SECTION ONE:
History of Property Ownership and Ranching at Point Reyes

Rancho Punta de los Reyes (Sobrante)
Rancho Punta de los Reyes
Rancho Tomales y Baulines
Rancho Baulines
I. HISTORY OF OWNERSHIP AND RANCHING AT POINT REYES

A. Land Grants

1. Rancho Punta de los Reyes

After centuries of occupation by Coast Miwok Indians, the Point Reyes Peninsula came under the jurisdiction of the Spanish Franciscan Mission at San Rafael, founded as an asistencia or branch of Mission San Francisco de Asis in 1817. The mission fathers reached as far as Point Reyes for converts and by 1820 most if not all of the aboriginal inhabitants had been taken to the mission or had fled. Evidently, the mission's large herd of longhorn cattle, used almost exclusively for tallow and hides, grazed as far as Point Reyes. This, then, became the first ranching activity at Point Reyes. After the Mexican revolution of 1821 and the subsequent secularization of the missions, Point Reyes fell open to claim by Mexican citizens.¹

Although the mission fathers at San Rafael controlled the lands until 1834, the Mexican Colonization Laws of 1824 and 1828 spelled out the rules of future settlement. Under these terms a potential settler could petition the governor for a grant of a specific parcel, roughly mapped with what was called a diseño, or a rough drawing of the boundaries. After an investigation of both the potential grantee's background and the availability of the property, and approval by the territorial legislature, the governor could then issue a grant. The grantee was then to have an official survey map made and to obtain juridical possession from a competent judicial authority. Unfortunately, the local grantees rarely met the latter two requirements, the result of which was some amount of chaos to come.²

The first to lay claim to a part of Point Reyes was Rafael Garcia, a corporal who had seen duty both at San Francisco and San Rafael. Garcia received what he called Rancho Tomales y Baulines in March 1836, having moved to this area surrounding Bolinas Lagoon about two years earlier.

About the same time, on March 17, 1836, James Richard Berry applied for


²Becker, Point Reyes, pp. 41-42.
and was granted 35,000 acres. Berry, a Mexican nationalist of Irish descent who had served Mexico as a colonel during the Spanish War, named his domain Rancho Punta de los Reyes. Berry visited Point Reyes with Captain of the Port of San Francisco, William L. Richardson, who related many years later:

He came to me in the early part of 1836 with recommendations from the then commandant of California, Don Nicolas Gutierrez, to pass him over to the north side of the Bay of San Francisco . . . in order to select some land granted to him for his services as a Colonel in the Mexican Army and I did so. He returned to my house at Yerba Buena [San Francisco] about three weeks afterwards on his road to Monterey. He came back again about a month after with his grant to take possession of his land at Punta de Reyes, which is in what [is] now Marin County. ³

Berry chose property comprising practically the entire Olema Valley from Garcia's grant north, including what would eventually become the town of Olema. The northern section of two leagues extended up the shores of Tomales Bay, including the area that would become the town of Inverness fifty years later. Berry brought cattle and heifers to the ranch and built a one-story house in the northern Olema Valley, at a location reportedly a short distance north of the future town of Olema, possibly on Olema Creek. Berry filed a juridical possession and survey with the military commander at Sonoma which was later found to be invalid. ⁴

Berry sold the two leagues on Tomales Bay in 1838 to Joseph E. Snook, a naturalized Mexican citizen and veteran sea captain and merchant of the Pacific Coast trade routes. However, sale of granted property was not allowed under the terms of Berry's grant. On September 18, 1838, Snook wrote to Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo, at that time Military Commander of the Northern Frontier, for advice:

³Testimony of William A. Richardson in Land Case 418 ND, copies at National Park Service, Western Regional Office, San Francisco.

You know that on the voyage past I bought from Don James Berry 2 leagues of his rancho, situated on Point Reyes . . . and the other day I put there 56 head of cattle by Mr. Rafael Garcia, whom I am paying $12 per month . . ., but I do not have papers for the rancho. I hope that you will be my counsel as to the manner in which I can secure the necessary papers . . . .

