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THE LEFTOVERS

Issue #26

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This is the second submission by a member of the Castro family, direct descendants of Francisco Castro and his son, Victor, who founded the Rancho San Pablo and Rancho El Sobrante. Evelyn Castro Miller is the younger sister of Janice Castro, whose article is featured in our Fall 2017 issue. Unless otherwise noted, photos courtesy of the Castro Family.

Branding Days on the Ranch



Castro Ranch home. Percy, Sr. (PL) on horse.

I grew up in the 1950s-60s on the last part of an old Spanish land grant called Rancho El Sobrante. It was allotted to my great great grandfather, Victor Castro and his brother, Juan Jose and had covered over 20,000 acres in Contra Costa

County. "El Sobrante" means "the outskirts" or "the leftovers" in Spanish, not a particularly flattering name, but was called this because of where it lay, between the borders of existing land grants in areas of San Pablo, Pinole, Orinda, Lafayette and Moraga. Our ranch ran along both sides of Castro Ranch Road and consisted of 120 acres.

The house where I lived with my parents, Percy and Evelyn Castro and my older siblings, Jim and Janice, was built by my great grandfather, Patricio Castro,



Hunting party, c.1870. Patricio Castro is the young man on the right. Photo courtesy of the Contra Costa County Historical Society



PL and Rose entering carriage, wedding day, Orinda, 1913



PL and Rose's wedding party. Patricio is the bearded man in the back, in the dark vest. PL is sitting 5th from left, with "Rose to his right

when he took up residence there in 1865. He was one of the first settlers in the valley. It was a small two-bedroom ranch house, with a newer addition in the front where my grandfather, Percy (known as PL) Castro lived with his eldest daughter, Bernice, and her husband. A white fence wrapped around the front lawn with a loveseat in one corner. Two pear trees planted by my grandmother, Rose, stood at either side of the gates. An arbor covered in grapevines provided a shady spot for parking. Mature eucalyptus trees stood here and there around the house.

There was also a meat plant and slaughterhouse, corrals, a barn and tack house, a small cabin and some other structures. We had dogs, cats, horses, a pony, and at times, chickens and a milk cow.

Early Years on the Ranch



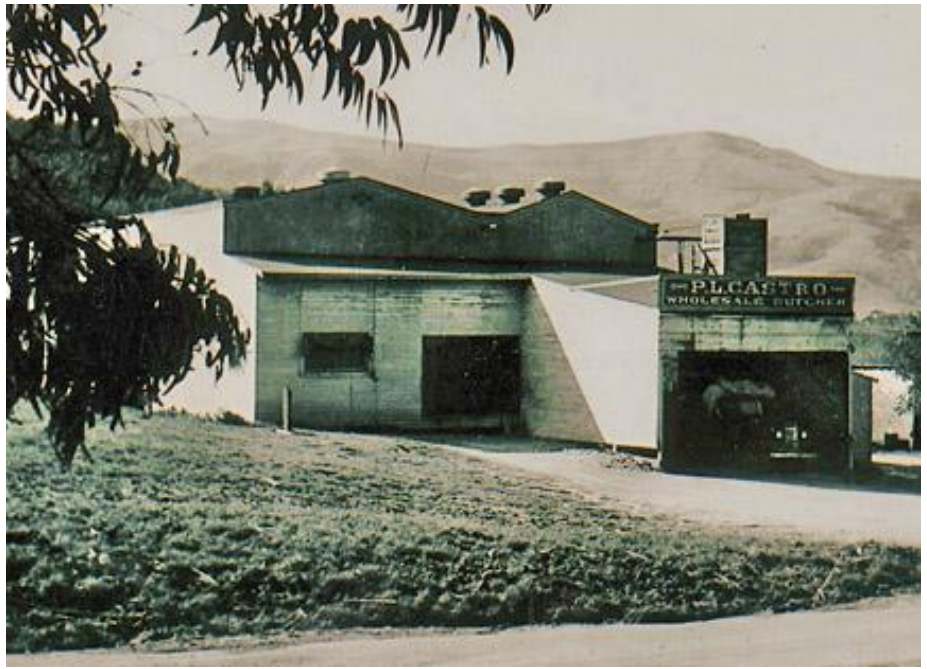
Third from left, sitting: PL, Rose, Percy (author's father) Patricio far right, c. 1916

died of Scarlet Fever in 1926. But life went on. A couple of years later PL married Martha Killen and they had a daughter, Mona. Dad, being the oldest, would drive his sisters and brothers to school in a buckboard. Most of the travel was done by horse and buggy in those days.

