

FRUIT SALAD

Santa Clara Valley's Fruit Industry

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PREFACE

I'm Frances Olson, and I'm a cot cutter. I spent most of forty-one summers cutting apricots or involved in fruit or vegetable harvesting. The subject for this essay is the introduction and production of fruit in the Santa Clara Valley.

Since one of my sisters married into the family of a descendent of an early pioneer of the fruit industry, it adds a personal involvement to the story.

I hope the story of how the Santa Clara Valley became the fruit growing and processing capitol of the world will be of as much interest to you as it was to me while researching and writing on this subject. Since it includes most fruits, I have titled my essay, "Fruit Salad."

01/16/04

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Chapter 1

The Origin of Fruit

The origin of the three stone fruits, prunes, apricots, and peaches, seems to have been in western Asia. The area lies between the Black Sea and Caspian Sea. Turkey and Iran lie to the immediate south. Their gradual spread to the east was slow, and many centuries passed before plums found their new home in Europe. It was about the time Columbus discovered America when the fruit spread to all the Balkan countries and eventually into France. It's still a mystery how the migration of the prunes spread south, then westerly across the Black Sea and Mediterranean to Italy.

Many varieties of plums were brought to the New World by the early settlers, who preferred the larger variety to prunes, which were small, could not be readily dried in the humid weather of the eastern seaboard, and were damaged by early spring frosts.

Apricots, also, were enjoyed as a juicy and aromatic fruit for more than 4,000 years. The fruit is said to have originated in China and been brought from Greece, then Italy. The apricot eventually was brought to the new world by the Spaniards, but did not adapt well to the climate of the eastern United States. Eventually the apricot seedlings got into the hands of the Spanish missionaries and they planted them at the California missions.

The peach, next to the apple, is the most versatile and widely planted fruit trees, also has a mysterious origin and difficult to establish. It was thought to have originated from Persia, now Iran, but it is more likely to have originated in China, and determined that peaches were brought to the New World shortly after America's discovery. Even Indians prized peaches and carried the pits and planted them inland.

The Jesuits were among the first to plant peaches and other fruit at the first missions in lower California. Early Americans brought peaches, apples and pears and planted the fruit clippings in our state, also. The pioneers grew the fruit mainly for their own use. But by 1823, nearly all the twenty-one mission gardens had planted orchards, some quite large, which included oranges, lemons, limes, figs, pomegranates and wine grapes.

In 1792, Captain George Vancouver reported seeing an orchard at Mission Santa Clara with apple, peach, pear, apricot, and fig trees.

The settlers at the pueblo of San Jose, the first civilized community in the state in 1777, planted fruit trees and grape vines to meet their needs and those of the military. Early settlers all around the state planted fruit trees and grape vines on their homesteads, and the variety depended on the location.

After the missions were secularized in 1834, the orchards and vineyards fell into a hasty

decline until the gold rush in 1849. But some men preferred fruit growing to gold mining and rebuilt the orchards by pruning, cultivation, and irrigation.

The first person known to dry fruits commercially in California was James F. Reed of the ill-fated Donner Party of October, 1846. He was in charge of the farm and gardens at Mission San Jose in 1847, 1848, and 1849, when he was placed at the mission to prevent squatters from damaging the buildings and settling on mission lands. Reed harvested apples, pears, and peaches, and shipped both fresh and dried fruit to the Hawaiian Islands. His venture into fruit drying was accidental, but being a businessman and not a farmer, Reed saw an opportunity to make money and did so.

Fruit drying was done in 1858 by Don Andres Pico, who came into possession of the orchard at San Fernando Mission. Pico hired Indians to help harvest and prepare his crop of pears and other fruits for drying.

The fruit growers in early California were mostly farmers, but some were non farmers. Some had little experience in producing fruit commercially. At first the trees were not planted in even rows, but haphazardly, depending on how large the tree would become. Pests and diseases were not serious at first due to the near virgin soil, but became more serious as the plantings increased in size and number. Due to persistence and ingenuity, the farmers developed ideas in

drying the fruit that enabled them to be successful with production of a superior product.

Chapter 2

CALIFORNIA'S FIRST

Early plantings of deciduous fruits by Americans were widely spread throughout California. It was the well-watered soils near major streams that were first to be developed. Irrigation was supplied by the streams and rivers, and also, used for transporting the fruit crops to market.

The demand for fruits developed during the gold rush as the gold seekers tired of beef, beans, bread, some potatoes and unfamiliar Mexican foods. The men at the gold mines wanted fresh fruit. As their money became more plentiful, those who could afford more luxuries paid exorbitant prices for the small quantities of fresh fruits available. The first offered for sale in San Francisco were pears and grapes from the old gardens of Mission San Jose and Santa Clara.