Snook chose or was advised to denounce the portion of the grant he had purchased from Berry. In this process a citizen could challenge the ownership of property if the terms of the grant were unfulfilled; in Snook’s case the denouncement was based on the fact that Berry’s grant was unoccupied, and the denouncement was no doubt applied for with Berry’s approval. In fact, Berry probably would have lost the land entirely had the governor known that he had illegally sold a portion of it. Snook won title to the 8,878 acres under a ruling by the Mexican governor in June of 1839. As one historian interpreted the transactions:

Snook officially denounced the land he had unofficially bought from Berry. Berry officially acceded to the denouncement of the land he had unofficially sold to Snook. In June of 1839, the land was officially regranted to Snook, and Berry officially retained the remainder of his land, with Snook’s money unofficially in his pocket.

About 1837 Snook had built a small house at the northwestern corner of the rectangular parcel (on today’s Rogers Ranch) for his ranch foreman. Situated on the north side of a small creek draining into Schooner Bay, the house was built of logs as thick as a man’s thigh, plastered with clay, with a thatched tule roof, measuring about 15 by 12 feet and seven feet high.

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5Joseph E. Snook, letter dated September 18, 1838, in Vallejo, Mariano Guadalupe, Documentos para la Historia de California, V, doc. no. 172, mss. at Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

6Becker, Point Reyes, p. 42.

7Toogood, Civil History, pp. 41-42; Mason, Point Reyes, p. 22-23; G. W. Hendry and Jacob N. Bowman, “The Spanish and Mexican Adobes and Other Buildings in the Nine Bay Area Counties, 1776 to about 1850,” unpublished manuscript, 1940, pp. 96-97.
2. Rancho Punta de los Reyes Sobrante

Within months after winning title, Snook mortgaged his Rancho Punta de los Reyes and traded it to Antonio Maria Osio, on September 28, 1839. Osio, the administrator of the custom house in Monterey and grantee of Rancho Isla de los Angeles (Angel Island) on San Francisco Bay, soon petitioned the governor for the remaining eleven leagues, or sobrante, on Point Reyes. After three years of administrative delays Governor Manuel Micheltorena awarded the 48,829-acre grant on November 20, 1843, to Osio, who moved his family to Point Reyes that year.⁶

Osio soon found himself in a dispute over proper boundaries of the rancho, setting the stage for later events. Berry, who had retained six leagues of his grant in the Olema Valley, began to run his cattle on Osio's sobrante. Berry had been pushed out of his own land by Rafael Garcia, grantee of Rancho Tomales y Baulines to the south; in early 1843 Garcia gave his Bolinas land to his brother-in-law Gregorio Briones and moved north onto Berry's ranch, where he built a house near the present town of Olema and settled in comfortably, calling his new property Rancho Al Punta El Estero. Until Osio received his vast sobrante, the apparent feeling in the area was that there was plenty of land to spare, hence the informal mode of use and settlement.⁹

Osio sued Berry in 1844, an action that brought to light Garcia's move north. Jose Maria Castanares, the government attorney in Monterey, ruled in Osio's favor and recommended that Garcia return the land to Berry by moving back to Bolinas. But Berry pulled out of the fray abruptly, transferring his property to his friend Stephen Smith of Bodega, "being debtor to Don Estevan [Smith] for various sums with which he has aided me." Berry died soon after. In the end, Garcia stayed on Berry's property and Osio was satisfied that his rancho was not being encroached upon.¹⁰

While Osio lived at Point Reyes beginning in 1843, he continued to work in Monterey, as justice of the superior court from 1840 to 1845, as a substitute

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⁶J. P. Munro-Fraser, History of Marin County, California. (San Francisco: Alley-Bowen & Co., 1880), pp. 190, 194.

⁹Becker, Point Reyes, p. 42; Mason, Point Reyes, pp. 42-43; Toogood, Civil History, p. 38.

¹⁰Mason, Point Reyes, p. 25; Toogood, Civil History, pp. 42-44.
congressman in 1843, as captain of the defenses in 1844, and as judge at San Rafael in 1845. He had hired a "Spaniard" named Pakito as his major domo, according to an 1880 account. After the American takeover in 1846, Osio moved his family to Hawaii, then settled in Baja California. Osio mortgaged the property to a man named G. W. Bird, then sold it to Andrew Randall in 1852. Meanwhile, Smith sold his Berry ranch to cattleman Bethuel Phelps on September 25, 1848, for $15,000.\(^{11}\)

