

TEMECULA VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER



Wolf Store

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It is our mission to identify, preserve and promote the historic legacy of the Temecula Valley and to educate the public about its historical significance.

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A Major Cattle Drive in the West The Diary of a Desert Trail

By Edward L. Vail

(FORWARD: Edward, brother of Walter Vail, wrote a series describing a cattle drive that began January 1890 from Vail, Arizona to Temecula, California. The series was originally published in TEXASLAND – The Pioneer Magazine, circa 1893. The Arizona Daily Star ran a continuing column from February 22, 1922 to March 10, 1922, tantalizing readers over a two-week period. Locally, the "Diary" has been previously published in The High Country, and the VaARRA newsletter. We will be sharing this piece of history in several parts. This issue is Part One and is done with express permission of Vail family descendants.)

The idea of driving a herd of cattle across Southern Arizona to California, was by no means an original one. After the gold discovery in California, many emigrants crossed southern Arizona and the Colorado Desert to San Diego, California, with teams of mules and oxen. In the sixties and early seventies, cattle became scarce on the big ranches in California and many herds from Texas were driven over the Southern Trail. This route came through Tucson, led northwest to the Gila River, followed the river to Yuma, where it crossed the Colorado River to the more dangerous desert beyond. It must be remembered that the early cattle drivers and emigrants who took the Southern Trail to the Pacific Coast had to be prepared at all times to defend themselves, their horses and cattle from the wily Apaches along the trail through New Mexico and Arizona, as well as from the Yuma Indians who were not always friendly. Years afterward, when the old Butterfield stages were still running, graves might be seen at many of the stations and along the trail, with this simple inscription cut on a rough board: "Killed by Indians."

In 1880, the Southern Pacific Railroad reached Tucson. It was several years after that, however, before there were any surplus cattle to be shipped out of Arizona. My brother Walter L. Vail, who owned the Empire Ranch in Pima county, in those days was the first to use the railroad and up to 1890 had probably shipped as many cattle as any other of the large ranch owners in Arizona. In the fall of 1889, the S.P. Company concluded that the cattlemen in southern Arizona would stand a freight raise, so they increased the rate to certain California points about twenty-five percent. Cattle were low in price and hard to sell at that time, especially stock cattle. A vigorous protest was made by the ranchmen on the grounds that the cattle in question were not beef, but young steers that

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had to be grown and fattened after reaching the California ranches before the owners could expect to get any return from them. The railroad officials in San Francisco decided, however, that they would make no reduction, probably thinking that the ranchers would be compelled to accept the new rate, or keep their cattle in Arizona, and then ship them over the only railroad there was in this country at that time.

My brother was about to ship 1,000 steers from the Empire Ranch to the Warner Ranch near San Diego, California. Tom Turner, foreman of the Empire Ranch, had worked on the old trail from southern Texas to Dodge City, Kansas, when he was a boy, and he and I concluded that if men had driven cattle from Texas to California fifteen or twenty years before, and fought Indians nearly all the way, that we could do it too.

So, we told my brother that if he would take a chance on our losing the cattle, we would do our best to reach our destination safely. My brother had recently taken as a partner C.W. Gates, of California, and after talking the matter over together they decided that they were willing for us to try it.

So, the herd was gathered and we were soon ready to start. We had eight Mexican cowboys from the ranch and our Chinese cook, known as "John", who had worked for us for some time. He had cooked on many a round-up and could drive a four-horse team, brand a calf, or make a fair cowhand, if necessary.

We left the home ranch the 29th of January, 1890, and after watering and camping at the Andradas that night, we drove on and made a dry camp on the desert about fifteen miles southeast of Tucson. Our cattle were all steers and none of them had ever been handled on the trail before. There were over nine hundred in the bunch and as most of the big ones had been gathered in the mountains, they were very wild. The part of the desert where we made camp was covered with cholla, a cactus that has more thorns to the square inch than anything that grows in Arizona. Cowboys say that if you ride close to a cholla it will reach out and grab you or your horse and as the thorns are barbed, it is very difficult to get them out of your flesh. These thorns make very painful wounds.

About midnight our cattle made a run and in trying to hold them, cattle, horses, and men, all got pretty badly mixed up in the chollas. A cholla under a horse's belly is probably not the most comfortable thing in the world. Consequently, we had our hands full riding bucking horses and trying to quiet a lot of

wild steers at the same time. The rest of the night was mostly devoted to picking out thorns, so none of us slept much. It was fortunate that we did not lose any cattle as they were not yet off their range and any that escaped would have lost no time in getting back to their usual haunts which might have been miles from our camp. Cattle and horses raised on the open range generally stay pretty close to the location where they are raised. They may change at certain seasons on account of better grass or early rains to another part of the range, but if well located, they usually return of their own accord to their old stamping ground. Also, they have their own companions as running mates.

