. A kind of

Monterey Jack cheese was made in the building, often the subject of photographers and painters.



Club Calendar

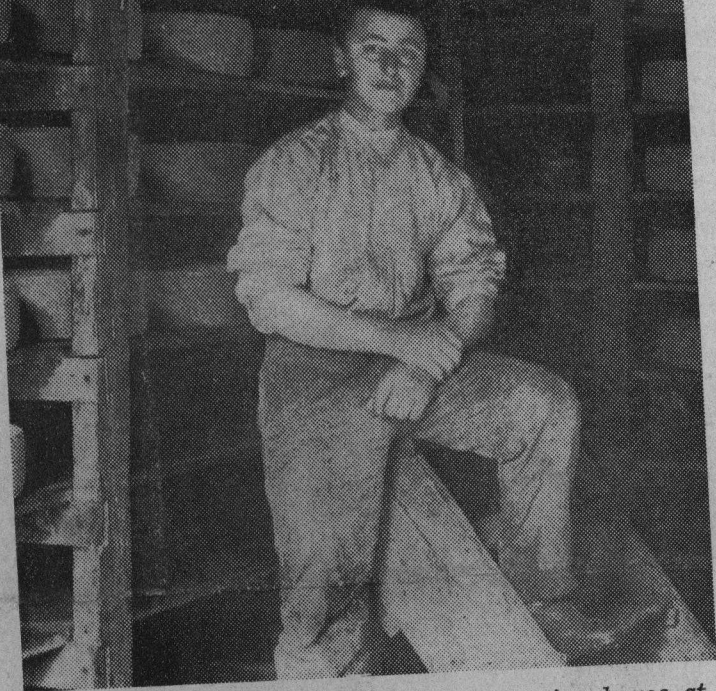
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1917 PHOTO was taken in the cheese curing house at the Joseph Scaroni ranch, 3810 Coast road. Cheese maker is Dennis Signorotti. The rounds were cured from two to three weeks before being shipped to Santa Cruz or San Francisco. But by 1933 cheese making was dead along the coast.

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