



**“Haying” in Bear Valley
By Scott Fletcher
Marin History Museum Volunteer**

The old expression, “Let’s make hay while the sun shines” comes from our rural past when farms took advantage of the early summer months to harvest hay. Before the age of the internal-combustion engine, horse-power accounted for most of the heavy work on farms. In order to feed the millions of horses that worked the farms and the cattle being raised, farmers depended on pastureland, supplemented by bales of hay either purchased or grown on their own land. Harvest time ran from May to July and was contingent on warm, dry weather. The old saying about ‘making hay’ has also come to mean taking advantage of a particularly favorable situation, sometimes in the romantic way.

Marin’s early agricultural importance to a growing San Francisco, especially the raising of dairy and beef cattle, required farmers and ranchers to dedicate enormous amounts of land to hay and pastureland. Accounts of “haying “ could be found in the summer issues of Marin newspapers as early as the 1860s. Flat-bottomed schooners shipped the hay to hungry San Francisco horses and livestock and brought hay to Marin County farms from Sonoma. One Marin Journal article reported on nine separate shipments of hay docking at the San Rafael Creek wharves during the week of September 30, 1909. Throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, hay was grown in fields from Sausalito in the south to Tomales in the west and Novato in the north. Hay was even harvested along the North Pacific Coast Railroad tracks that ran through the county. The image above

dates to the 1920s and was taken on the Bear Valley Ranch between Olema and Point Reyes.

Harvesting and baling hay was a very labor-intensive process as farmers had to cut the hay by hand, bunch it together, tie it up and haul it to a barn or silo for storage; all in hot, dry conditions. Over the years, many inventions for mowers, sweepers and stackers were made, but the process still required a great deal of manual labor. It was the Vermeer round baler, invented in 1971 by Iowa farmer Gary Vermeer, that revolutionized the work of harvesting and baling hay.

Recent county records indicate that there are still more than 2000 acres of hay harvested in Marin and more than 150,000 acres that are dedicated to pastureland. “Haying”, revolutionized by technological advances, is still an important activity on Marin’s farms and ranches. As “for making hay”, the following lyrics to an old “Haying Song” bring the historical haying rituals to life:

Hey Boys! Haying joys are ours,
While the sun shines, while the sun shines.
Toss the treasure, sweet and smelling.
Fill the cart to overflowing with golden hay,
Then up and away boys, up and away.

The end has come at last boys!
The season’s work is done.
And now my little lassy, your hand I’ve surely won.
So, the minister’s not far away, to make life’s hay.
Let’s up and away! Let’s up and away!

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