

A black and white photograph of a log cabin with several people sitting on the porch. The cabin is made of horizontal logs and has a gabled roof. There are three people visible on the porch, one in the foreground and two behind. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

QUARTERLY

NORTHEASTERN NEVADA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SPANISH RANCH

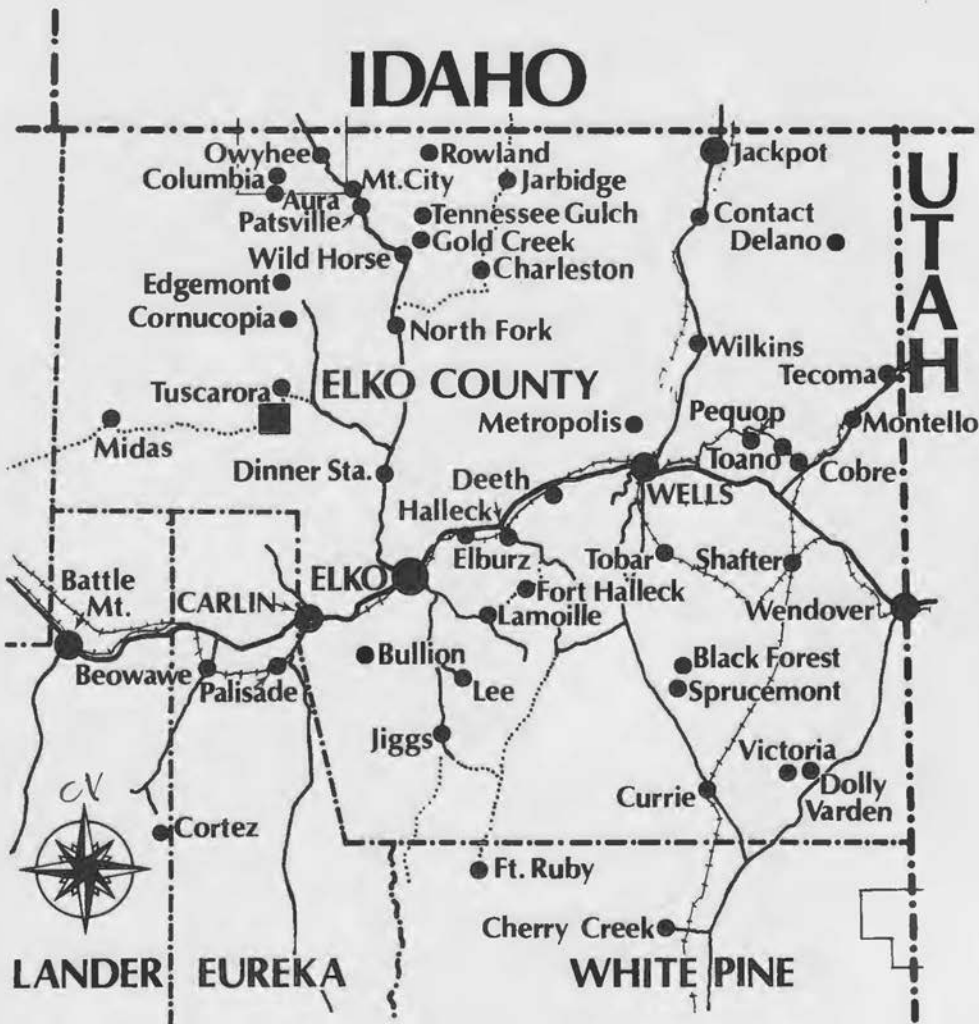
SPANISH RANCH LETTERS
COMPILED BY EDNA B. PATTERSON

CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS
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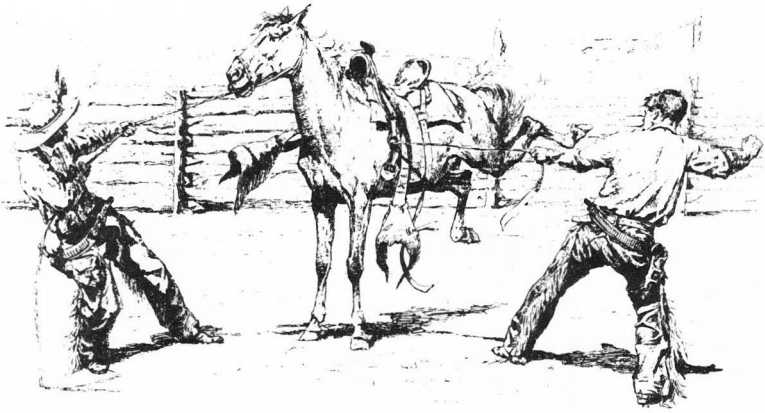
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NORTHEASTERN

