

The Giant Cheese Of Santa Cruz County

By Margaret Koch
Sentinel Staff Writer

When the Steele brothers and their cousin, Rensselaer Steele, came to Pescadero in 1862 to start dairy operations, they leased nearly 18,000 acres with an option to buy a portion of it at \$6 per acre.

This was part of Simeon Castro's great Rancho Punta del Ano Nuevo, also owned briefly from 1851 to 1862 by the colorful trapper and mountain man, Isaac Graham. Graham lost it at a sheriff's sale.

Isaac Steele, his brothers, George and Edgar, and their cousin, did well with dairying on the ranch right from the start. They were not affected even by several "dry years." Pasture was abundant on the coastal hills. Indian laborers cared for more than 1000 cows. And cheese alone was in such demand that the Steeles made \$17,000 on it alone during their first year at the ranch. Their butter also was famous.

In 1864, after two years of prosperity, the Steeles made a giant cheese weighing two tons. It was displayed at the Mechanics Fair in San Francisco and when the fair ended, slices were sent to President Lincoln, General Grant and General Frederick Steele. General Steele, another brother, was a distinguished officer with the Army of the

Potomac in the Civil War.

The remainder of the cheese was sold to the public at \$1 per pound. Money from its sale, totaling \$2820, was donated to the Sanitary Fund, forerunner of the American Red Cross.

The great cheese was about 20 feet in circumference and its wooden packing case is still in existence. Mrs. Catherine Steele had it cut in half and for many years used the sections as picnic tables.

In the early days coastal steamships transported much merchandise from point to point along the California coast. Sometimes the cargo to be shipped was rowed out in small boats when no wharf existed; in places it also was swung out on long booms from the cliffs into the waiting vessel below. Steamers called at such points between Ano Nuevo and Waddell Beach in early days; later a wharf was built there by William Waddell.

Smaller batches of cheese and butter went to San Francisco by stage coach in later years. The coach line, established in 1872, ran from Santa Cruz to San Gregorio, then through the hills to Redwood City. It was first operated by Billy Bias, but in 1874 the line was bought by Nathan Ingalls.

This was a dangerous route. The road was narrow, steep in spots and poorly construct-

ed. During high tide the waves swirled about the horses' legs as they passed over the sand below the cliffs at Waddell Beach. No road had been cut yet into the cliffs and falling stones created another hazard for the creaking stage coach.

In fact, residents of the Pescadero area "seceded" their portion of the country from Santa Cruz county and annexed to San Mateo county in 1868 due to the condition of the roads for the greater part of the year. Their complaint: they could not get in to Santa Cruz. But the cheese and butter went through and continued to, as long as the route operated.

When their Ano Nuevo lease terminated, the Steeles bought the acreage they had in the dairy operation. Edgar Steele left the coast and went to San Luis Obispo county where the family also had large dairy holdings. Isaac and Rensselaer built homes which still stand today. Isaac Steele also played an important part in early-day business development as well as pioneering in dairying. He established the Grangers Bank in San Francisco and was a director of the Grangers Business association.

Next: The school that vanished.



Steele's giant cheese — (From Catherine Steele collection)
—won them this certificate.



Stagecoach which carried passengers, butter, cheese and other merchandise along the route from Santa Cruz to Pescadero and Redwood City in the 1870s. (Photo from Catherine Steele collection)

Mission Drive-In Market To Close

By Wallace Wood
Sentinel Staff Writer

After 30 years, Santa Cruz' first drive-in market, Mission Drive-In, at the corner of Soquel avenue and Front street, is going out of business.

"It's been wonderful all these years, and we've made thousands of friends, but we can't get any assurance we won't become a city parking lot," longtime owner and operator Heinie Waldemar said.

It will take about a week to sell the store's remaining stock of goods and another week to sell the fixtures and equipment.

35 cents. Of course, in those more agrarian days, milk was not a big seller, since many a householder kept a cow in his back yard and supplied those that didn't, he adds.

Canned goods, but not TV dinners, were also popular with the housewife.

And everyone knew everyone. "I just couldn't begin to count the people we know," both Heinie and Don declared.

Though the city planning de-

partment claims it has no current plans for the use of the corner property, Heinie says its long-range use is a parking lot.

"The city just won't tell us one way or another," Don charges. "It's no use to remodel and then six months later have to tear it up."

The small store is noted for its wide variety of goods, and housewives still can buy something in bulk. "We've got the best bulk cheese in town," Don concludes.

Recreation Calendar

Today

1:00 p.m.- 3:00 p.m.—Lawn Bowling, San Lorenzo Park
1:00 p.m.- 5:00 p.m.—Rifle range open, De Laveage park.

♥ ♣ CARD Sense ♠

DENTAL PLATES