

# COSMOPOLITAN CHRONICLE

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## Earmarks & Branding.

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Brands were symbols or designs that were easily recognizable and used to signify cattle ownership. Earmarks were a method of marking cattle by cropping their ears in distinctive patterns. Some of the earliest brands were not recorded as there was so much land that cattle could roam freely. In time, as herds got larger and more people owned them, it became necessary to mark cattle to sort them and to prove ownership. The earmark pattern had to be registered along with the brand as evidence of private ownership. In San Diego, Henry Fitch as *Juez de Paz* (Justice of the Peace) ordered in February 1847 that people must record their cattle brands. Brands in Los Angeles were recorded even earlier. The record in the town's clerk office had to have a basic diagram indicating both ears, the particular mark cut in the ear, and the position in which the mark was placed. The

distinctive pattern of cropping ears was easier to see when sorting cattle (looking at cattle head on rather than shoulder, ribs, or hip).

Brands were something like a coat of arms and were often handed down to family members. We know from early documents that Juan Bandini's brand (pictured) was used



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at least as early as 1838. He transferred it to his son-in-law Abel Stearns on Aug 19, 1859. A letter that Bandini wrote in Tijuana on September 20, 1858 mentioned that he spent five pesos to get a branding iron to mark Stearns' cattle. Some families had a number of brands. As a large ranching family, Bandini's sons and daughters would have had their own brands. A daughter's dowry could include a separate brand

and a herd of cattle. The Cc brand that is usually associated with Cave J. Coutts was actually registered to his wife, Ysidora Bandini, in 1854. There were a number of Californio women's names in the San Diego Brand Book Number One, as well as a few Indians who registered their brands.

In a letter Bandini wrote on April 3, 1845, he said that he talked to the Alcalde (Mayor) of Los Angeles and that he was getting ready to start the rodeos (round-ups). The Judge of the Plains would be in charge of the rodeos. Rodeos would proceed from one part of the county to another, rounding up, sorting, and branding cattle. Calves were given the brand of their mothers. For example, Bandini wrote on May 24, 1856 that they had finished the branding and that they had marked 1026 animals. Many of these Old Town families had huge ranchos as well as their town casa. Families and friends would gather for food, games, music, feasting, and exchange of news as they proceeded from one rancho to another. Branding of livestock was a big social event, as well as a necessary ranch activity, and was done once or twice a year.

