

DIG DEEPER INTO CATTLE BRANDS

This reading aligns with the [California History-Social Science Framework for Fourth Grade](#) and following [History-Social Content Science Standards](#): 4.2.5, 4.2.6, 4.2.8, 4.4.2.

Cattle Introduced to the New World (mid 1700s)

The Spanish brought the practice of cattle branding to the New World. Cattle as well as other plants and animals were brought with the conquistadors and missionaries that framed the colonization process.

Process of Branding

During the spring and fall roundups, calves receive a brand. The calf or cow is held down with the help of a few people. The branding irons are heated in the fire and then placed on the hindquarter, hip, shoulder, or side of the animal. After placing the hot brand on the cow, the hair would be removed, forever leaving the brand design on the body.



Branded Cow Hide
MSJC Archives

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California Mission Cattle Products (mid 1700s to mid 1800s)

The California Missions heavily relied upon the products that came from the raising of cattle. Mission San Juan Capistrano used cattle for many different needs including:

- Food: beef and dairy products
- Tallow: lye Soap, tallow candles, lubricants, leather dressing.
- Selling/Trading Hides
- Leather: saddles, bed frame ties, lariat (lassos), sandals, ropes, whips, clothing items etc.

Mission Branding Symbols

Each of the twenty-one Missions in California had an identifiable brand. Mission San Juan Capistrano's brand is pictured here to the right. Most likely this brand design was created shortly after the Mission's foundation in 1776.



Mission San Juan Capistrano Brand

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Vaquero Training at Mission San Juan Capistrano

Spanish vaqueros taught Native Americans to ride, rope, and brand cattle. What we associate with cowboys—such as saddles, chaps, ropes, lassos, spurs, bandanas, and rodeos comes from Spanish vaquero traditions that developed in what is today California, Texas, and Mexico.



Spur
MSJC Archives

Post Secularization Rancho Period (circa 1822-1848)

After Mexico won its independence from Spain in 1821, the new government decided to do away with the Alta California missions. The Mexican government granted or sold the mission lands to Californio ranchos. Californio Rancho's increased land holdings and open trade with the United States boosted the cattle industry throughout California. Mexico's control over California, however, would be short lived. President Polk's declaration of war against Mexico over border discrepancies in Texas would ultimately lead to the United States acquiring California.

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The End of the Mexican American War and The Gold Rush (1848-1849)

The Mexican American war was officially ended with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. The treaty forced Mexico to cede 525,000 square miles of land, which is known today as California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona and portions of Colorado and New Mexico in exchange for \$15 million dollars. Interestingly enough, just one month before the treaty was signed, gold was discovered at Sutter's Mill. The cry for gold echoed all over the world. California and her early inhabitants would struggle with the screams of chaos and change.



Gold Mining Pan (reproduction)
MSJC Archives

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Cattle Industry During California Statehood (1850)

California officially became the 31st state in the Union on September 9, 1850. By 1852, California saw an influx in population; approximately 250,000 miners had arrived from around the globe. Californios no longer claimed the majority governing body. American newcomers took their place, and often treated the Californios with disrespect and discrimination. Court battles and land rights went up to review boards and courts, many Californios lost land, and by the 1870s the Californios rancho empire was gone.

The Gold Rush gave a boost to the Southern California cattle industry at a time when demand for cow hides was decreasing. Ranchers sold their cattle to feed hungry miners living in the North. Yet the ranchers of Southern California soon faced hard times, by the early 1860s, years of severe flooding and drought caused tens of thousands of cattle to die. Because of the tragic circumstances many ranchers, in Southern California especially, lost a great deal of money, and were forced to sell their land.

This essay was created by Mission San Juan Capistrano.

