

The Boston Ranch

By Ken Morrill



Try to picture the city of San Francisco as it looked following the discovery of gold in California in 1848. Can you imagine the undeveloped grass covered hillsides, the changing landscape as new buildings were constructed and the fact that cows roamed nearly everywhere there were not buildings? Cows were a common sight in San Francisco in the second half of the nineteenth century. Dairymen, during these early years, grazed their cattle in the fields of the Presidio, in Cow Hollow, on the slopes of Twin Peaks, south of the Mission district, along the shore at Brisbane, up Visitation and Guadalupe Valleys and all across the Peninsula to the south.

Dairying was an important part of San Francisco's past yet today perhaps the only evidence of its existence, apart from old photographs, are the milk bottles that were left on the doorsteps of the cities residents. Although bottled milk was not available in San Francisco until 1888, these bottles are a reminder of a lifestyle long forgotten in this city.

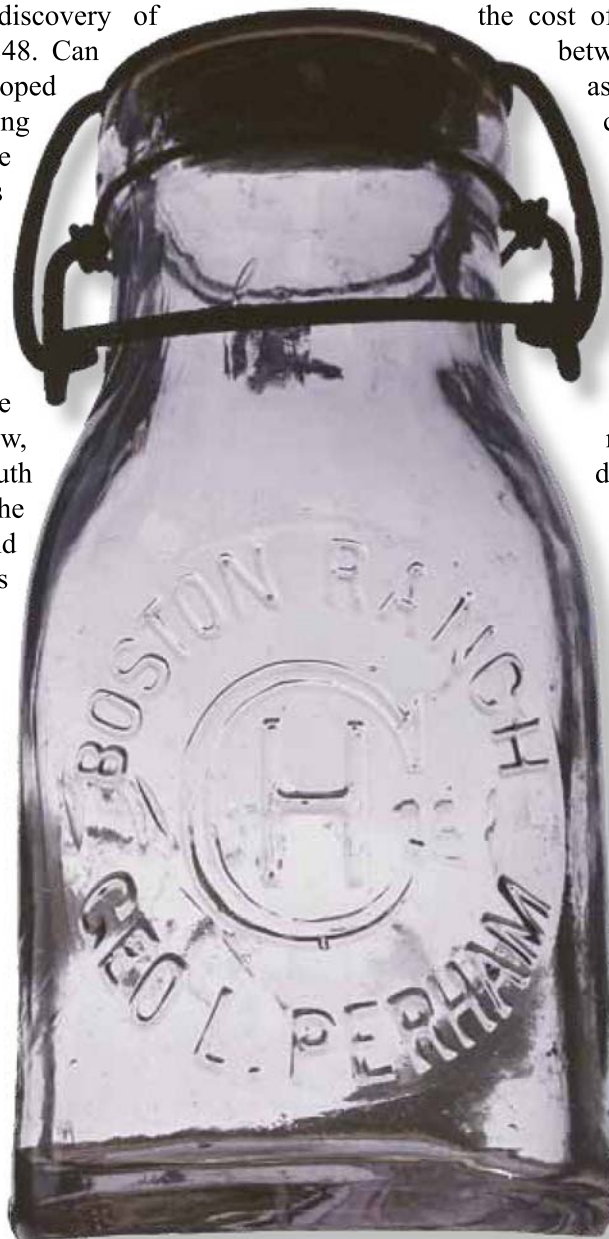
Milk bottles were to be washed and returned to the milkman every day and were reused until lost or destroyed, consequently very few remain today.

There were more than one hundred dairies supplying San Francisco at the end of the

nineteenth century but few were large enough to bear the cost of bottling their milk. Competition between dairies kept milk prices low, as little as five cents per quart, and consequently most dairies delivered their milk from three gallon cans, carried on horse drawn wagons. A measuring device was used to dip the milk from the can and place it into a receptacle supplied by the customer. This was a highly unsanitary method of distribution and also allowed many unscrupulous dealers to water down or adulterate their milk. Many San Francisco dairies did not favor the practice of bottling milk and it would take a quarter of a century from the bottles inception to finally replace the antiquated system of dipping from cans.