NEVADA



SPANISH RANCH LETTERS

COMPILED BY EDNA B. PATTERSON

In the 1840's five Basque brothers left their native Spain and sailed for South America. Here they developed a bonanza in the Argentine cattle industry. After ten years of prosperity two of the brothers, Pedro (born in 1829) and Bernardo (born in 1831), liquidated their assets and came to the United States while the other three remained in Argentina.

Settling near San Mateo, California, Pedro and Bernardo Altube ran a dairy until the town of San-Mateo bought their property for a cemetery. Pedro moved to Palo Alto and Bernardo to Fresno, both acquiring land and cattle interests. Finally they decided to seek less populated country. They sold their California property, became equal partners and began plans for a cattle operation in Nevada.

Purchasing 3,000 head of cattle in Mexico, they drove them to Nevada. In 1871 they reached Independence Valley in the Tuscarora area of Elko County and established the Spanish Ranch which became a thriving cattle kingdom.

Both men were in their forties when they launched their new enterprise. They first lived in a log cabin and then built a larger home, bunkhouse, storehouse and blacksmith shop.

The Altubes adopted the common practice of acquiring more land by having employees file land claims then later buying the property from the workers. Bernardo handled the livestock while Pedro supervised the Home Ranch. It was a privilege working for them — pay was good and paid in gold coin.

The brothers reigned over their kingdom until the severe winter of 1889-1890 wiped out years of work. By selling property, tapping financial sources in California and borrowing from the Henderson Bank in Elko they rebuilt the herd. The ranch extended 20 miles in length and four or five miles in width besides occupying thousands of acres of open country. Spanish Ranch cattle grazed from Independence Valley in northern Elko County to Paradise Valley in Humboldt County and north into Idaho.

After 1890 haying grass meadows provided winter feeding and barbed wire fences began to surround some of the land. The operation required 15 to 20 cowboys with more added for seasonal work.

The Altube family helped smaller local spreads by purchasing supplies from them but their world was centered on the ranch. Pedro's four daughters rode as well as the best vaqueros and Bernardo's wife and two sons, Felix and Jules, participated in ranch work.



PETE ALTUBE COLLECTION, RED BLUFF, CALIFORNIA

Pedro Altube, one of the founders of the Spanish Ranch in northern Elko County.

Felix, an all around cowboy, died while a young man. Jules eventually managed the ranch.

As Pedro grew older, his family insisted upon a move to California. He built a palatial home on Pacific Avenue in San Francisco and entertained on a lavish scale. He died in 1905.

Bernardo retired to Berkeley, California where he passed away in 1916. His son Jules and Amelia had twin sons named Pedro and Bernardo after their grandfathers. Soon after the birth of the boys Amelia died and Jules later married the Spanish nurse who had cared for his wife. Jules died in California in 1944.

In 1902 the ranch operated on a grand scale. In addition to the Spanish Ranch, the Palo Alto Land and Livestock Company owned the Thompson, Taylor and IL ranches and their range extended over thousands of acres.

When the Altube properties were liquidated in 1907 there were 20,000 cattle, 2,000 horses and 20,000 sheep. Land controlled by the company consisted of 400,000 acres with 66,000 in meadow and 40,000 acres fenced.

The ranch still operates in Independence Valley. Ownership over the years has passed from the Altubes to H.G. Humphrey et al (Humphrey, W.H. Moffat, Peter S. Garat and Lewis L. Bradley); Union Land and Cattle Company; E.P. Ellison and Associates; and finally to the Ellison Ranching Company.

