RANCHING ON THE POINT REYES PENINSULA

A History of the Dairy and Beef Ranches Within Point Reyes National Seashore, 1834-1992

by D. S. (Dewey) Livingston
HISTORIAN, POINT REYES NATIONAL SEASHORE

HISTORIC RESOURCE STUDY
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
POINT REYES NATIONAL SEASHORE

This was people's homes.
Inspiration from birch lifestyle.
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NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
POINT REYES STATION, CALIFORNIA
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National Seashore is regionally significant for its contribution to the state's dairy industry and the commerce of San Francisco. With 13 of the ranch complexes remaining in use, all dating from 1857-1880, and with a number of these complexes retaining their historic integrity, the ranches as a whole or in part appear to be eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places with local and regional historic significance.

The heart of dairy country—Point Reyes Peninsula from the air, 1959. Barries Bay is in the foreground, with ranches D, C, and B marked by groves of trees. Point Reyes National Seashore Collection.
each section. From this the milk passes through a tin pipe to a vat which holds one hundred and thirty gallons.\textsuperscript{114}

The milker returned to his "string" after depositing the contents of his bucket.

In time, ranchers built huge wooden milking barns, the popular "hay barn" of today. Cows entered the barn from one side, were secured into a stanchion, and milked by hand. The floors were wood, increasing the cleanliness, and the barn was washed out after every milking. Near the turn of the century, some milking barns in the cities were improved with concrete floors, but at Point Reyes these barns didn’t appear until the 1920s and 1930s. A few Point Reyes dairies continued to milk outdoors until constructing milking barns in 1920. Milking machines, invented in the 1870s but not in popular use until the 1920s, decreased

\textsuperscript{114}Munro-Fraser, Marin County, p. 298.
dairies. The large wooden milking barns came into a new use as feed storage and the old dairy houses or creameries were often remodeled into residences, or torn down. The Grade A, or sanitary, barn became the center of activity at the ranch, and the cleaning of the barn and disposal of dairy wastes became more carefully practiced. Local dairies ceased to truck their own milk out, as larger creameries provided pickup service to the farthest dairies at Point Reyes. The days of ten-gallon cans of milk or cream gave way to the stainless steel storage tank and tanker truck.

Dairy ranchers today operate under the strictest standards the industry has seen. Environmental laws of the early 1970s required new and costly waste disposal systems, putting a number of local dairies out of business. Three Point Reyes dairies, A, B, and J Ranches, constructed free-stall barns, or loafing barns, large open-walled structures with clean resting stalls for cows; these barns are labor-intensive, with necessary cleaning schedules, but protect the cows from the rigors of the elements. On many of the Point Reyes dairies, feed types and amounts, and subsequent milk production, are monitored by computers that keep files on each individual cow. A complex pricing system, increased regulation and public pressure, and doing business within a National Park make the dairyman’s life at Point Reyes both complicated and labor-intensive.131

**H. Sale of the Shafter and Howard Ranches, 1919-39**

Members of the Shafter family owned major portions of Point Reyes for 82 years, from 1857 to 1939. During this time the operation of the ranches changed little, save for modernization in technology and transportation. The eventual sale of the ranches, in three transactions ten years apart from each other, brought a new life to the dairies of Point Reyes.

Many of the ranches sold to tenants, resulting in an increase in prosperity and pride, as well as giving the former tenant a chance to increase dairy production through herd improvement and physical modernization unhindered by a distant landlord. These tenants were able to purchase their ranches through the speculators who had purchased the entire estates of Charles Howard and O. L.

131Abbott, *North Bay Dairylands*, pp. 82-83.
Shafer. These speculators quickly resold the individual ranches to the tenants, a move that no doubt improved the financial health and pride of the community. Ranches A through N retained their historic boundaries in these sales.

In two cases the purchasers held on to some of the land: John Rapp, buyer of Howard's estate, sold ranches A through G to tenants but kept Bear Valley Ranch for his own purposes. Leland Murphy bought James McMillan Shafer's Home Ranch and surrounding dairies and kept them until financial problems necessitated selling various large tracts, created by new subdivisions of the original ranch and ignoring the historic boundaries. Over the years, the historic boundaries in the north district of the park have survived the various land sales of this century, while in the south district, with the exception of Bear Valley Ranch, the ranch boundaries have changed due to more recent subdivisions.

