

Gianone Hill . . .

By MARGARET KOCH
Sentinel Staff Writer

High on a hill overlooking the Pacific Ocean, two old houses newly painted, and a cluster of unpainted outbuildings face the wind and the sun.

This was the Gianone Ranch. Today it is the Big Creek Pottery. Formless lumps of clay grow into pots where cheeses once appeared.

The Cheese House is still there, newly renovated. One door in it bears the list of names of all the cheese makers, swamper, brush grubbers and barn cleaners, including some of the Gianone's themselves and the men who worked for them. Also on the door is inscribed, barely readable now, the words: "Started to make cheese February 24, 1913."

It was long before that, back in 1869 that the first Gianone, Ambrose, settled here on the hill to wring a living from the soil, to build up a cattle ranch and dairy, cow by cow.

Later his sons Joseph and Emil took over the ranching. Two houses still stand side by side on the hill. A little below them is the humble pioneer home where Ambrose first lived. It is two rooms and a loft, its old boards are polished silver by the weather.

The old milking barn still stands. Inside are two long rows of stanchions where cows stood patiently—and impatiently—to be milked. Overhead the roof is giving way in a hit-or-miss pattern of broken shingles that let in patches of blue sky.

Once upon a busy time, a pipe carried skim milk left over from cheese making across the barnyard and down to pens of hungry pigs below the barn. It is said the coffee pot was always on the stove in the Gianone kitchen. Few passersby failed to stop for a hospitable bite to eat and an exchange of news.

The Gianone children, three generations of them, attended Seaside School. So did three generations of the McCrary/Trumbo family of nearby Swanton.

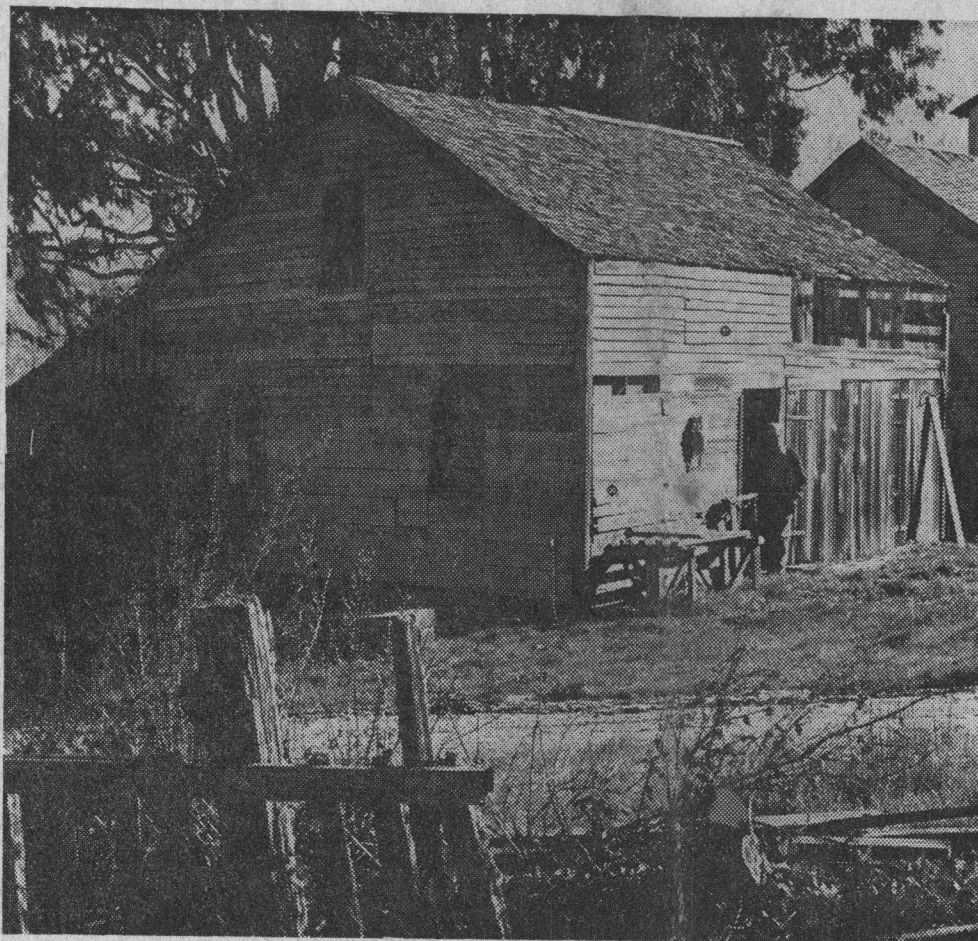
The last Gianone cheese was eaten long ago. Today this part of the ranch belongs to the McCrary family of Big Creek Lumber Company. It is leased by the potters, Al Johnsen and Bruce McDougal, who jokingly refer to it as "Potters' Hill."