When California gained statehood and the first legislature created Marin County in 1850, the new county government found nothing but confusion at Point Reyes. Few of the landowners lived there and the true acreage of their properties was unknown. Tax assessments of 1851 indicated that Osio owned only two leagues, while his eleven leagues of the sobrante received no notice. Berry's tract, transferred to Smith then sold to Phelps, was described as, "The tract of land formerly owned by Berry containing six leagues owners unknown lying between Punta Reyes and Garcia also running on said tract of land is 200 head of cattle belonging to said farm." The fact that Bethuel Phelps recorded his purchase in Sonoma County may explain some of the confusion.\(^{12}\)

3. A Fiesta at Garcia's Rancho

While Berry and Osio lived for a time at Point Reyes, the only known permanent residents were their ranch foremen and the oldest "ranchero" of all, Rafael Garcia. Garcia's hacienda near Olema grew into a comfortable home and headquarters for his rancho with its thousands of livestock and what may have been a steady stream of visitors. A writer in 1880 described the old Garcia ranch:

He built a very large adobe house for the use of his family, which stood on the present site of Thomas Crandall's house [W Ranch]. The work was done by Indians, and an Indian was foreman and had full charge of the work. He afterwards built two more adobe houses for the use of his servants and employes; also several

\(^{11}\)Toogood, *Civil History*, pp. 41-43; Munro-Fraser, *Marin County*, p. 302.

\(^{12}\)Toogood, *Civil History*, pp. 69-70.
frame buildings. In the olden and balmy days of the Spanish-Mexican regime, the *Summa Summarum* of the *dolce far niente* style of life of that age could be found at this ranch.\(^{13}\)

Garcia reportedly had 3,000 head of cattle, "one of which was slaughtered daily to supply the demands of the *establecimiento*"; 400 horses that "bore the ranch brand"; and "extensive flocks of sheep and herds of swine [that] formed a part of the princely possessions of the Garcia estate." Garcia’s servants processed the wool and wove it into cloth, and made shoes from the leather provided by the cattle. Wild game roaming on Garcia’s (and probably Osio’s and Berry’s) land attracted guests who came to hunt and visit with the Don.\(^{14}\)

Joseph Warren Revere, an American lieutenant stationed at Sonoma, visited Garcia’s ranch during its heyday. Revere described a fiesta he attended as a guest of Garcia at his Bear Valley headquarters in August 1846. Revere’s party had been salvaging a rich array of articles from a shipwreck nearby and returned in a festive mood. When Revere and his associates arrived, a feast was prepared. "Fat muttons and beeves were slaughtered by Don Rafael; and the *cocina* was alive with women preparing the various dishes affected by native Californians . . . ."

According to Revere, the staple at Garcia’s was tortillas and "beefsteaks broiled on the coals,—called *carne asado*.”

Garcia’s house had apparently been stocked with the treasures of the wrecked ship:

The long, low, one-storied house, with its spreading eaves, was profusely illuminated with the best wax-candles in bronze or plated candelabra of artistic patterns, adorned with artificial flowers of every hue; while the rugged walls were concealed with framed engravings: and beneath them was arranged elegant furniture in buhl and *marquetry*, on which stood crowds of bottles, from which the company regaled themselves.

\(^{13}\) Munro-Fraser, *Marin County*, p. 277.

with unlimited champagne, and the delicate wines of the Rhine and Burgundy . . . .  

Garcia treated Revere to a party not to be forgotten, complete with "exhibitions of skill with the lasso" and a duel between a bear and a bull. Early on, "the rancheros, who had brought their guitars and fiddles strapped on their backs, soon struck up merry tunes; and the light-hearted Spanish girls and their cavaliers danced the jarabe, the waltz, and other national dances, all night long; while the elders sat about amusing themselves with monte and euchre."  

Revere accompanied an elk hunt, at which the American observed the fine techniques of the vaquero in action. On swift horses and using only the riata (rope), luna (a crescent-shaped stone used for hamstringing the elk) and knife, the Mexican horsemen brought down six large elk, from which they extracted tallow and hides. The elk fat, which after processing exhibited a "superior hardness, whiteness and delicacy," was a staple in the local cooking. Its availability was apparently not taken for granted, as Revere overheard one of Garcia's vaqueros address his captured prey as "cunado" (brother-in-law), assuring him that his death would give the man a little lard for his tortillas. Revere also commented on the dwindling number of elk on the point, where "mouldering horns and bones attested to the wholesale slaughter which had been made in previous years by the rancheros of the neighborhood." Within a decade or two, the herds would disappear entirely.  