My grandfather was born in the same house we lived in, as were my father and his siblings. The youngest of six children, PL helped his father operate the ranch, running cattle and raising hay. In 1913, he married my grandmother, Rose Cunningham. They were to have six children: Percy, Bernice, Dorothy, Vic, Vern, and Patricia. My father remembered the doctor named Fernandez who would drive out from Pinole in a buggy to help deliver the babies. Tragically, Rose

Castro Meat Company

PL built a slaughterhouse in 1916 and started a wholesale meat business. The San Pablo Reservoir was under construction at that time and there was a high demand for meat to supply the work camps. He also sold to families in the valley. The business expanded as more people moved to the area, and it was to last for nearly seventy years. He oversaw the operations, and sold only USDA Prime and USDA Choice beef. In the 1940s, my father delivered meat all over the Bay Area in a meat truck. Later on, he and his sister, Bea, helped run the business.



PL Castro Meat Company

In the 1960s, my parents took over ownership of the business. Instead of utilizing the slaughterhouse, they closed it and purchased beef from other wholesale meat plants in the Bay Area. All members of our family worked there. Customers liked to come out and select a side or a quarter of beef and customize how they wanted it cut and wrapped. Many times I would see an entire family sitting on a long bench inside the cutting room, watching as their order was processed. Customers with home freezers could pick up their order already cut, wrapped and frozen.

Cattle Ranching and Rodeos



Castro family gathering cattle, 1930s

In addition to the El Sobrante ranch, my grandfather ran cattle on several thousand acres of land near Crockett and in Hayward. The whole family rode and worked as a team, gathering and moving them from one location to another, sometimes for several miles.

In the 1930s, the Castros hosted rodeos every year. These were two-day events

that took place in a clearing above where Olinda School now stands. There was a grandstand accommodating 2,000 seats, plus more seating available elsewhere. A typical show started on a Saturday morning with a Grand Entry Parade down MacDonald Avenue in Richmond. One year it was led by a famous Arizona steer named Johnnie, as cowboys, cowgirls, stage coaches, and floats followed. At 2:00 there was a second parade for the opening ceremonies at the ranch, followed by the rodeo. PL's trick horse, Lucille, performed. There were bucking horses, ropings, races, steer wrestling, and other events. Families were welcome to join in the parades and competitions, and prizes and ribbons were given out by Martha Castro.



Vic and Vern, team roping, Klamath Falls, Or., 1957

Vern began at the young age of sixteen. He competed in rodeos, making annual trips to Madison Square Garden, but still managed to work part-time on the ranch. Together they won the World Championship Team Roping title in 1942, and Vern won it again in 1955 with a different partner. He also won All-Around Cowboy three times at the Ellensburg Rodeo in Washington, and is a member of the Professional Cowboy Hall of Fame there. Both of my uncles, besides being honored in the rodeo world, were known and respected as cattlemen. Both were cattle buyers and had ranches in Livermore and Oakdale.

Pl and Martha, at Uncle Vern's wedding, around 1949. Back, from left: Patricia, PL, Martha Castro. Front, from left: Vic, Bernice, Mona, Dorothy, Percy (author's father)



Rodeo poster, 1930s

Saturday night, a street dance was held in Richmond. On Sunday morning, there would be a barbecue at the ranch at 11:00 and the rodeo would start up again at 1:30

I must stop here and give a nod to my two uncles, Vic and Vern Castro. They started competing in rodeos early in life and went on to win many titles.

Branding Day



Vic Castro, gathering cattle, place and date unknown

Every year, there was a big roundup on the ranch, known as Branding Day. All the cattle were brought over from the hayfield across the road to the main ranch. It was a big undertaking with a lot of people on hand to help. It was also a time to reunite with family members and friends, eat good food, and catch up. I will try to describe what it was like for me as a young child. These were some of the last times we would ever have a roundup. Times were changing and within a few years, this way of life would end.

It is early in the morning as I walk down to the barn and look towards the corrals. There are already a dozen empty horse trailers parked in the morning sun. The cowboys have already arrived and are busy gathering cattle across the road. It will take them a few hours to get all of them from the eighty-acres of land. More people keep arriving and excitement mounts as we wait for the cattle to come up our driveway. Just before they are taken across the road, my mother will be down there, blocking traffic with the car.

