

Los Angeles Times
Monday, January 16, 1989

ORANGE COUNTY

LOCAL AND SOUTHLAND NEWS • EDITORIAL PAGES

CCY Part 11



A rusted saw, right, is a relic of an earlier, more rural time, before Troy Thomas, below, was given \$2,000 and ordered from bunkhouse where his family had lived since 1923.



Last Roundup
Homesteader's grandson forced to leave bunkhouse where 3 generations lived since 1923

By JIM CARLTON, Times Staff Writer

Troy Thomas rummaged through an old bunkhouse, trying to figure out what links to the past he could take.

Three generations of his family had lived in the San Juan Capistrano house since 1923, as Thomas' biggest decision was not what to take but more what to leave behind.

The two wood stoves were too big, so he sold them off. The dresser drawers which he slept in as a baby were also too large, so he left them behind. Antique cameras, a World War II vintage photograph and overvalued furniture—where his family would sit and gaze at the staff dove below their hilltop home—were also too cumbersome for him to move.

In the end, Thomas, 36, went away with practically nothing in all, unsure of what to do or where to go after spending most of his adult life living in the bunkhouse, surviving a way of life that has all but vanished in Orange County's urban sprawl.

Thomas is the last of three generations of San Juan Capistrano ranch hands who were allowed to live free on the property they worked. But with the ranch no longer in existence and development finally planned for the family's hilltop spread, Thomas was evicted last Tuesday.

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'It's devastating to me. The hardest part about moving is the emotional feeling.'

—Troy Thomas



Troy Thomas takes a final walk, above and at left, across the land that was his family's homestead. The 300 acres off Foster Ranch Road was bought by the TMC Corp. for construction of a 500-unit community. Three generations of his family farmed the rugged land where an old World War I barracks provided a secluded place to live.

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Mon, Jan 21, 2019