Jim Redmond, who took possession of the Santa Clara mission orchards soon discovered he had a bonanza and sold his fruit at fifty cents per pound.

E. L. Beard, who took over the Mission San Jose gardens following James Reed, considered he found a fortune in raising fruit instead of mining for gold.

The first extensive new fruit plantings were in the Santa Clara Valley due to the favorable growing conditions; fertile soil, mild and semi-arid climate and lots of water. The area was

accessible to San Francisco where their product could be shipped inland by riverboat.

Many plantings came from the east and many deciduous fruit nurseries were established near the fruit orchards.

By 1858, there was an over supply of fruit and some growers lost their enthusiasm to continue with their profession until the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869. They soon realized they had a new market for their product and a surge of fruit growing was opened.

CHAPTER 3

PRUNE WHIP

There is no authenticated record of prunes being one of the fruits planted by the Spanish missionaries until Louis Pellier introduced the French prune. Although there was confirmation of eastern nurseries supplying prune rootings, there is no evidence that California growers planted them.

Louis heard of the gold strike in California while in Chili. He came to the golden state and did well in the diggings until the winter of 1849, when he left the hardships of the gold fields and ended up in San Jose. In 1850, he purchased a tract of land fronting the west side of San Pedro near St. James Street. The tract was known for years as Pellier's Gardens. It was filled with a nursery, orchard and cultivated flowers and plants.

Pellier liked the familiar French fruit and wanted to try it in his new country. He never realized the prune plantings would play such an important role in the state's deciduous fruit industry when he planted the roots in such favorable conditions as the Santa Clara Valley.

Louis later sent for his brother, Pierre, but the younger brother returned to France to marry his sweetheart. He returned in 1856 with his bride and a third brother, Jean. Pierre brought grape cuttings of Black Burgundy, Chasselas Fontainelbleau and Madeleine.



Pellier's home and place of business, City Gardens Nursery, at N. San Pedro and Chaboya in downtown San Jose. This was San Jose's first frame house, built with lumber from Oregon and from around the Horn. Photo by Alice Hart, 1902. Courtesy San Jose Historical Museum

It was Louis Pellier who was instrumental in establishing the prune industry in the Santa Clara Valley, but he died on June 13, 1872, of apparent nervous breakdown after an unhappy and childless marriage, but Pierre had four daughters, whose descendants grew up in the area. The two brothers had friction between them and the descendants belittled Louis' part in bringing the prune to California, but the fruit industry historians give Louis the credit for introducing the French prune to this area.

Because of the slump in the fruit industry in 1868, mainly affecting apples and pears, peaked the interest in prunes. By 1870, prune plantings totaled 650 acres, almost half of which were in the Santa Clara Valley. The market became glutted, which resulted in the plantings of other varieties of fruit such as cherries, apricots and plums.

At the same time imports of dried and canned fruits to California brought the fruit growers to take steps to secure the trade for themselves.

From 1871 through 1880, the United States imported prunes from France, Germany and Bosnia until some Californians decided that maybe Californians could share in this industry. They decided to duplicate the French process of drying the prune. Some pitted the fresh fruit while others were perfecting the process of dipping the fresh pitted prunes in lye before setting them out to dry.

A few fruit growers, mainly in the San Joaquin Valley, used evaporators, like those back east, to dry their fruit, but were not happy with the results.

CHAPTER 4

TRY, TRY AGAIN

George Fleming recalled that in 1879, a grower in the Willow Glen district of San Jose took a load of prunes to a neighbor's evaporator, but arrived too late for that day's processing, and thinking the prunes would not hold up till the next day, dumped them over the bank of a nearby creek. He happened to spot the fruit several days later and discovered that a great deal of his dumped fruit dried satisfactorily in the sunny, warm air. He gathered the fruit he thought were okay, cleaned them, and shipped them to San Francisco, receiving 14 cents a pound. After that experience, the San Jose area fruit growers abandoned the use of evaporators for drying prunes.

Leonard Coats, a respected California nurseryman, reported that after visiting France, he had heard of the use of a lye solution for dipping prunes. But in Santa Clara County, the new drying process took place as prune plantings were rapidly expanding. By 1890, 6,175 acres of prunes were in Santa Clara County, with a total of 15,090 acres in California.

Production of apricots and peaches grew steadily, but before the sulfur process, the fruit had an undesirable color, no natural flavor, and was not insect free.

Sulfur was unknown to early Californians, but the Egyptians used it as far back as 2,000 years before Christ.