With breakfast before daylight our cattle were soon headed towards Tucson and I rode ahead to buy a new chuckwagon and have it loaded with provisions and ready for the road. I had two forty-gallon barrels rigged up, one on each side. John, the cook, came into town after breakfast and exchanged his old chuckwagon for a new one.

Our camp that night was to be on the Rillito Creek, just below Fort Lowell, about eight miles northeast of Tucson. We drove the cattle east of Tucson, past the present site of the University, and over what is now called the "north side," the best residence section of the city. At that time the foundations of the University's first building was just being laid and it was about a mile from there to the nearest house in town. The surrounding county was covered with grease wood (creosote-bush). A photographer from Tucson took several shots of our herd from the foundation of the University, but as I never saw any of the pictures, I think they must have been a failure. That night after we had watered the cattle in the Rillito, they were very restless and hungry and it kept us busy to hold them. We had to close-herd them to keep from losing them as the county was full of brush.

We followed the general direction of the Southern Pacific Railroad. The watering places were from fifteen to twenty miles apart until we reached Maricopa, but several times we had to water in corrals. Most of our cattle were wild and had never been in a corral before, and I am sure that many of them did not drink at all.

One night we camped between Casa Grande and Maricopa. Turner and I concluded we would try to get a good night's sleep for once. We had been sleeping with all our clothes on and our horses ready-saddled near us every night since we had left the ranch, but as the cattle had been more quiet than usual for several nights past, we concluded to take off our outside clothes and get a more refreshing sleep.

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Sometime near midnight I awoke and was surprised to find we were in the middle of the herd and a lot of big steers were lying down all around us. I woke Tom quietly and asked him what he thought of our location. He answered, "The only thing to do is to keep quiet. The boys know we are here and will work the cattle away from us as soon as they can do so safely. If the steers don't get scared we are all right." I knew it was the only thing to do, but was a little nervous never-the-less, and every time I heard a steer move or take a long breath it made me more so.

The boys moved the cattle away from us a short distance and not long after that we had the worst stampede of the whole trip. Tom and I jumped on our horses without stopping to dress and we finally got most of the steers together, but as it was still dark, we could not tell whether we had them all or not. As soon as we had the cattle quieted, we made a fire and put on our clothes. We were nearly frozen. I have rounded up cattle at all seasons of the year, but never before in my night clothes, in the early part of February, and at midnight. To make it worse the county was full of washes and holes and "Billito", Tom's horse fell down with him but Tom said that when he got up without his rider, he commenced to herd the cattle on his own account by running around them and pushing the stragglers in.

As soon as it was daylight, we counted our steers and found we were short one hundred and fifty head and we missed a good many of the big mountain steers that we remembered as the wildest of the bunch. We soon found their trail going north and from their tracks could easily tell that they were on the run. We must have travelled eight or ten miles before we caught sight of them, and they were still on the trot. We were then on the Pima Indian Reservation near the Gila River. The Indians were on the hills all around us and they made some objections to our driving the cattle back, but we paid no attention to them and took the bunch back to camp where the rest of our boys were holding the herd.

The next day we reached Maricopa. At this point there was a choice of two routes; one went north and then followed the Gila River which makes a big bend to the north near there. This route would give us plenty of water but would take us many miles out of our way. The other way was to follow the old stage coach along the S.P.R.R. to near Gila Station and then drop down to the river. This meant a drive of fifty miles without water, but it was about half as far as the other route and gave us a chance of finding a little more grass for our cattle, as well as our horses,

which needed it badly. As we expected, our trail ran through a very poor country to find grass or other feed for either horses or cattle. We had two horses to each man and few extra in case of an emergency although on a large ranch each cowboy has ten or twelve horses. We hauled barley in our chuck wagon and fed all our horses twice a day. We had several young saddle mules and some of them were very "broncho" especially about feeding time. There was one little roan mule in particular that was as wild as a hawk when we started but soon got acquainted with John, the cook, and come to the wagon for pieces of bread. There was also a little brown yearling steer the boys called "Brownie" and said he was "muy valiente" (very brave) because he always travelled with the leaders of the herd when we were on the move. When camp was made Brownie would pay us a visit and eat any scraps.

(To be continued next month)

Volunteers Needed

We would like to invite you to join the dynamic group of people who help the Temecula Valley Historical Society provide so much educational fun for people at Vail HQ and the Little Temecula History Center.