1. C. W. Howard Lands, 1919

The first of the Point Reyes property to leave the Shafer family included the estate of Charles Webb Howard, administered until her death by his widow, Emma Shafer Howard. After her death in 1916, the couple's four children, Fred, Maud, Harold and Oscar, disagreed on how to share the estate. After months of hearings in San Rafael the land was partitioned, then each part was sold separately to John G. Rapp of San Francisco between November 18 and December 11, 1919. Rapp, having recently sold his family's large and successful brewing business, already owned the Pierce Ranch on the north end of Point Reyes and looked to become a rancher in his own right.\textsuperscript{132}

Almost immediately, Rapp sold the dairies on the Point Reyes parcel to tenants and other local dairymen, an arrangement reportedly set up by Rapp's real estate agent August Lang. To Joseph V. Mendoza, already a tenant of Rapp's at Pierce Point, he sold A and B Ranch; C went to tenants Joe Nunes and Joe Avila, D to Hamilton Martins (a Mendoza relative) and Trajano Machado; the well-developed E Ranch was sold to Lindo Berri, of a pioneer Tomales Bay dairying family, and Leo Bartolotti; tenant John G. Gallagher bought F Ranch, and G Ranch sold to its long-time tenant James McClure. Rapp no doubt made a

\textsuperscript{132}Mason, Point Reyes, pp. 93-95; Deeds Book 192, p. 383, Book 209, pp. 435-441 etc., MCRO; interview with Joan Rapp Mayhew.
tremendous profit, but the Point was now owned by its workers, all immigrants from the Portuguese Azores, Switzerland, and Ireland, fulfilling a belief of Rapp's that a man should own the land he works on.\footnote{Deeds Books 208, pp. 311, 373, 407, 409, Book 209, p. 491, Book 210, p 257, Book 211, p. 226, MCRO; letter from Jerome E. White to Jack Mason dated March 3, 1968, Jack Mason Museum; interview with Joan Rapp Mayhew.}

Rapp leased out the small dairies on Bear Valley Ranch after a failed attempt to subdivide and sell them, and created perhaps the first certified dairy at Point Reyes at Howard's old W Ranch. Rapp's dairy shipped fresh milk by truck to San Francisco hospitals and restaurants where it was considered to be among the best available. His family夏季ed in a new house built overlooking Bear Valley, the four Rapp children having the run of the vast and beautiful ranch.\footnote{Mason, Point Reyes, pp 94-95; interview with Joan Rapp Mayhew.}

2. J. M. Shafter Lands, 1929

On his death in 1892 James McMillan Shafter left a shocking amount of debt for his heirs to clear. Bad investments, the largest in the North Pacific Coast Railroad, coupled with Shafter's generosity and unwillingness to leave a friend in need, led to an empty purse and embarrassing headlines in the San Francisco papers. Shafter's daughter Julia Shafter Hamilton served as administratrix of the estate and spent the rest of her life settling the debts in a fair and proud manner.

Shafter had subdivided and founded the town of Inverness overlooking Tomales Bay on the eastern part of his Point Reyes tract, and Julia Hamilton aggressively pursued buyers for the lots there. Mrs. Hamilton attempted to sell the ranches of the Point Reyes tract in 1893, publishing a booklet outlining the attractions of the properties, but none of the Point Reyes ranches sold.

In a new attempt to salvage the family fortune, Mrs. Hamilton and her brother James Shafter formed the Point Reyes Land and Dairy Company in 1898. Ranch leases were written under this name and property put up for sale, but again to no avail. Mrs. Hamilton did sell the Glen Ranch in 1910 to her land agent, John Bondeson, but overall there was little progress. In a letter to her husband, Mrs. Hamilton spelled out her woes with the ranches: "So many repairs are needed and lumber is so high that my heart sinks within me. It is nothing but pay
out money all the time and nothing to show for it—until I am sick at heart and frightened and worried.\textsuperscript{135}

The burden of the ranches finally overtook Mrs. Hamilton in the days following the stock market crash in 1929 when, after defaulting on a large bank loan, she sold the Point Reyes tract to real estate specialist Leland S. Murphy. Murphy found the ranches in poor condition, with the tenants importing liquor rather than tending their dairies. Murphy phased out the dairies and promoted beef ranching and vegetable farming on his ranches. Mrs. Hamilton died in her hotel room in 1936, having failed to recover the family fortune.\textsuperscript{136}