Deliveries were available twice daily to accommodate the twice daily milking of the cows as well as to ensure fresh milk to customers who had no refrigeration. Milk at that time was raw and unprocessed and without refrigeration could not be kept fresh for more than a day. It would not be until the early twentieth century that the process of pasteurization and development of refrigeration would allow the customer to keep their milk fresh for days.

Recently an early half pint milk bottle was discovered,



"Tin top" Boston Ranch half-pint milk bottle

from a milk dealer who played a very important role in San Francisco's dairy industry, having roots tracing back to the Gold Rush. This bottle is known as a "tin top" milk because of the tin coated metal lid that was used to seal the mouth. It is embossed with a monogram of a "C" encircling an "H", Boston Ranch, Geo. L. Perham.

The meaning of the monogram and the story that follows unfolded after discovering a letter written in the 1940's to the California district of the Borden's Dairy Delivery Company.

The explosive growth of San Francisco following the Gold Rush created great demand for milk, cream, butter and cheese. Many of the gold seekers, with experience in dairying, left the mines and came back to the Bay Area to establish dairies. The climate and vegetation that existed in this area was ideal for cattle. Large and small dairy operations flourished in and around San Francisco for decades as the demand for milk increased.

However, with increasing land values and property development, as well as mounting pressure from health concerns over keeping cows in the city, dairymen were either forced out of business or had to relocate their herds to surrounding counties where grazing land was still available.

Among the gold seekers that came to California to find their fortune was Hiram Penny Clifford. The lure of riches and a new life prompted Hiram to bring his wife, Martha, and their three young sons; Clarence (7), Daniel (5), and Hersey (5 mo.), to California. The family left Bridgewater, Massachusetts in 1856 and traveled to Panama where they crossed the Isthmus to continue on to San Francisco. From there they traveled up the Sacramento River and on to Oroville, finally settling at Tarr's ranch near Bidwell's bar on the Feather River.

Although Bidwell's Bar yielded a fortune in gold, by the time Hiram arrived the placers were largely played out. The 1860 federal census lists Hiram's occupation as a carpenter so



Hiram Clifford

it is likely that he found it easier to support a growing family by working for wages.

Martha gave birth to a daughter, Jennie, in 1859 and five years later to a fourth son whom they named Ulysses S. Grant. The Clifford's remained in the Oroville area until moving to San Francisco in 1869.

Hiram purchased a ranch located northwest of the Mission Delores on the corner of Castro and Fourteenth streets. He named his dairy the Boston Ranch and it is likely that his cows grazed on the slopes of Twin Peaks where water was available from several springs and a small stream that flowed by the mission.

In 1872 Hiram purchased a larger ranch south of the Mission district in the University mound Tract area. The



The Clifford house

family moved in to a large two story home on the corner of Cambridge and Bacon and they had several large barns nearby to house the dairy operation.

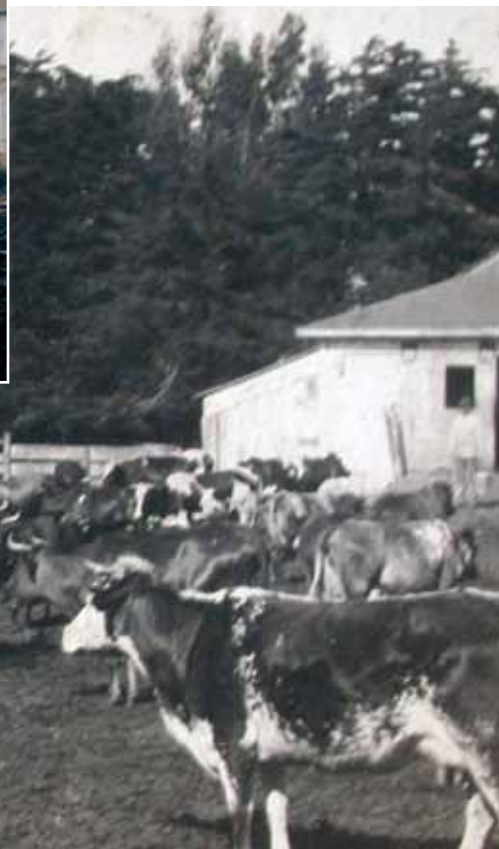
As the Clifford boys grew older they assisted their father with the business. In 1877 Hiram took in a partner, Alpheus Talbot, and an office and depot was opened at 35 Eddy. The business was called Clifford and Talbot but the partnership only lasted a year. Hiram maintained the office and depot at 35 Eddy and Daniel and Hersey worked as deliverymen. When Hiram's youngest son, Grant, had finished school in 1882, at the age of 18, he became a deliveryman.