The McCrarys have taken an active interest in repairing and remodeling the old homes and buildings for Big Creek Pottery. Without their interest the job wouldn't be possible, according to Johnsen. The home repairs are almost complete now and the Johnsens and McDougals live in the houses.

The Cheese House will become an art gallery. The huge milk barn is to be another gallery. A little school-house-turned-feed-house is going to be a print shop. Annie McSweeney taught the 3 R's to six students there back in the days of slates and ink wells. Now an old printing press waits to speak again.

A new building houses 24 potters' wheels for summer pottery classes. Last year there were 25 students from all over the U.S.

In 9 years, Gianone Hill has come from cows to cheese to ceramics.



ORIGINAL GIANONE HOME above, pioneer cabin was Ambrose's home, still stands on ranch. At right, Al and Clarice Johnsen in background of their living room with display of his pottery on the coffee table.



Sunday, Dec. 8, 1968

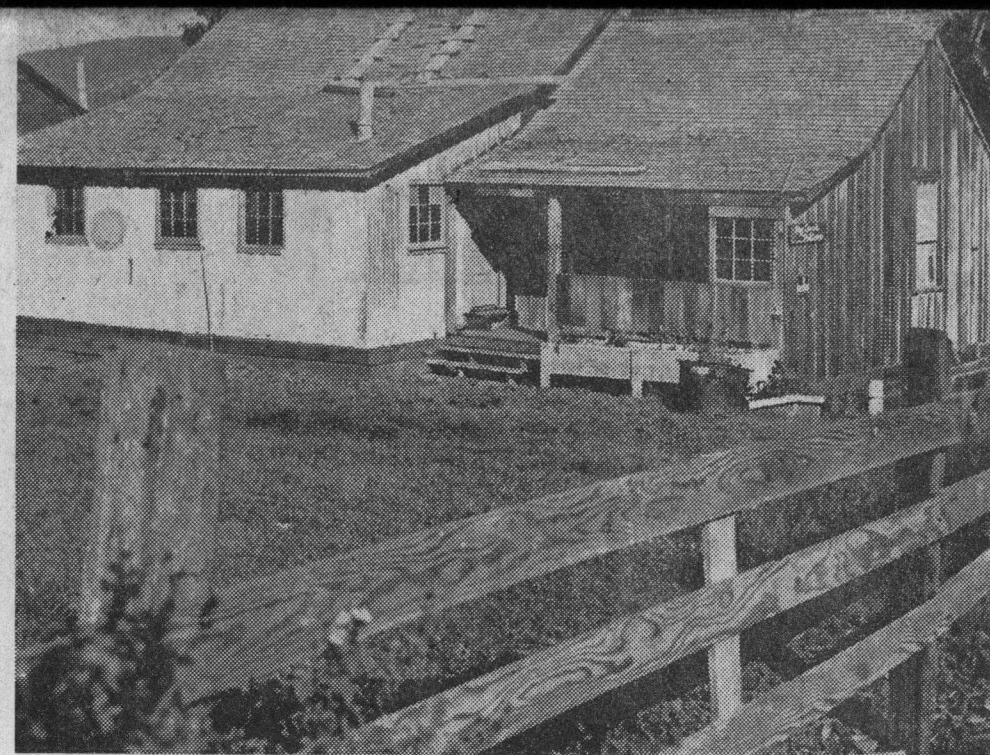
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From Pioneers To Pots