Early settlers had known of the use of sulfur to preserve raisins in the eastern Mediterranean countries. They used apple dryers to preserve their fruit, then discovered by experiments, the use of sulfur for drying apricots and peaches.

In the late 1880s, many grower-packers of dried fruits installed sulfur houses and used sulfuring as a regular practice for their product.



Fruit orchards in Santa Clara Valley c. 1900. Water tank on each farm indicates presence of well for family's needs. To judge from the small barns, these farmers did not process their fruit themselves, but sold it to a processor. Large driveway appears upper left. Photo by T. C. Tucker. Courtesy Sonoma Academy.

CHAPTER 5

A PERSONAL TOUCH

One person who became a prominent and successful individual, identified with the fruit industry here in the Santa Clara Valley was Benjamin Scorsur. Arriving here in September, 1871, after being a seaman for five years, was born in Dalmatia in April, 1855.

His elder brother had preceded him to the United States, arriving in Philadelphia. In 1871, the two brothers headed west until they arrived in Virginia City, Nevada. But, being unsuccessful in mining there, they packed their belongings and ended up at the Guadalupe Mines in the Santa Clara Valley.

The two brothers worked the mines, and also, spent half their time in farming and stock raising on 163 acres adjoining the mines. There was a property dispute with an English company, who originally owned the land, and through the courts, continued to hold title.

Meanwhile Benjamin became a United States citizen, then moved to San Jose and entered the business of fruit buyer and shipper. He eventually married and had six children, four boys and two girls. Through hard work and thirty-five years later became a prosperous horticulturist, purchasing property on Doyle Road and San Francisco Highway.

During World War I, Mr. Scorsur sold his two properties as his sons left to serve their country and he missed their assistance on the farms. In 1918, following his sons return from the war, Mr. Scorsur bought a sixty acre pear and prune orchard on King Road and Cunningham Avenue and later an apricot ranch on Mt. Pleasant Road. He farmed the orchards with the help of sons, John and Nick, who ran two large drying plants.

The Scorsur connection will be revealed near the end of this story.

CHAPTER 6

THE BOOM AND BUST OF THE 1880s

The boom of the fruit growing industry in the Santa Clara Valley during the 1880's, was due to access of public land and Spanish land grants that became available for purchase, as well as perfect growing conditions, irrigation and access to markets by the railroads. Farmers bought land cheap, and when trees began to bear fruit at full capacity, an orchard would yield over \$125 an acre from land costing \$100 per acre. The profit at times would reach from \$300 to \$1,000 per acre.

The 18,000 acre Catherine Dunne ranch in Morgan Hill and San Martin was subdivided into ten acre parcels at \$150 per acre. The buyer could put down \$250 and pay \$125 for ten years. The cost of purchase and planting ten acres of prunes usually cost a farmer \$1,400 through the first four years. By the fifth year the harvest would take care of expenses.

In 1874, the Alden Fruit and Vegetable Preserving Company produced fifteen tons of dried apricots that year. It was an incentive for dried fruit production in Santa Clara Valley. By the 1880's, farmers in the Sacramento Valley and Colusa County became interested in prune growing. The same year dried fruit shipments by railroad did not keep pace with fresh fruits, but

by 1897 and 1898, the dried fruit shipments exceeded that of fresh fruit.

When the transcontinental railroads started shipping the products, and the refrigerator car was introduced, easterners began to enjoy the canned fruits available, as well as the fresh and dried. The products soon became staples in grocery stores. Non-perishable fruits and vegetables were transported by ship also, especially after the opening of the Panama Canal in 1914.

By the late 1880's and early 1890's, fruit growers who in the past, had to search out their own customers, were able to ship their crops. The growers got together to pool their crops for drying, shipping and marketing. That lead to a great number of dried fruit marketing agencies. In ten years time, California was over producing prunes and the market was glutted with the fruit, as it was served in hotels and boarding houses, and finally the public acquired a dislike for prunes. Even prune trees were being pulled out until the production of prunes stabilized with the amount of consumption and the fruit once again was on a paying basis.

CHAPTER 7

THE FOLLOWERS

In 1856, J. Q. A. Ballou went into the fruit business when he purchased a homestead in Milpitas and in February, 1853, he planted about 500 trees of apples and pears. In 1858, he added about 1500 more trees. In 1861, he purchased fifty French prune tree grafts from Louis Pellier. By 1867, he had his first prune crop. In 1868, he dried eleven tons of fruit for the eastern market.