While on a trip back to his home state of Maine, in 1883, Hiram passed away. The Boston Ranch was carried on by Hersey and Grant, both serving



Boston Ranch barns and silos

Cows and dairy workers at Boston Farm



as proprietors throughout the rest of the 1880's.

Hersey met the daughter of another successful gold seeker turned dairyman by the name of William Edgar Randall. William traveled with his wife from Boston, Massachusetts to California, via the Cape Horn route, and arrived in San Francisco in 1850. They found their way to Murphy's Camp and established a claim that proved quite rich. After leaving the gold fields the Randalls eventually purchased 1400 acres in Bolinas, Marin County, to operate a dairy. Most of the milk was made in to butter that was shipped to San Francisco.

Hersey married Mary Lorraine Randall in 1886 and over the next four years had three children. The first child, Rue Randall, became a school teacher and well respected member and contributor to the South San Francisco community. In the 1940's she wrote to her cousin, George Sheldon Perham (president of the Dairy Delivery Company), about the history of her

grandfather's (Hiram Clifford) dairy. It was from this correspondence that I discovered the relationship between the Clifford's and Perham's and a wealth of information about many of the other early San Francisco milk dealers.

In 1875 a fourteen year old boy, by the name of George Lawrence Perham

and his mother came to California with another family by the name of Shafter. The Perham's had been living with the Shafter's on a farm in Vermont and apparently decided to follow the Shafter's to a dairy ranch they bought near San Jose on the slopes of Mt. Hamilton.

Some time in the 1880's George and his mother moved to San Francisco and George got a job delivering papers. Living in San Francisco he chanced to meet Hiram Clifford's daughter, Jennie, and they were married in 1888. The following year Jennie gave birth to a daughter, Ina C. and George's career was about to take a turn from paper deliveyman to milkman.

In 1890 George and Jennie moved into the ranch house at the corner of Cambridge and Bacon and joined Hersey and Grant in running the Boston Ranch. The partnership was called U.S. Clifford and Co. In 1893 Jennie gave birth to a son, George Sheldon, or "Shel" as he was later known by his friends.



George L. Perham

For thirty years the cows of the Boston Ranch grazed on land south of the Mission district and the milk was distributed from the depot at 35 Eddy. The depot also served as a location where the cities milkmen held meetings and could pick up their mail. It became the milkman's headquarters and here, with the encouragement of George L. Perham, the first drivers union was created.

In 1897 George L. Perham became the sole proprietor of the Boston Ranch and Grant and Hersey went on to pursue other interests. Grant became the assistant grand secretary for the grand lodge I.O.O.F. and Hersey made a living as an inventor.

The great earthquake and fire of 1906 was a turning point for dairies and milk dealers that served San Francisco.

For the next five years George ran the Boston Ranch while living at the home on the corner of Cambridge and Bacon, with his cows grazing the hills to the west and south.

In 1902 the Boston Ranch joined force with the Pacific dairy and the business was renamed the Boston Ranch and Pacific Dairy. The herds were moved to the hills of Baden, now known as South San Francisco. George moved his family to Baden and the depot in San Francisco was relocated to 2779 Folsom street.

The great earthquake and fire of 1906 was a turning point for dairies and milk dealers that served San Francisco. The Boston Ranch and Pacific Dairy in Baden was probably not seriously damaged but their business in San Francisco temporarily evaporated. Many of the city milk depots were destroyed by the devastating fire that followed the quake. For businesses that relied on daily deliveries and monthly billings the loss of depots, equipment, records and customers created havoc for all of the dairies.

Two hundred thousand refugees were created by the earthquake and fire but their needs were partially met with the help of many of the cities milk dealers. George L. Perham joined forces with seven other leading San Francisco dairies to provide free milk to the cities refugees. For six days following the earthquake, milk was brought into the city and dispensed from cans into whatever receptacle the homeless had to receive it.

These previously competing companies cooperated in sharing equipment, supplies, personnel and experience to enable the free distribution of milk to the cities homeless.

This arrangement was so successful that the eight dairies formed a legal partnership and became the Dairy Delivery Company.