B. Andrew Randall on Point Reyes  

Antonio Osio sold his holdings at Point Reyes, including Snook's two leagues on Tomales Bay and the vast sobrante, to Dr. Andrew Randall of San Francisco on January 8, 1852. Randall, a geologist with medical training, came to California in late 1849, and soon became customs inspector and postmaster at Monterey. He

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17Ibid., pp. 184-185.

won a seat on the first California legislature and founded the California Academy of Sciences. Upon purchasing the Point Reyes ranch he hired a foreman, Josiah Swain, and built a house for his wife and four children at what became the site of F Ranch.18

Within a year Randall apparently had a flourishing cattle ranch, although it is doubtful that he spent much time there. His property assessment for the year 1854 listed land and improvements valued at $178,365:

Rancho Punta de los Reyes
including the Berry Rancho, 35,520 acres at $2 $71,040
Houses and improvements 4,500
Tame California Horses and Mares 75 at $40 3,000
Wild Horses, Mares and Colts, 400 at $36 6,400
American Cows 30 at $65 1,950
Other American Cattle Oxen 30 at $62.50 1,875
Tame California Cattle 400 at $30 12,000
Wild Cattle 3,500 at $20 70,000
Sheep and Goats 1,000 at $5 2,000
Wagons and Carriages 3 at $100 300
Library 300
$178,36519

Earlier in 1854 Randall had purchased the remainder of Berry's ranch from Phelps with $150,000 he had borrowed. Having already purchased Osio's Point Reyes property and other parcels of land across the state, Randall soon found himself deeply in debt. His problems were exacerbated by a financial depression all over the country and he soon found himself pursued by creditors. The Point Reyes ranch was foreclosed, setting the stage for a confusing and costly battle over the property.20

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20Mason, Historian, pp. 731-733.
One creditor, Joseph Hetherington, sued Randall; the Doctor refused to
answer questions from the judge during a debt hearing and fled to Sacramento
where he was arrested for contempt of court. Finally, on July 24, 1856,
Hetherington approached Randall in a San Francisco hotel and shot him to death.
After Hetherington's arrest, the city's vigilance committee seized him and hanged
him two days later in front of a large cheering crowd.²¹

Elizabeth Randall found herself not only a widow pregnant with her fifth
child but saddled with Andrew's debt of $237,000. Randall's credit troubles not
only led to his murder, but as Jack Mason wrote, "out of the turmoil was to come a
series of events that helped to write California legal history."²²

C. Title Litigation

Osió's mortgage to Bird had by 1853 grown from $3,000 to $8,400, with the
Point Reyes land put up as collateral. At a foreclosure sale, Thomas G. Cary
purchased it, obtained a deed from the sheriff, then sold it to John G. Hyatt, who
in turn sold it to Thomas G. Richards and Samuel F. Reynolds. All received deeds
from the sheriff. At the same time, on January 5, 1855, Dr. Robert McMillan
obtained a judgment against Randall and recorded the judgment a week later
which created a lien against the estate. Jesse Smith had also obtained a judgment
against Randall, even before McMillan had, but failed to record it until February
20, 1855. McMillan and Smith were also issued deeds by the sheriff. And Randall,
still alive at this point, mortgaged the premises to William I. Shaw.²³

It was Marin County Sheriff G. N. Vischer who had foreclosed the property
to each of the claimants, apparently pocketing the $2,000 he had collected from
them. The claimants, McMillan, Smith, Hyatt, Reynolds and Richards, soon found
that they had been conned by the sheriff. With the exception of McMillan, the

²¹Ibid., pp. 731-733.
²²Mason, Point Reyes, p. 29.
²³Ibid., p. 27; Toogood, Civil History, 74; Delos Lake, U.S. Attorney, District of California, to
United States Lighthouse Board, "The Title of O. L. Shafter, James McM. Shafter, and Charles Webb
Howard to La Rancho Punta de los Reyes Sobrante . . .", circa 1869, copy at Point Reyes National
Seashore (hereinafter cited as PRNS); Deeds Book B, pp. 69, 147, 179, 288, 300, Book C, p. 183, Book
D, pp. 13, 15, 16, 18, 20, 28, 30, Marin County Recorders Office (hereinafter cited as MCRO).
group hired a lawyer; the wealthy McMillan, however, hired Shafter, Shafter, Park and Heydenfeldt, one of the most respected law firms in San Francisco. The firm’s senior partner, Oscar L. Shafter, was a powerful figure in California title litigation. Historian Mason wrote:

McMillan was the only one with enough money to clear Randall’s property of the liens against it. His attorney Shafter went to Sheriff Vischer’s office twice—first to ascertain what the liens were; again on December 13, 1856, with the cash in hand. He counted it out on the desk—$24,146.08—and told the sheriff to deposit it in McMillan’s bank "to save the interest during litigation." The sheriff instead put it in two banks of his own choosing. Indignantly Shafter got out an injunction and impounded the funds. Richards, Hyatt and the others took their case into district court where they argued that McMillan and Shafter by impounding the money were admitting they had no intention of parting with it—that in reality it had not been paid at all. The judge agreed and found for Richards et al. Shafter prepared an appeal to the state supreme court.24

As Richards, Hyatt, Reynolds and others lived on Point Reyes, McMillan sued in ejectment, in addition to appealing the district court’s decision. The supreme court decided in McMillan’s favor on May 31, 1858. Meanwhile, John and Samuel Reynolds had conveyed the land to Stephen Marshall, creating further problems for the litigants, and McMillan sold away part of the property.25

On January 14, 1857, before receiving the final judgment, McMillan conveyed a two-thirds interest in his Point Reyes holdings to the law firm that represented him, Shafter, Shafter, Park and Heydenfeldt; the firm paid McMillan $50,000. Then, on April 7 of the same year, they bought the Snook parcel of the original Rancho Punta de los Reyes from Randall’s widow at auction for $14,700, or one-tenth of what Randall had paid for it in 1854. The partners then bought out McMillan’s third interest for $20,000, and owned almost the entire Point Reyes Peninsula. As Mason wrote: "The total price paid for Point Reyes was $84,700. How much cash the lawyers were out of pocket has fed the fires of speculation on

24Mason, Point Reyes, p. 30-31.
25Lake, "La Punta de Los Reyes"; Deeds Book C, pp. 122, 125-126, MCRO.
Point Reyes for a century. A good part of the purchase price was undoubtedly written off as legal fees owed by McMillan. How much, who knows?26

The Shafter firm then successfully beat down challenges by Shaw, holder of Randall's mortgage, and the Reynolds' purchaser, Marshall. Oscar Shafter wrote:

After a series of tremendous fights we have beaten our adversaries at all points and what is more have humbled the strongest and the proudest of them.27

The Shafters also personally evicted six or seven people still occupying the point, including Richards and probably Hyatt and Reynolds as well. This action cleared the way for the Shafters' development of what would become the largest dairy operation in California, in which the partners divided the peninsula into more than 30 ranches occupied by tenants.28

D. Pioneer Dairies at Point Reyes

1. California Dairy Development to 1857

Dairy farming is one of the most important industries in the civilized countries of the world, and health, wealth, and prosperity of a country is largely denoted by the extent and condition of its activity.29

The effect of the 1849-50 Gold Rush on the once-sleepy territory/state of California has been well documented, as thousands of people converged on the San Francisco Bay area seeking their fortunes. Along with the immigrants came a need for dairy products. According to the 1850 census, only 705 pounds of butter and 150 pounds of cheese were produced in the state that year. Miners in the

26Mason, Point Reyes, pp. 33-34; Lake, "La Punta de Los Reyes"; Deeds Book C, pp. 125-129, 349, MCBO.


28Mason, Point Reyes, pp. 36-37; Lake, "La Punta de Los Reyes".

Sierra foothills relied on small dairies based in the San Joaquin Valley, who in the spring would drive their cows to the mountains, bringing along the necessary dairy utensils to make butter and cheese. These nomad dairies stayed until the October frosts, when the herds and wagons returned to the valley. The dairies reportedly made products of good quality, as the demand (and prices) were high.\textsuperscript{30}

San Franciscans, on the other hand, initially made do with butter imported from the east coast or Chile, salted and packed in firkins and, in the case of the Chilean product (according to a contemporary correspondent), "partaking strongly of the character of hog's lard, which we always believed to be one of its principal ingredients." The East Coast butter was not much better, as it often emitted a "most ancient and fish-like smell."\textsuperscript{31}