The following letters are from Theodore Dierks of San Francisco to Ramon Lugea who worked at the Spanish Ranch. Dierks was 55 when the letters began and about seventy when the last was written. Lugea was eleven years older than Dierks.

In 1902, young Theodore Dierks was in a doctor's office in San Francisco and passed through the waiting room where Jules Altube, son of Bernardo, was waiting to see the doctor. Jules was the next patient called into the doctor's office.

The physician remarked, "That young man who just walked out of my office will be dead in six months. He has tuberculosis. This damp climate and the disease will kill him unless he gets to a drier climate."



Bernardo Altube.

Jules thought for a few moments, then said, "He can go to the the Spanish Ranch near Tuscarora. There the climate is dry, the sun shines bright and the air will be conducive for his recovery."

So it was that "Teddy" Dierks came to Tuscarora as a lad of 17 years. He was ill, lonely and afraid. The boy was lost in the rural environment and spent his days wandering about the ranch complex finding companionship with the cowboys and other ranch help. He developed a friend in Ramon Lugea whose father sailed from Spain with the Altubes in their migration to the Americas. Ramon was the blacksmith at the Spanish Ranch. He later owned his own ranch in Lamoille Valley, south of Elko.

After Dierk's health improved he returned to San Francisco and he and Ramon lost contact with each other. Forty years later they renewed their friendship. It was due to the death of Al Shannon, an old-time cowboy at the ranch, who died in San Francisco. He was buried by Halstead-Dierks Funeral Directors.

The Dierks letters follow:



PETE ALTUBE COLLECTION, RED BLUFF, CALIFORNIA

Jules J. Altube, Spanish Ranch.

San Francisco, Calif

April 24, 1940

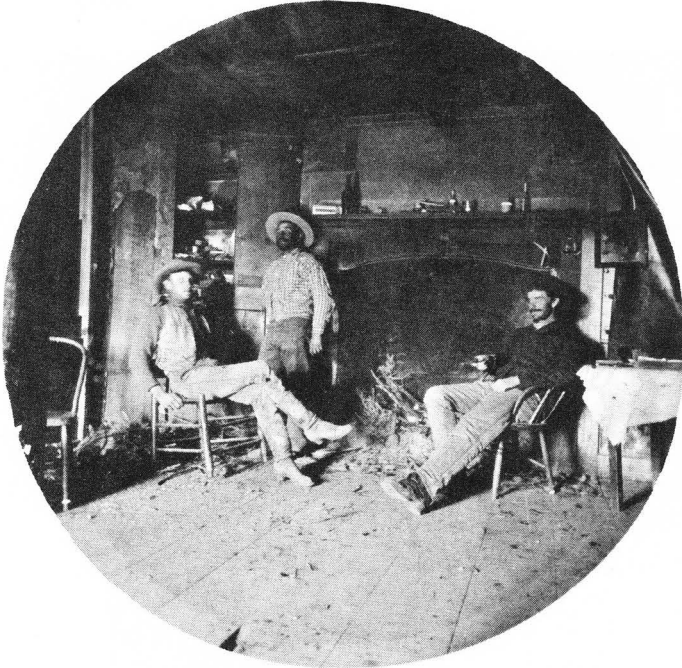
Ramon Lugea
Lamoille Valley
South of Elko

Dear Mr. Lugea:

This is to inform you that Mr. Al P. Shannon died April 21, 1940 in San Francisco — peacefully in his sleep, aged 75 years. Of late he lived in the past, in memory of the happy old days on the Spanish Ranch. He spoke often to me of you and that is why I am writing you, because you knew him then. Funeral is Thurs. April 25 with interment in the National Cemetery in San Francisco.

Some day I am going to look you up and say hello because I think I knew you too, that time.

Theo. Dierks



Three vaqueros in the Spanish Ranch bunkhouse.