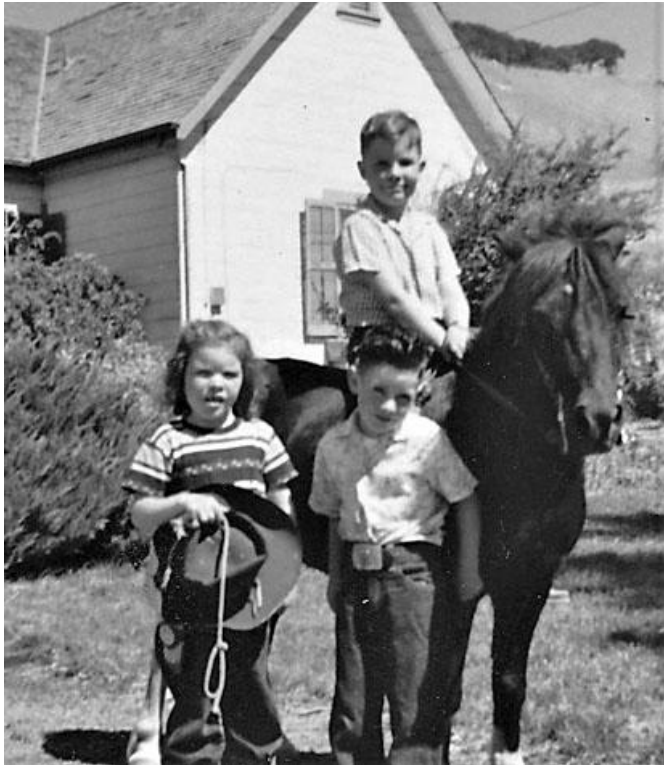
Keeping quiet and out of sight was a must when the cattle arrived. The younger ones had never been out of their field before or seen people and we were careful not to startle them. I remember watching from the meat plant porch one time; another time I was standing by the barn.

An older cow named Brenda was a familiar face. She was a white-faced Angus/Hereford cross with pointy horns that curved outward, and was one of the first cows to arrive. She knew exactly where to go and ended up in the lead. It is wonderful to see the way matriarchs exist in herds, whether they are cattle, buffalo or elephants...an older, protective female leading the way. The men rode on all sides, guiding them forward. My grandfather's Australian Shepherd, Mickey, was always in the mix. He wouldn't miss this for the world.

After they were contained in the corrals, the cows and calves were separated from each other. In the next several hours, a lot of work would be done. The heifers and bull calves had to be roped and branded, earmarked and dehorned. Cattle were identified by a certain brand and earmark. Ours was the PC brand. If they were growing horns, they were removed early to avoid problems such as getting themselves caught in a fence, having the horns grow inward towards the head, or injuring each other during shipping. Bull calves were castrated. Steers were raised to be fattened up for beef production.

All of the cattle were checked over and put through a “dip,” which was an enclosed trailer designed to spray them for bugs. It is important to do this once a year to keep the cattle safe from ticks, fleas, etc. They would be sent down a narrow chute to the dip machine and when the doors opened, step up and stand inside. A man stationed at the top would turn on a valve of water that was mixed with pesticide and it would douse them all over. This was done very quickly. Another set of doors would open and they would jump out.

We’d sit on the fence and watch as long as we felt like it. I enjoyed seeing my uncles helping out since I thought that they could throw a rope better than anyone there, but it was also tempting to run off and see what the other kids were up to.



There were plenty of things to do with our cousins and friends, starting with our animals. We had a dog named Sandy who sometimes had puppies to show. There were always cats and kittens around. We could ride our black Shetland pony, Prince. Or catch pollywogs in a water trough, go down to the creek, jump off bales of hay in the barn, or just sit under a tree and talk. I remember making milkshakes in the kitchen. Those are some of the memories I have of those days.

Left: Sister Janice and cousin Joseph, with Jim, on Prince

Lunch was served in the main house and outside. My grandfather proudly barbecued steaks while my aunts and mother helped serve the side dishes. If they saw one of us run by, they would ask if we’d eaten yet. Sometimes you forget to eat when you’re having fun. I can still see myself sitting on the hood of a car with a plate of food on my lap, watching PL barbecuing and

talking with our guests. My sister, Janice was told an anecdote by our Auntie Bea about one guest, in particular. Slim Pickens showed up one time. He was a friend of our uncles, and had been a professional rodeo clown before he turned to acting in television westerns and movies. She said he fit right in with everyone else, as he was a natural cowboy, raised on a ranch in the Fresno area.