By 1854 dairies in Sonoma and Santa Clara counties provided fresh butter and cheese to San Francisco. Milk, highly perishable, could only be produced in or near the city itself, whereas butter could withstand a day's journey and cheese even more under reasonable conditions. Sonoma County proved to be the city's major supplier of butter and cheese until 1862, when Marin County surpassed its northern neighbor in production. It was in Sonoma County, however, that the Point Reyes dairy industry had its roots.\textsuperscript{32}

2. The First Point Reyes Dairies: Steele Brothers

The three brothers George, Isaac, and Edgar Steele and their cousin Rensselaer Steele came to Sonoma County separately and by various routes from their home state of Ohio during the mid-1850s. George and Rensselaer arrived in 1855, first working in the eastern mines, then in San Francisco. Within a year they had found a farm to rent at Two Rock near Petaluma, and were joined in


\textsuperscript{31}Toogood, Civil History, p. 94; San Francisco Daily Alta California, May 25, 1854, p. 2.

\textsuperscript{32}Toogood, Civil History, pp. 94-96; John S. Hittell, Commerce and Industries of the Pacific Coast of North America (San Francisco: A. L. Bancroft and Co., 1882), p. 261; California, Surveyor General, Annual Report of the Surveyor-General of the State of California for the Year 1862, (Sacramento: P. Avery, State Printer, 1863), pp. 62-63. That year, Marin County produced 200,000 pounds of butter to Sonoma's 191,400; Marin's cheese output was 300,000 pounds to Santa Clara's 250,000, San Mateo's 75,000 and Sonoma's 66,700 pounds.
June of 1856 by George's parents, brother Edgar, and Rensselaer's family. Edgar found work harvesting oats and bought five cows with his wages. The family began making butter, and planted eighty acres of grain and potatoes.

A third brother, Isaac, brought his family to Two Rock at the end of March, 1857. Isaac Steele later wrote of the situation he found in California:

A large proportion of the people here at that time had come to make a fortune and return to their old homes to enjoy it. The word "home" meant some locality beyond the limits of California. Land titles were unsettled. A bitter contest raged between squatters and grant holders. Squatters contended with each other and grant holders filled the courts with litigation. The legal fraternity seemed in a fair way to gain the whole country for services.

To the stranger the hospitality of the people was unbounded. He was ever welcome to hang his horse to a stake and share the board and blanket of any shanty in the land.

The dairy business was getting out of favor at that time; the price of butter declined to 75¢ per pound and cheese to 35¢. These prices were not considered remunerative by many of the dairymen, and cows had declined to $75.00 to $100.00 per head and dairymen wished to sell out to engage in more profitable business.33

Meanwhile, Rensselaer's wife Clara made a cheese from a recipe she found in a book, and sent the product to a commission house in San Francisco. Her recipe was well-received and found an immediate demand in the city. Despite the industry downturn, and inspired by Clara Steele's successful experimentation with cheesemaking, the Steeles expanded their small dairy business by purchasing 25 head of dairy cows. They adopted the brand of the previous owners, Tustin and Lewis, a simple "C.T." (for Columbus Tustin). The Steeles then began to look for suitable grazing land in the area.

While exploring Point Reyes as a possibility, the Steeles' business partner

Colonel Lewis exclaimed that the place was "cow heaven!" Edgar Steele's biography continued the story:

There appeared an abundance of rich bunch grass and clover, with many springs of cold water, and the prevalent fogs gave encouragement of maintaining fresh feed. Some people discouraged the enterprise, saying the cold fogs kept the grass in such a condition that it would support only the lank Spanish cattle, and that butter-making at Point Reyes was utterly out of the question.34

Isaac Steele, from Catherine B. Steele, "The Steele Brothers."