San Francisco, Calif.
December 9, 1945

Mr. Ramon Lugea
Lamoille, Nevada

Dear Mr. Lugea:

I find an envelope in one of my desk drawers with your name on it and postmarked Elko, May 18, 1940. As I remember I put it away with the intention of visiting you the next time I went to Elko, but I haven't been there since. I think that was the year that Al Shannon died and I wrote you about it as he told me you were on the Spanish Ranch in 1902 when I was up there. Were you there then? I remember there was a Ramon who was a blacksmith. Was that you? At that time I was 17 years of age and sort of a guest at the ranch. A big tall thin blond boy. If you are the Ramon that was blacksmith there at the time, you will remember me, for I spent a lot of time in the blacksmith shop. I'll mention a few of the names I remember:

Old Al Buker, Mormon
Gene, Italian
Joe, the Mexican
Castro, dropped dead in Elko in 1902
Chappo, milker
Chappo, ex-vaquero foreman
Chappo
Ramon, the blacksmith
Pat, the Chinese cook



PETE ALTUBE COLLECTION, RED BLUFF, CALIFORNIA

Al Shannon in his later years.



Two of Pedro Altube's daughters.

Joe, the vaquero cook
 Old Dan Man
 Ben Loinez

These are the only names that I remember, but they whose names they are and were standout (sic) in my mind in warm memory and friendship. Nearly all are dead of course, for that was 43 years ago, and they were men then, whereas I was only a boy.

If you were there then, and if you happen to remember one of the vaqueros that was short, of slight build, brown mustach, wore yellow chaps, and invariably packed a 45 Colt, and was the only man on the place that packed a gun, and if you happen to remember his name and what became of him, I will be very glad to receive what information you might give me about him. But I am just as interested in knowing about you. If you are that Ramon you must be pretty well along in years now, for I am 61. You must be at last ten years older.

I buried Jules Altube last year. In the end he was very humble and a devout Catholic. May his soul rest in peace! I see his son Bernardo often, but Pete seldom because he lives at Red Bluff.

I will appreciate it if you will answer my questions. Someday I hope to visit you.

Yours Truly

Theo Dierks
 901 Divisadero St.
 San Francisco, 15,
 Calif.



Spanish Ranch bunkhouse, c.1920.

San Francisco, Ca.
Dec. 23, 1945

Mr. Ramon Lugea
138 Pine St.
Elko, Nevada

Dear Ramon:

So you are that Ramon I knew so well and whom I had for such a warm friend 43 years ago. Well! Well, Well! Shannon told me that you were, but I didn't believe he was right. Now I know he was and now that you have confirmed it I am most happy to hear from you. Memories surge through my mind, strange how they come, of those days and of those friends, pictures from out of the kaleidoscope of memory. Only a few live to have those memories — they are a section from out of our lives.

Yes, I spent many happy hours, sometimes entire days in the blacksmith shop, and you were one of those that through your friendliness and interest in me made me feel that life had some meaning for me. For that I am grateful to you, even today and always will be. If you remember the people in the house with the fence around it hardly spoke to me at all and I would have been lost if I had not had the friendship of the men. I say this without intending any disparagement of my friends; but the truth is the truth.

After I left the ranch and came down here with Jim Tunnel (I) and 33 carloads of cattle, I resolved to complete my education, and did four years of high school work

in one year, and entered the college of Pharmacy in 1903, and completed the course in 1905, and after clerking around in various stores for one year, was just ready to enter the University College of Medicine, when the earthquake and fire came along, and I abandoned that plan to help my father in this business, and have been an undertaker ever since. That was a big mistake because today I know my father could have gotten along alright without me. I call it a mistake because I do not have the nature requisite to success in this business, and the associations and conditions involved in it were bad insofar as a career went. Sometimes I think ones life is predestined, and one had to do what a super-natural will ordains. So now you know what I did with virtually my life, virtually because when one reaches 61 it virtually is a lifetime, isn't it?

Yes, I am married. I married when I was 25 and I have one son, now 34 years of age, just twice the age I was when I was on the ranch. I am glad that the good Lord gave you a wife and family, and that you have not had to go through all these years alone. As I remember you I am sure you made a good husband and father.

Those were happy and comparatively care free days for me that time up on the ranch, yet I had my worries but had I known then, as I know now, I would have had none, for they were all imaginary.

