

Summary: Ranchos and Pueblos

The Rise of the Ranchos

Cattle were a major part of the economy in Alta California. Rancheros and rancheras raised cattle for the hides and tallow. People made boots and other leather goods from the hides. Tallow was used to make candles. Traders from the United States and Britain sailed to Alta California for these goods. They paid with clothing, furniture, and other finished goods. Some California families grew very wealthy.

Some wealthy rancheros and rancheras kept thousands of cattle. One ranchero owned most of the Sonoma Valley. Large families, including parents, grandparents, and children often lived together on the ranchos. Many people worked on ranchos, including farmers, weavers, and cooks. Twice a year, vaqueros rounded up the cattle. This was called a rodeo. In the spring, the vaqueros branded the calves. In the fall, cattle were chosen for their hides. After a rodeo, the rancho held a fiesta that might last for days.

Living in a Pueblo

As ranchos grew, so did pueblos. Hides and tallow were stored in warehouses in pueblos near the coast. When trading ships arrived, finished goods were exchanged for the hides and tallow. Some pueblos became centers of business.

When a ship arrived, people celebrated with music and dancing. Fiestas were as important a part of life in the pueblo as on the rancho. Another common way of life was the willingness of people to share their food and home with strangers.

Government officials, soldiers, skilled workers, and some rancho workers lived in the pueblos. The voters of each pueblo chose an alcalde and a council. The alcalde acted as mayor and judge and resolved arguments. The council gave advice to the alcalde.

In the 1830s, when the Mexican government closed the missions, many California Indians had few choices. They knew how to farm but had no land. Some moved into the pueblos and did heavy labor for little pay. Some stayed on the ranchos and worked as vaqueros, often for no money. They received clothing, food, and a house.

Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

vaquero *noun* (Spanish), a cowboy

rodeo *noun* (Spanish), a roundup of cattle

fiesta *noun* (Spanish), a party or celebration

After You Read

REVIEW What was the source of wealth for rancheros and rancheras? Highlight the paragraph that explains how rancheros grew wealthy.

REVIEW What ways of life did the pueblos share with the ranchos? Draw a box around the paragraph that described customs the rancho and the pueblo had in common.