During the lull in the day when then men were having lunch, their horses were tied up in a row by the corrals. As much as I wanted to ride one, they were “off-limits” to us children. They were there to work and needed a rest as much as the men did. As the afternoon work was finishing up, the cows were obviously missing their calves, and the babies missed their mamas. Their lowing and bellowing grew louder until, finally, the gates swung open and they were allowed to find each other again. It was a good feeling to see them reuniting after a long day. Mama cows smelling their poor little tired babies showed me how animals have feelings, too.

Then it was time to drive them back to their field. This did not take as long to do, as they were more than eager to get back to their home across the road.



People left, little by little, but others stayed for more socializing. We played outside until dark, doing what a lot of children did in the '50s. We had gunfights with our cap guns until we ran out of caps. We girls made up a game called Horses. Some of us were the horses and the others played men who captured us and tied us up until one of the other horses galloped by to set us free. Of course, there was also Hide-and-go-Seek and Tag.

Eventually, we went inside the house where the adults were congregated. I remember how the moths fluttered around the porch light, how the warm living room smelled of coffee and cigarettes, and also, my aunt giving me some pie.

*Standing, from left: Janice and Evelyn Castro.
Seated are cousins Ticia and Mona, early 1950s*

Saying our final goodbyes was hard. Our Salinas cousins had a long drive ahead of them and they'd pile into their station wagon. One time, someone sneaked a kitten into the backseat. It wasn't until they'd gone down the road a few miles before it was discovered. My uncle had to turn the car around and come back. Then, there were our family friends, the Marrons. Our fathers were not only best friends since high school, but they were also butchers who worked together through the years. Whenever we got a chance to get together with them, we had endless fun. As soon as everyone was accounted for and ready to say goodbye, our dads would start talking again someone would slip away.

The Next Day

The next morning, everything seems too quiet. The horse trailers are gone. No more cowboys throwing lassos, no cattle, dust, smoke or noise. Cousins and friends are gone. The only trace of yesterday to be found is the way the ground is stirred up in the empty corrals. But our dog, Ponchie, is trotting ahead of me and I see my brother and sister over by the gate, so I guess I'll go see what they're up to.

Life is good.



Standing, Jim Castro. Seated, from left: Evelyn, Ponchie, Janice and puppy

ESHS EYES FIRST HISTORICAL MUSEUM

Maurice Abraham



Situated alongside San Pablo Creek is an older ranch-style home, part of the El Sobrante Library civic complex. Formerly our District 1 Supervisorial office, today it's home to the Friends of the Library organization (Friends). Under the leadership of Supervisor John Gioia, and with the cooperation of the Friends organization, a portion of the old home is now destined to become home to the El Sobrante Historical Museum.

Supervisor Gioia, who has long talked of a historical museum in this building, turned talk into action after the adjacent creek-side mini-park, amphitheater and other Library grounds improvements were completed. He has assembled a working group of County staff and local stakeholders, making clear his goal of expanding the use of this County-owned building to make it more community oriented and encourage public use of the new amphitheater.

Since its founding in 2011, a local history museum has been a vision of the El Sobrante Historical Society. We are pleased to know our vision will now become a reality. Working with the County staff, plans are underway to make certain improvements to the building that will facilitate consolidation of the Friends operation and free up two rooms for the museum. The improvements will include creating a book storage room by enclosing a rear porch area now used by SPAWNERS for equipment

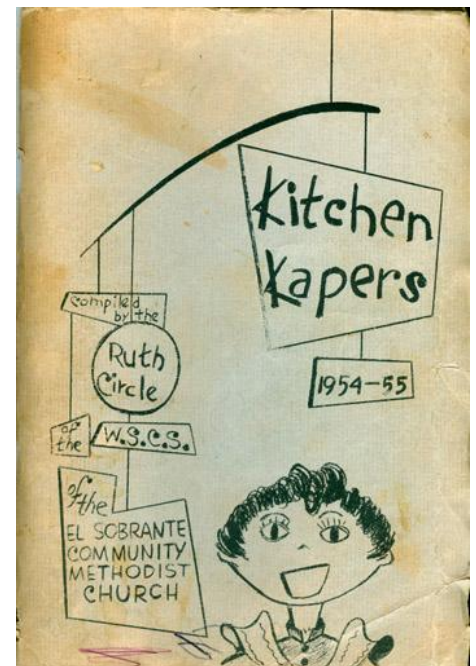
storage. SPAWNERS is a volunteer organization that cares for the Library's native garden, the adjacent creek area and sites along other El Sobrante creeks.