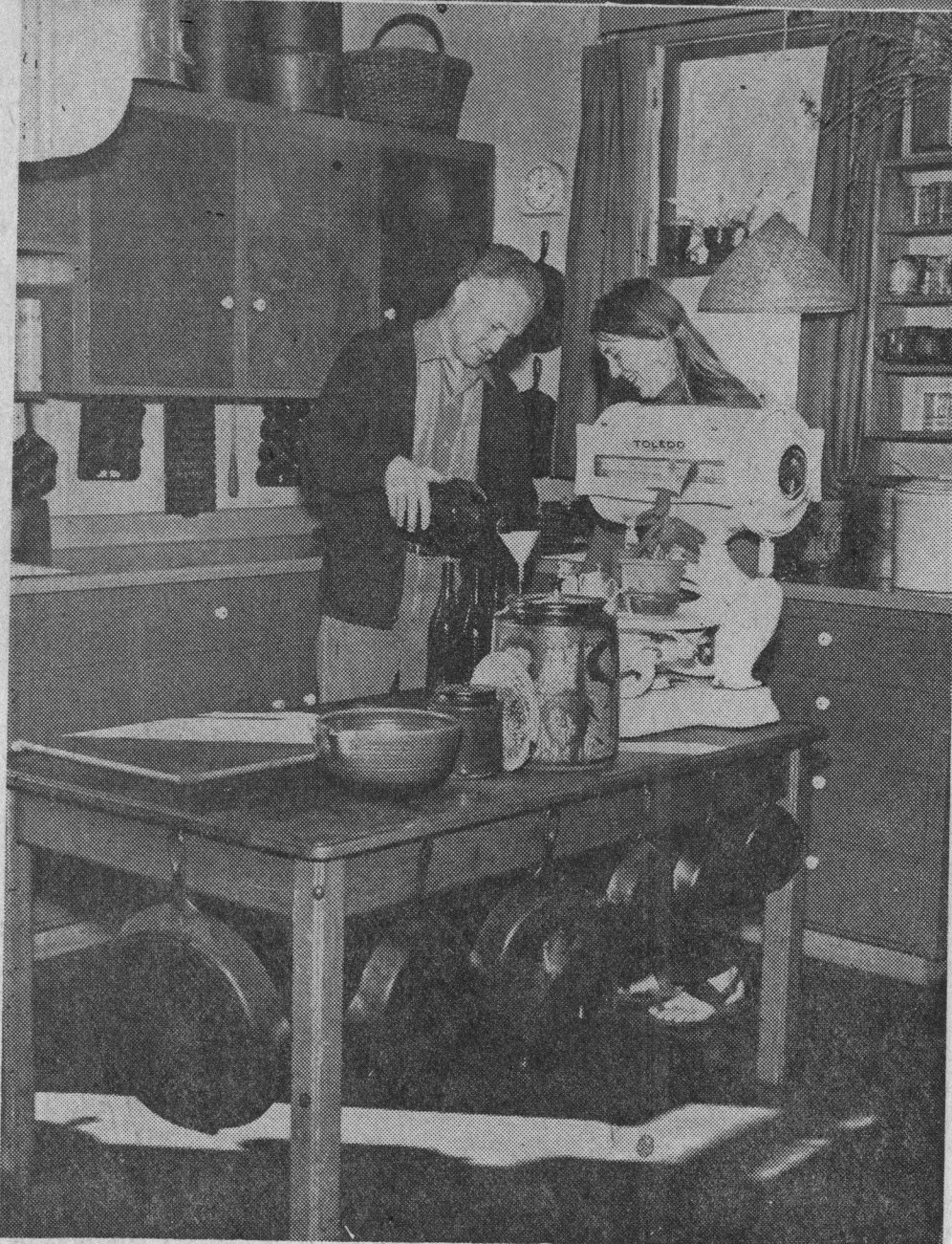




CHEESE HOUSE at right will become an art gallery. Below, the Gianone family's handsome old home has been renovated and now is lived in by Bruce and Marcia McDougal and their children. Bruce makes pots, and Marcia designs and makes jewelry.



NEW STUDIO above holds 24 potters' wheels for student classes. Mr. and Mrs. Johnsen and Bruce McDougal are busy at work. There are two 20-cubic foot kilns.



FAMILY STYLE KITCHEN of the McDougal's once was a favorite stopping spot for every neighbor who passed by the Gianone Ranch. The coffee pot was always on. The McDougals have restored the 1890's flavor of the room with black iron pans, copper utensils.

Photos

By

Pete Amos

POT SALE at Big Creek Pottery is on today from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Pottery is by Al Johnsen and Bruce McDougal. Jewelry is by Marcia McDougal. After today, the Pottery will be open weekends only from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. The public is invited to visit.