Don't sit around feeling bored! Do something fun and make new memories! Please contact our volunteer coordinator Bonnie Reed at 760-484-6019 for details on how to get started!

Directors Wanted

Would you like to join the Temecula Valley Historical Society Board of Directors? Please contact Rebecca Farnbach, Nominating Committee Chair, by emailing sunbrook@hotmail.com or by texting (951) 775-6057.

Membership News

Thanks to renewing Members:

**Amber Gentry
Julie Gilbert
Dennis Hibberts
Barbara Lamb
Joann Mitcham
Sally Myers
Bryant Rich
Valeri Sexton
Dana Thoman
Nathan Russell Vail III**

100 Years Ago in Temecula

Selected items from Lake Elsinore Valley Press, Temecula Gossip Column — August 1923

August 3, 1923

By Mrs. V. B. Sands

Mrs. William Wolf was visiting old friends here last week. Mrs. Wolf's husband was a son of Louis Wolf, who at one time owned the Pauba ranch and store where Alessandro, in Helen Hunt Jackson's Ramona went after his violin.

Mr. and Mrs. A.B. Barnett were Los Angeles visitors last Thursday.

Albert Otto has been hired as driver for the school bus for the coming school year.

Mahlon Vail is a Los Angeles visitor this week.

George Sawday shipped twelve cars of cattle to Los Angeles Monday.

August 10, 1923

By Mrs. V. B. Sands

Temecula, August 9 – Mrs. W.M. Friedemann delightfully entertained last Friday afternoon in honor of her son, Billie's birthday. Many games were played until all were called into the beautifully decorated dining room where the table was set for the nine little guests, in the center of the table was a large yellow and white basket with yellow streamers running to the place cards and each little guest pulled his streamer and found at the end a gift which called forth many "Oh's. Delicious refreshments of ice cream and cake were served and a big white cake with seven yellow candles held the place of honor. The guests were Marjorie and Betty Swanguen, Georgie Young, Vera and Vernon Knott, Francis and Chester Barnett, Gilbert Helms and Billie Friedemann.

Mr. and Mrs. A.A. Barnett were guests of Mr. and Mrs. A.B. Barnett several days last week.

August 17, 1923

By Mrs. V. B. Sands

Temecula, August 15 – The Temecula Indians and the Riverside Colored Giants played ball on the Murrieta Hot Springs diamond Sunday afternoon. The first few innings they endeavored to out talk each other but after deciding to call it a draw settled down and tried to play regular baseball, resulting in a score of 10 to 8 in favor of the Indians. Tano pitched the entire game for the Indians, while the Giants tried to reverse the score by using three twirlers. As a rule the Giants and Indians play a very close, interesting game but for some

unknown reason this teams got started on the wrong foot Sunday nevertheless all the "fans" received their money's worth in comedy and streaks of brilliant ball playing.

Loren Fernald and Miss Marjorie Barrows both of San Jacinto were married in Los Angeles Saturday evening. Mr. Fernald lived here with his parents until a few years ago when they moved to San Jacinto. The young couple will reside in Los Angeles.

What might have been a serious accident occurred at the concrete bridge between Temecula and Murrieta Saturday afternoon when H.R. Price struck the end of the bridge, damaging the front end of the car, himself sustaining cuts and bruises from the flying glass. Mr. Price was meeting another car and endeavoring to keep entirely on his side of the road came in contact with the bridge, the slow speed of his car was the only thing that prevented a serious accident.

The Bank was closed all day last Friday in memory of our late President. (Researcher's note: President Warren Harding died August 2, 1923)

August 24, 1923

By Mrs. V. B. Sands

Temecula, August 22 – A.J. Escallier has returned from a motor trip through the northwest. Mr. Escallier tells some wonderful "fish stories" of the streams of Washington, Idaho, and Oregon, and has some really, truly pictures which substantiate the stories. Richard Escallier, Philip Freeman and Harold Clogston are in training at San Diego preparing to join the navy.

The Temecula Valley Lumber Company received a large car of lumber Monday.

Tom Tune motored to San Jacinto Sunday to visit with his sister, Mrs. Edward Ralston, of Tulare, California, who is visiting there and whom he has not seen for ten years

The Temecula Valley Lumber Company received a large car of lumber Monday.

Miss E. DeWolf of Pasadena, who is riding horseback through the country to San Diego, spent Sunday here.

The Temecula Indians and the Meadowbrook Sluggers of San Bernardino played ball on the Murrieta Hot Springs diamond Sunday afternoon. The score was 6 to 1 in favor of the Indians. Tano pitched the entire game.