3. O. L. Shafter Lands, 1939

The last lands to leave the Shafter family were those of Oscar L. Shafter's estate, Ranches H through N, and the South End and Lake Ranches near Bolinas. After Shafter's death in 1873 these lands had been administered by the O. L. Shafter Estate Company, under the control of Charles Webb Howard until his death after the turn of the century. The holding company decided to sell in 1939, first selling the I Ranch to Jim McClure and the J Ranch to Jim Kehoe in April of that year. In August, real estate promoter Leonard David of San Francisco bought the rest of the ranches for $300,000 and immediately resold them to the tenants and others.\textsuperscript{137}

The only tenant to purchase a ranch was James Kehoe of J Ranch, although David offered the other ranches to the tenants. Domingo Grossi, a successful dairymen from Novato, purchased H and M Ranches, then divided M for another dairy and placed two sons and a daughter on the dairies to expand the family business. A milk company headed by Sayles Turney and James Lundgren bought K Ranch, Swiss dairymen Ernest Ghisletta bought L Ranch, and German

\textsuperscript{135}Leses, Book E, pp. 63-82; Mason, Point Reyes, pp. 85-86, 96-98; letter in Jack Mason Museum Collection.

\textsuperscript{136}Mason, Point Reyes, p. 100; interview with Leland Murphy by Diana Skiles, June 15, 1977, transcription at PRNS. Murphy's purchase included the Home Ranch and Drakes Head, New Albion, Glenbrook, Muddy Hollow, Laguna, Sunnyside, Vision and Oporto Ranches.

\textsuperscript{137}Mason, Point Reyes, pp. 104-105; San Rafael Independent, August 3, 1939; Official Records Book 377, p. 379, and Book 383, p. 405, MCRO.
immigrants Edward and Hildegarde Reems purchased N Ranch. All embarked on improvement programs for their dairies and herds, eventually becoming Grade A dairies. The southern tracts were sold to cattleman William Tevis, Jr. for $20 per acre, and to San Francisco socialite Alma deBrettwille Spreckels Awl in trade for a hotel in Santa Barbara worth $80,000.138

I. Point Reyes Becomes Public Land

1. County and State Acquisition, 1935-62

A growing conservation movement in the San Francisco Bay area provided a push for recreational lands in proximity to the urban areas. In Marin County, Point Reyes had been noted in a 1935 coastal parks survey produced by Conrad Wirth of the National Park Service as a prime area for a National Park. After a fundraising drive by citizens including Joseph V. Mendoza of B Ranch and the local "Pirate's Club", a 52-acre Drakes Beach County Park was purchased and donated to the County of Marin in November of 1938. In early 1942 McClures Beach County Park was established on the ocean side of Pierce Point, on property deeded by Pierce Ranch owner Margaret McClure. In 1943, the Marin County Planning Commission proposed a Point Reyes Scenic Reservation, covering the Tomales Bay beaches and much of Inverness Ridge. These plans included a new Pierce Point Parkway and an improved Sir Francis Drake Parkway, scenic highways designated as routes to park areas. On the ex-O. L. Shafter Estate, Tomales Bay State Park had its beginnings in 1945, when the first section was purchased from Leonard David using privately-raised funds. The park was enlarged to its present size in 1951 and dedicated as a California State Park.139

Wirth's 1935 park proposal was revived in 1958, when the National Park Service announced plans to establish a 35,000-acre Point Reyes National Seashore. During four years of debate, spurred by Inverness Congressman Clem Miller and


139Mason, Point Reyes, pp. 157-159, and Historian, pp. 606-607; Master Recreation Plan, pp. 11, 28.
California Senator Clair Engle, the size of the proposed park rose to 53,000 acres, much to the distress of the Point Reyes landowners. Most of the dairymen remembered the demise of the tenant ranches at Point Reyes, and didn't relish the thought of returning to tenancy. Zena Cabral, the widow of longtime Point Reyes dairymen Joseph V. Mendoza, spoke emotionally to a congressional hearing in Washington, D.C. in 1961, pleading for understanding:

I was not born in this country. I was born in Europe. But since I was a child I wanted to come to America, to the land where there was respect for human dignity, the land of the free . . . where the minorities would not be trampled on, where there would be no dictators. [Point Reyes] is where my children were born . . . and my grandchildren were raised.