It is strange you don't remember old Al Buker. He bunked in the same room with Shannon and Joe — he was quite old then — partially paralyzed — brown beard — always chewed tobacco — was an old hand under old Pedro and Bernardo Altube. He couldn't work, so he devised that little water wheel or mill to turn the grindstone to sharpen mowers teeth, and he also devised a contraption to cut wood by means of a foot pedal. He usually emerged every morning with a tomato can in his good hand. Shannon used to have to dress him. When the ranch was sold he and Gene were placed in the County Home at Elko, and both died there and are buried there. Both I understand, had been most unfortunate in life, for one had the syphillis (sic) and the other the gonnerea (sic) of the spine. I tried to find their graves many years ago, but did not succeed although I looked at almost every headstone in the cemetery.

Yes, you have identified Jose Urias very well. I think you are mistaken about Chappo, the milker going to Spain, unless you mean the very youngest Chappo — there were three at the time: ex-foreman of vaquero, Chappo the ranch hand or milker, and the boy Chappo who was younger than I. I understand that Chappo the ranch hand died heating dynamite in a stove.

Old man Mann owned a small ranch at the foot of the mountain range south of the ranch and sold out and retired to San Jose, Calif. I am trying to remember the name of the Mexican that they had up there that year to break broncs, but it just will not come, but he is alive and living at Hollister, Calif. I'm sure you could remember him if I could name him. He too is now quite an old man. If you ever hear where Chris Aguillar is I will appreciate it if you will let me know. Yes, I heard about Ben Loinez dying at Winnemucca. I didn't know him hardly at all as those days he stayed aloof from us. They say he became a pretty hard drinker, and that it had a lot to do with the pneumonia overcoming him.

The two Altube sons are in California — one has a ranch, Pedro at Red Bluff, and the other Bernardo a hotel on Jones street in this city. Both are married and have families. The wife and daughter of Jules are in Spain. The daughter is by the second wife.

I buried old Al Shannon in the presidio at San Francisco. He was a peacetime soldier at one time and entitled to burial in a National Cemetery. He was a good hearted man even though in those days he was so profane and cruel with animals, but

strange to say he became freed of profanity in his last years. Profanity was the language of those men those days, and while they were profane, I know they were not conscious of it. Gosh, that was a long time ago, Ramon, when you think there were no automobiles, no movie, no aeroplane.

I've been back to look at the ranch three times since — the first time in 1904 just before they sold out to Humphrey and Moffitt. At that time everything was just as it used to be. There were new faces, of course. Then a second time, years later and I found all changed and not a familiar face on the place. The same old valley and the same old hills were there, but all the old landmarks and houses had disappeared and no where could I find a single one of my old friends. All the romance, adventure, and friendships had disappeared as though they had been only a dream. The third time it was even more so, and it was then that I decided that the place held nothing for me but memories.

I understand that the Garats are still ranching, but all the original Garats are now dead. Also that the Fairchild family still ranch in the west end of the valley. Of course I didn't know those people, and know them only through hearsay, although I have buried some of them.

About the horse bucking me off — it was a big raw boned roan called Cigarette, and he bucked when Shannon and I were in one of the Fairchild's fields cutting two horses out of a bunch. I still count myself lucky not to have been killed that time. I could have very easily have been the way I lit on my head, down hill. I don't remember Joe Yraguen by name, but would probably recognize him if I saw him. Some day you and I will go over and visit him. As to Jefferies Francisco Goicoechea — maybe you refer to him of the enormous build — he came to the ranch just before I left. I am sorry to hear that he is dead too.

I am one of those people that just can't realize the passing of time — to me those days exist as vividly as though it had been only a couple of years ago — isn't that strange? It has been almost half a century ago! But when I think how nearly all those men are gone — it makes me sick with apprehension — apprehension that life is slipping by and many years are gone forever.

Yes, I am certainly going to look you up the next time that I am in Elko and have the great pleasure of shaking your hand and giving you a pat on your back, mi amigo! And now I am going to close this letter, first with thanks for answering my letter and giving me the information that I asked, second with the best wishes to you and yours for a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year, and thirdly with kindest regards to you personally.