34History of San Luis Obispo County California With Illustrations (Reprint, Berkeley: Howell-North Books, 1966), no page numbers.
On July 4, 1857, the Steeles leased one square league of the Point Reyes peninsula from Thomas G. Richards, one of the owners currently in litigation. The land stretched from "Berrie Point" (Drake's Head) on the west to Inverness Ridge on the east and Drakes Bay to the south, and rented for $25.00 per month, to be paid only when title was settled. The partners had the option to buy the property at $3.00 per acre once the title was firmly in Richards' hand. However, Richards soon lost the land to the Shafter, who then wrote a new four-year lease with the Steeles on July 28, 1858. The Shafter lease called for payment of one-sixth of the yearly increase of the livestock, "one third part of the nature of all improvements made by them [Steeles] during said term, the amount . . . not to exceed one thousand dollars," and the taxes on the land. The land covered the area that later became the New Albion, Laguna, and Muddy Hollow Ranches:

All that portion of the Punta de los Reyes Ranch commencing at a point on the shore of Sir Francis Drakes Bay at the south side of the inlet first south of the Berrie Point so called [Drakes Head], thence northerly up the said inlet, and the gulch into which it leads to the timber east of the ridge dividing Drake's Bay from Tomales Bay, thence southwardly along said ridge and Timber to where a fence and gate formerly stood upon the trail above the Grasie[r] place so called, thence to the head of the gulch leading westerly to the Foster place [Laguna Ranch?] now occupied by Geo. H. Higgins, and down said gulch to Drake's Bay, thence along the shore to the place of beginning . . . .

The lease was redrawn on September 1, 1862, to a flat rental of $2,000 per year paid quarterly in cash. Neither of the leases contained reference to eventual sale.\textsuperscript{35}

Indeed, the Steeles found themselves in "cow heaven," but they faced a great deal of work in developing a dairy industry from scratch. Isaac Steele later described their first months at Point Reyes:

We had a dairy house in course of construction which lacked a roof, doors and windows when we commenced

\textsuperscript{35}Richards lease in Steele Ranch Papers, Box 46 Folder 258, Stanford University; Leases Book A, pp. 25-27 and 73-74, MCRO.
cheese making. There were no barriers to restrain our stock save ocean, marsh, and mountain crag. No roads except the Old Spanish Trail; but of wild, weird, beautiful grandeur, the appreciative soul could get its fill. Grass was abundant beyond desire, with pure streams of never failing water flowing over sands of gold (mica). No vehicle common to civilized life had ever passed the mountain height and deep ravine to our promised land.36

During the first year in business Colonel Lewis received one-half of the butter and cheese produced by the Steeles; he apparently then dropped out of the business. After two years the Steeles reported to the California State Agricultural Society that they had made $6,000 worth of improvements on the ranch, milked 163 cows during the season, and hired nine men to work in the dairy. During the previous year the Steeles had made more than 55,000 pounds of cheese at a value of almost $15,000. The operation had expanded into three dairies at this time, one at Limantour Estero (at the later site of New Albion Ranch), one at Muddy Hollow, and one possibly at either Glenbrook or Laguna ranches. Edgar Steele's biography described the situation:

The Steeles then increased their number of cows to 355, and maintained three dairies. Butter and cheese were made, the cream being taken for the first and the buttermilk returned to the cheese vats, adding enough value to pay for all the hired help employed. Butter was sold readily at $1.00 per pound, and cheese at twenty-seven cents, the demand for them being greater than they could supply. The wages of dairymen and manufacturers then were the same as at present [1883].37

Each dairy supported four to five laborers in addition to the Steeles themselves. The U. S. Census of 1860 listed the following employees: for Isaac Steele, J. K. Lyon, R. B. Delphin, Lawrence Larson, T. N. Heanam and family; for Edgar Steele, Loomis Curtis, John Donlen and family, James Seeley, J. Langston;

36Notes of Isaac Steele, quoted in Steele, "The Steele Brothers", p. 264.

37San Luis Obispo. n. p.
for Renssalaer Steele, Joseph Jameson, William Brandon, Michael Kirk, John Doyle and Frank (illegible). No doubt housing was provided for the employees and their families. By 1861, 600 head of cows grazed the Steele lease and the brothers had $10,000 cash profit. That year writer John Quincy Adams Warren visited the dairies of Point Reyes and described Edgar Steele's operation at Muddy Hollow:

It is situated in a hollow, at the foot of and surrounded by a high range of hills. He occupies about 6,000 acres. This is the most prominent and extensive establishment in the county, and they manufacture more cheese than any dairy in the State. They made during the season 640 pounds per day of cheese, and 75 pounds of butter. The crop of cheese the present season (for 1861) will amount to 45 tons!! The cheese made here is of excellent quality and commands a good price and a ready market. . . .