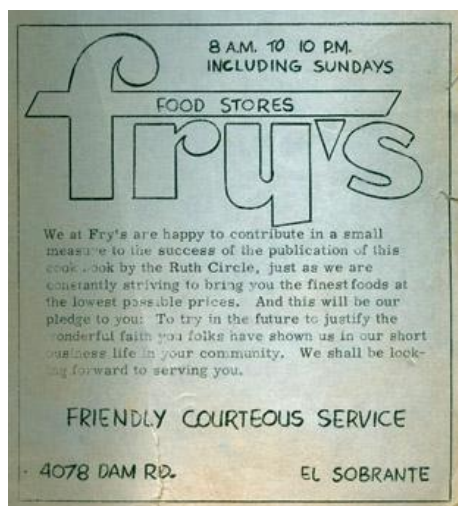
A separate storage building will be constructed for SPAWNERS as part of relocating the library's trash bin enclosure which, in its current location, was determined a fire hazard for the library building. A recent fire of as-yet-unknown cause started next to the existing enclosure, making its way into the roof and wall of the close-by library building.

With planning well underway, actual building improvements should coincide with fire damage repairs and upgrades to the library itself. Outfitting the new museum space with various furnishings, artifacts and exhibits will follow. Although a precise schedule is not yet available, future issues of this newsletter will provide progress updates as well as fundraiser announcements. Stay tuned.

New Acquisitions:

The Society recently received two cookbooks from Mary Egger, who was a member of the El Sobrante Community Methodist Church. The book pictured here is the earlier one. The second is undated, but was produced around 1960. Both contain wonderful recipes and also,

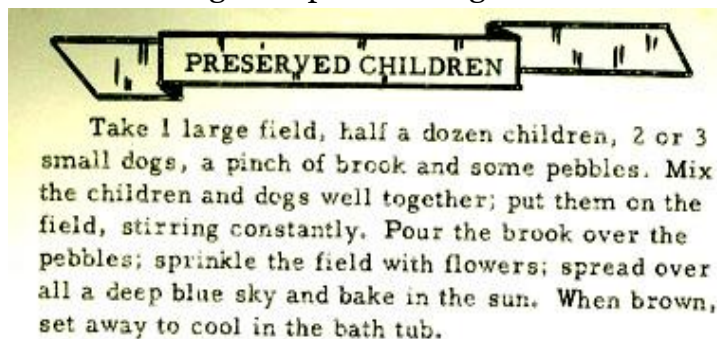




interestingly, great ads for local businesses, including this one from the local Fry's grocery store, which pretty much establishes that that the current Fry's

electronics store had its start right here in El Sobrante.

We also love the "words of wisdom" bits, such as the following excerpt on raising kids:



Thank you, Mary!



Royal Jersey Milk Bottles

Our Secretary, Lyle Miller, received two Royal Jersey milk bottles from one of his customers. Royal Jersey sold milk here in El Sobrante after the Skow Dairy (Richmond Farm Creamery) closed shop in 1955. They were located

near the intersection of the Dam Road and El Portal, on the south side of the street. They operated until sometime in the 1980s.

We still do not have a Richmond Farm Creamery bottle, so if any of our members know of one for donation or sale, please let us know.

The Leftovers is published quarterly. Articles for publication are encouraged, as are comments. See e-mail address below.

The El Sobrante Historical Society is a formal nonprofit organization, and donations may be tax-deductible. We are dedicated to the preservation and display of the history of the community of El Sobrante. We depend on our members and local residents for the information, artifacts, and photographs that make up the society's collection. Become a member and help out! It's free and simple. Just visit the website, at eshist.org.

Visit us on **Facebook**.

Mission Statement

To promote the awareness and appreciation of El Sobrante Valley history through preservation and education, and chronicling of the community's heritage for current and future generations.

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