In 1906 George L. Perham became the first president and his depot on Folsom street became one of four branch stores for the company. A new plant was completed that year, at 3550



The Dairy Delivery Company delivery wagons at 19th St. plant Bottle (above right) is a quart Dairy Delivery Company bottle.



These bottles were cheaper, easier to use, maintain, wash and thus were more sanitary than the tin top bottles.



Quart milk bottles in horse-drawn delivery wagon



Early delivery trucks for the Dairy Delivery Company.

product. One of the operations that could be observed was a new bottle capping system, utilizing a device that could seal hundreds of bottles per hour and was the first of its kind to be used on the west coast. A new style of bottle was used that had a rim (cap seat) inside the mouth of the bottle. These bottles were cheaper, easier to use, maintain, wash and thus were more sanitary than the tin top bottles.

For over 25 years George L. Perham was a highly respected member of the San Francisco dairy industry, continually striving to improve the quality of milk and service provided to the cities residents. While living in San Mateo county George also played an active role in improving the counties highway system. In 1913 George moved to Hillsborough and maintained his position as president of the Dairy Delivery Company until his death in 1915, at the age of 54.

George's son, Shel, was 22 at the time of his fathers passing and he was already moving up the ranks of the company. He started work in the dairy business, as a teen, breaking in the horses that were used to pull the companies milk wagons. Later he drove the trucks which replaced the horse drawn wagons. In 1920 he had become a director of the Dairy Delivery Company.

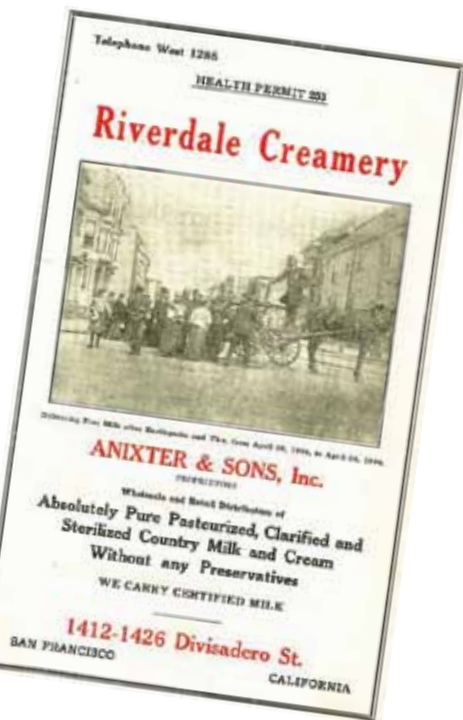
Shel married Francis Bell in 1921. They had four children; Jane, George Sheldon Jr., Patricia and Arthur Francis. George Sheldon Jr. was born

in 1929; the same year that the Dairy Delivery Company was purchased by Borden's forming the Borden's Dairy Delivery Company.

Shel, like his father, was well respected by his peers and employees. His consistent work for improvements in the dairy industry included, serving as director of the California Dairy Council and the Milk Institute of California. In 1930 Shel was the vice president of the California district of the Borden's Dairy Delivery Company and later went on to become president and Chairmen of the board until his retirement in 1949. Sheldon died in 1955, being survived by his wife and three of his children.

Luckily, my search for family members was rewarded by finding that George Sheldon Jr. still resides in California; however neither George or his brother entered the dairy business thus ending 80 years of family involvement in San Francisco's dairy industry. At the age of 82, George Sheldon Jr. and his wife Ann operate a bed and breakfast and farm 30 acres of vineyard. They have graciously provided me with many photographs and helped fill some gaps in my research on the Clifford and Perham families.

For information about San Francisco dairies and milk dealers, or the bottles they used, prior to 1910, contact me at arrowheadfarms@cruzio.com.



19th street, which was considered the most modern and sanitary dairy operation on the west coast. This location was the headquarters for all the company's dairy operations from receiving through bottling and distribution. The plant was over 20,000 square feet and included rooms for management and employees, receiving, processing, bottling, cold storage, creamery, laboratory, bottle storage, bottle washing, blacksmith shop, machinery room, retail sales room as well as stables and an 8700 square foot wagon shed.

The cities residents were encouraged to tour the plant so they could observe first hand the degree of care taken to provide a clean and wholesome