There are on the ranch about 500 head of dairy stock--all American--also a few horses and brood mares, and one fine stallion. . . . The appearance of the rancho and buildings, from the hills adjoining, was quite attractive, and the fresh green forage refreshing to the eye, forming a most grateful contrast to the dry hills.39

The Steeles' success was evident, as told by Catherine Baumgarten Steele in the family's history:

With their herds increasing, larger quantities of cheese were shipped by steamer to San Francisco, which in turn brought to the Steeles the comforts of life from that city. No commission, apparently, seemed too trivial or too great to entrust to the steamer captain, but in shipping cheese it was always expected that one of the best quality should be designated for the crew, otherwise the entire shipment was apt to reach the city in an unsatisfactory condition. Too, if the steamer at Point Reyes did not

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38Population Schedules, 10th U. S. Census, 1860.

have a full load, the "boys" went out and got enough elk
to fill the boat.\textsuperscript{40}

The steamer, which no doubt landed at the wharf at the end of New Albion Head,
was piloted variously by the Captains Nelson and Conner, who received about
$25.00 per trip to San Francisco. The steamer made a round trip about every ten
days. During 1861 the boat delivered the Steele dairy and meat products to T. H.
Hatch and Company, commission merchants at 320 Front Street in San Francisco,
and butter to Guise and Elder in the City. Cash accounts revealed the nature of
much that was brought back to Point Reyes, such as smoked salmon, brandy,
vegetables, clothing, "sarsaparilla," coffin trimmings, and in 1866, a Steinway
piano.\textsuperscript{41}

Life at one of the Steeles' Point Reyes dairies was illustrated in a letter to
Edgar Steele from one of his dairy managers, probably Ed St. John:

Muddy Hollow
February 29, 1863

Mr. E.W. Steele,

Dear Sir:

We received your letter last Wednesday and it
found us enjoying good health and prospering tip top.
We are milking about 55 cows and are making 180 lbs.
cheese per day. The cows are gaining quite fast. We
have hired a man by the name of Doris that has worked
for Laird for about two years. He is a first rate hand. I
don't know as you will be suited with the wages we are
paying him but we think that good milkers are cheaper
at $30.00 per month than green hands at $25.00. We
have been lucky in getting good men so far.

We are raising about 20 heifer calves. Some of
them are old enough to wean. Do you want them
branded C.T. or are you going to have a private brand?

I am making cheese now and Seeley is ploughing.
We ordered two presses from the city last boat, but

\textsuperscript{40}Steele, "The Steele Brothers", pp. 263-264.

\textsuperscript{41}Steele Ranch Papers, Box 37, Stanford University.
Nelson has been gone over a week now.

We are using rennet that we cured ourselves and I don't see but they are as good as the German rennets. We have learned a new way of curing them and if you have not learned it already you try it. We take them out and put them in a pan and leave the curd in them for 24 hours and then we just squeeze the curd out, and tie the big end up and take a quill and blow them up and tie them and hang them by the stovepipe until they are nearly dry and then cut the string on the big end, or they will hurt where they are tied. We dip them in brine after we have blown them up.

Ed, you were talking of sending us a heating apparatus. Seeley and I have been talking it over and have come to the conclusion, that if you want to run this dairy with as little expense you can, that we can get along with this heater and these vats.

We will make cheese night and day—we would like to have you a little more on this dairy than the other boys do off from theirs. We are ahead now on cheese, and we are making very firm cheese, too.

I have never seen everything move off as smoothly since I have been on the ranch as it does this winter. We are just as happy as clams. All that is lacking is two or three nice women to make it heaven at Muddy Hollow. [unsigned]42

Edgar Steele had a hands-on involvement in the dairies, milking his own string of cows daily, as well as making cheese, doing the books and attending to the daily needs of the ranches. George Steele, trained as a lawyer, ran for California state assembly in 1860 but was defeated; he served as county judge of Marin County in 1863 until leaving the area in 1866. The Steeles' gained national fame in 1864 when they produced a "monstrous" cheese at their southern dairies measuring 20 feet around and weighing 33,850 pounds, to benefit the Sanitary Commission.43

Apparently unsatisfied with the fact that the Point Reyes land was not available for purchase, the Steeles had leased and eventually purchased the 18,000-

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42Letter in Steele Ranch Papers, Stanford University.
43San Luis Obispo; Steele, "The Steele Brothers," p. 270.