17. Dairying and Stock Raising

THE ANZA EXPEDITION brought the first settlers to San Francisco with herds of cattle that soon multiplied on the hillsides and in the valleys of what is now San Mateo County. Spanish bullocks and cows were earmarked and branded and turned out to roam, wild and free, until rodeo time and the "matanza, or killing season that followed.

By 1790 hides and tallow from animals that were raised in the Colma Hills or on the slopes of San Bruno Mountain were being shipped to Spain or down the Pacific coast to the mines and plantations of Mexico and South America. Hides for export sold for $1.50 apiece in cash and for $2.00 if bartered for goods. Tallow was worth three cents a pound.[1]

Neither the Spanish settlers nor their Mexican successors favored milking and did little of it. Milk cows were practically unknown until they were brought in by the Americans.

It is probable that J.G. Knowles, whose land was in the middle of the present day City of Daly City, established the first dairy in San Mateo County to supply milk to the residents of San Francisco. His business was founded in 1853 and lasted until his acres became part of an urban development.

Following this lead dairying became one of the leading industries in the area. The dairies became large plants with huge barns, blacksmith shops, coolers and steam engines and they were surrounded by acres of hay and grain. Reports indicate that on some dairies as many as 288 cows were milked every morning and every evening.[3]

The products of the dairies were taken to San Francisco in large wagons drawn by six or eight oxen or mules and were delivered to dairy plants in the city. From there they were taken in milk wagons to the homes and shops of San Francisco. This procedure continued until shortly before the 1906 earthquake when seven dairymen formed the Dairy Delivery Company to market their products.

A handbill reprinted in the **San Francisco Daily News** in 1926 illustrated a change in the development of the gateway cities. "Little Farms, the advertisement read, "For chickens and truck farming! Where are they? Colma Farms, only eight miles south of San Francisco."[4]

The promoters viewed these "little farms" as one to two and a half acre plots (it so happened that some were several acres larger) for raising poultry, or for berries, bulbs, celery, tomatoes, artichokes, and other high yield, highly profitable crops.

Little farms replaced most of the remaining dairies and ranches in the Colma Hills and in the sandy areas that became Westlake. Indeed the small farm movement proceeded down the coastside of the peninsula toward Half Moon Bay.

While some such farms produced berries and vegetables, as the developers had suggested, others raised pigs. Hog ranches, they were called. Their owners learned that pigs could thrive in the foggy weather and could be fed swill from San Francisco restaurants and marketed with no great trouble. Hog raising proved so successful that a 1936 report indicated there were 43,000 hogs in San Mateo County.[5]

But pig farms produce an ugly smell and are unsightly, so almost from their beginning there was agitation against them. In response the farmers moved their ranches inland and continued raising pigs until the development of the subdivisions following World War II.

"PIG FARM" NEAR THE PRESENT SITE OF WESTLAKE PRIOR TO 1940

ONE OF THE LAST OF THE OLD RANCH HOUSES IN COLMA