My grandson, after he came from the service, that is where he is living. The other grandson that is married and who has a baby--I have a little great-granddaughter--has his family there. My other two grandsons, their choice is dairying, the farm.

Now I am faced with the possibility of losing everything that I have worked for. The strangest thing is that I never was approached. Everything was done underhanded . . . Nobody ever came to me to ask, "Do you want to sell your property for a park?"

. . . If my ranches would be taken for defense, well, you have to sacrifice, but it is for the benefit of all, for the benefit of my family as well as for the others.

But for recreation, what kind of recreation did I have when I was a youngster? Work and save so my children would have a sense of security and heritage that I felt belonged to them. Now every inch of my land is supposed to disappear.

Opposition to the proposed park was well-organized, composed largely of landowners, tax groups, and real estate developers, some of whom were subdividing Limantour beach at the time. During much of the debate the Marin County Board of Supervisors opposed the park. But early on, the Marin Conservation League, an influential county organization, attempted to bridge a gap between the ranchers and the park supporters, paving the way for the future policy of reservations and lease-backs. Mrs. Norman B. Livermore, president of the League, wrote to Senator Engle:
As true conservationists we want to preserve dairying in this area and will do what we can to promote the health of this industry which is so valuable to the economic and material well being of our people and which adds to the pastoral scene adjacent to the proposed recreation project. Perhaps the solution to this problem lies in purchasing substantially the entire peninsula and then leasing back to these dairymen or to other operations those portions suitable for grazing and other agricultural pursuits and not needed for public use.\footnote{Mrs. Norman B. Livermore to Hon. Clair Engle, July 28, 1958, Anne T. Kent California Room, Marin County Library.}

Public pressure in favor of the park was spurred by the Sierra Club and the newly-formed Point Reyes National Seashore Foundation, an effective grass-roots organization that collected money and support from all over the country. Needless to say, the park's supporters won the votes in Congress and Point Reyes National Seashore became a reality.\footnote{Mason, \textit{Point Reyes}, pp. 160-169.}

2. \textbf{National Park Service Acquisition, 1963-88}

President John F. Kennedy signed Public Law 87-657 (S.476) on September 13, 1962, authorizing Point Reyes National Seashore. This authorized acquisition of 64,000 acres with a $14 million ceiling on purchase cost. The State of California subsequently granted 11,416 acres of tidelands to the park, and the County of Marin deeded Drakes Bay and McClures Beach County Parks to the National Seashore. After a number of initial land purchases, including the Bear Valley Ranch and C and N Ranches, the authorizing acquisition funds had been spent. With park-designated lands slated for development and increasing public activism to "Save Our Seashore," as well as landowner complaints about paying higher taxes, the authorizing act was amended in 1969 to raise the acquisition ceiling to $57.7 million. Most of the park land purchases occurred during the early 1970s. The U. S. Department of the Interior officially established Point Reyes National Seashore on September 16, 1972, after sufficient land had been purchased to make
the area efficiently administrable to carry out the purposes of the Authorizing Act of 1962 and its revision of 1969.\textsuperscript{142}

Three subsequent acts of Congress added acreage to the National Seashore: 448 acres in the Inverness Ridge and Bear Valley areas in 1974 (Public Law 93-550), about 2,000 acres in the Bolinas area in 1978 (Public Law 95-625), and an undetermined number of acres in the Inverness Park area in 1980 (Public Law 96-199). As of this writing, the park contains 70,187 acres, of which 21,649 acres are used for either dairy or beef ranching. In addition, the superintendent of Point Reyes National Seashore manages 10,125 acres of the adjacent Golden Gate National Recreation Area, which is almost entirely in agricultural operation as beef and horse ranches.\textsuperscript{143}

\textsuperscript{142}Statement for Management, Point Reyes National Seashore (revised May, 1990; National Park Service: 1990), p. 45.

\textsuperscript{143}Ibid., pp. 46-47; "Briefing Statement," Point Reyes National Seashore, January, 1987, pp. 1, 3.

Schoolchildren gather for a photo at the Point Reyes School at M Ranch in 1905. Among the students are DeFraga, Reinhold, Claussen, DeSouza, Luiz, Irving, McClure, Regallo, and Reeves; the children represent families from the Azores, Switzerland, Ireland, Denmark, and the United States. Courtesy of June Gibbon.