Yours very truly,

Theo Dierks

Sunday, Dec. 21, 1952

Dear Ramon:

There was a mail delivery this morning and on going through the envelopes I saw that one was evidently a Christmas Greeting from Elko. I was amazed because I could think of only one person in all of Elko County who would possibly send me a card and that would be you. Yet it is hard to believe for we have not seen each other for fifty years. I took the mail upstairs to read while at breakfast and when I opened your envelope and saw who it was from I was overwhelmed. I seldom pay much attention



Spanish Ranch chuckwagon.

to Christmas cards because so many are sent as a social obligation and without any reference to the true reason of the occasion and its meaning. But I read every word of your prayer and a surge of happiness and gratitude welled up within me to know there was someone who cared enough for me to wish me peace and God's Blessings. I thank you and Mrs. Lugea for your prayer and for your good wishes and greetings. I wish to say that I wish the same for you. It has been a great pleasure to receive a card from you.

Only this morning as I walked down the street I couldn't help but feel the cold; and the thought occurred to me that up in Elko County nature prepares one for the change and one doesn't feel it as much as down here. And then when I got back a message from Elko!

It has been 50 years since I used to watch you work in the blacksmith shop at the Spanish Ranch. That is a long time ago. I can still hear your "Adios Amigo" as I left. I was a peculiar boy. I left without saying goodbye to anyone. I don't know why that was. It was just my nature I suppose. But even today, I still carry memories of you all — just as though it were only yesterday. I have stopped in two or three times to the ranch just to look around, but no one is there that we used to know. The hills and the valley and the spring and the meadow are there but that is all. Their beauty merely accentuates the sorrow of old friends gone. As for you and me, it means not only that, but the day of our youth also. I am 68 now and you must be older. There is one consolation; we are wiser.

Al Shannon and Jules Altube are dead as you know. Al was buried at the Presidio and Jules at Holy Cross. Jules became very religious before he died and went to mass every morning. He told me, "I am only human, and I have my sins to repent for." It was largely through him that I became a convert. May all be well with both of them.

I hope that all is well with you and your family, and in closing I wish to again thank you for thinking of me and your good wishes, and I want to assure you and Mrs. Lugea that I wish the same for you both. Your voice is truly a voice from out of the past. The half century that has passed makes it all the more wonderful. God Bless you both.

Sincerely,

Theo Dierks



Spanish Ranch bunkhouse.

Dec. 23, 1955
San Francisco, Calif.

Ramon and Grace Lugea

Dear Friends:

This is to acknowledge receipt of your lovely Christmas card and your very kind thoughts. I am grateful to you for thinking of me and remembering me in your good wishes. Please accept my reciprocal good wishes to you:

May the Holy Infant bless you
May His peace enfold you
May His love overshadow you
And may He pour into you abundantly
The graces that He has won for you
By His Holy Incarnation.

I tried hard to get up to Elko this year and couldn't make it. Pete writes that Bernardo is ill with a heart attack in Spain. Please light a candle for him, and I will do so too.

Always regards, best wishes and fond memories.

Adios Amigos,

Theo Dierks

San Francisco, Calif.

March 2, 1956

Mr. Ramon Lugea
138 Pine St.
Elko, Nevada

Dear Ramon:

This is just a few hurriedly scribbled lines to inform you that Manuel Larios died yesterday at Hollister, California. He was very old, about 87 years — and looked it.

He, if you will remember, was breaking horses to ride up at the ranch in 1902. He made pre-need arrangements for his funeral with me and I went to Hollister and arranged for his funeral at the mortuary there. He will have a mass at Sacred Heart Church, Monday at 9:30, and then be buried in his grandfather's private cemetery at San Juan Bautista. His grandfather had a large Spanish Land Grant, when California was owned by Spain and he donated the land for the township. All the land grants were raided by Congress and the old Spanish Dons pauperized. The Larios family was one of them. And so fades out of sight another memory of the days of our youth. I thought it right to let you know. He leaves a sister at Azusa, California, and a nephew, Anthony Marios at Hollister.

Regards to you and Mrs. Lugea.

Resp.

T. Dierks

Ramon Lugea, born July 2, 1874, died November 27, 1958. He is buried in the Catholic Cemetery in Elko.

Edna B. Patterson