In the Willow Glen district cherry plantings began by 1868, by W. C. Geiger in an area which is now Willow Street. Apple and pear trees were on the northeast corner of now Lincoln and Minnesota Avenues. The only road there was El Abra, which is now Lincoln Avenue. Strawberries were also planted and flourished in the area, but could not compete with other area growers where water was more accessible so they converted their berry patches to orchards. By 1874, the Willows was the principal orchard section of the county.

Different areas of the county were seen being planted following the Willows example. From 1863, by John Rock in the Alviso and Milpitas area, to Campbell and Los Gatos, Cupertino, north and west of Santa Clara, and by 1880, Evergreen and along Monterey Road.

In 1871, the first canned fruit was processed by Dr. James W. Dawson, who, with the

help of his wife purchased an ordinary cooking range, 12 x 16, and placed it in a shed kitchen behind his residence on the Alameda. He obtained the fruit from neighboring orchards which was heated before it was placed in cans. Three hundred-fifty cans were the season's first output.

In 1872, the base of operations was moved to 21st and Julian Streets where production doubled from the previous year.

A year or two later a new and enlarged building was constructed at Fifth and Julian Streets. The company was incorporated and titled San Jose Fruit Packing Company. That year production increased to 25,000 cans. The business continued until 1878, when Dr. Dawson sold his share and retired. He resumed business on his Alameda property until he died in 1885, and his son continued the business.

By 1868, the main strawberry growing section was north of San Jose and Santa Clara in the Alviso and Milpitas area. The first person was Mr. Cary Peebles and later owned by Mr. Agnew at Agnew Station. Later large portions were planted in the Berryessa area. By 1922, the bulk of the land was leased to the Chinese and Japanese and they became the growers of most of the berries in the valley.



San Jose, 1866 view northeast from courthouse along First Street. Note box factory (left), an early supplier to fruit industry. Photo by J. T. Pollock, Robert T. Butcher and Eugene Butcher Collection. Courtesy Robert T. Butcher

CHAPTER 8

TRANSPORTATION WAS IMPORTANT

By 1900, prune production reached 87,000 tons with about 85 packing plants spread from San Jose to Visalia. It was necessary for the plants to be near the orchards to make them easily accessible to farmers so they could deliver the crops by horse-drawn wagons in one day while the fruit was still fresh. The distance that fruits could be hauled depended on the condition of early-day roads. The fruit growing area had to be within the range of railroad and water routes, as well. San Jose had access to San Francisco by boats so small landings lined the south bay in the Alviso area.

A railroad began operation in 1864, which connected San Jose with San Francisco. Rail lines ran in the north and east bay and a railroad even ran to Tres Pinos via San Jose, Gilroy and Hollister.

The Civil War had a positive affect on fruit growers in California. When the transcontinental railroad was first proposed, a southern route was favored due to the ease of construction and lesser cost. But when the war started, the federal government thought that route was too vulnerable to the Confederate forces and proposed the Sierra Nevada route. That route ultimately saved shipping time to the Midwest and Eastern markets. The completion of the

transcontinental railroad in 1869, played a big part in the fruit industry opening up a big market for the California growers.

CHAPTER 9

TOGETHERNESS MAKES IT HAPPEN

During the years of the late 1880's and early 1890's, there was overplanting and overproduction in the prune industry. Supply was ahead of demand which affected the price. Another problem was a lack of coordination in the marketing portion of the industry. Small packing and marketing agencies were competing against each other, as well as the poor quality of packaging being a factor to discouraging consumers from buying the product.

American consumers were used to two kinds of prunes as the California prunes became available. High quality prunes were imported from France, packed in neat boxes or glass jars. Austria-Hungary supplied a different kind of prunes produced in Bosnia and Serbia. That fruit was smaller and packed in bulk, weighing from 1,500 to 2,000 pounds. It looked better than the California fruit, but when kept in the stores for two or three years they became dry, hard, and worm-infested.

The California farmers seemed unconcerned about the prune quality and packaging and believed their product was more essential to American consumers as any improvements of the product might result in high prices in the marketplace. Throughout California, farmers called for larger organizations to solve the problem of high prices and poor packing.

Most of the farmers believed they could increase production and still maintain higher prices and control the volume consumers would purchase. They looked for packers who would buy at the growers' price if they hung on long enough. They depended on jobbers in San Francisco and even some back East to buy their prunes even when the selling arrangements were unplanned and temporary.

By 1890, the dried fruit buyers in the Santa Clara Valley organized the Fruit Dryers and Packers Association in order to bring about uniformity in buying procedures. Buyers were buying by verbal contract until 1891, when buyers began to encourage the use of written purchase contract in order to avoid controversy over price and payment to the farmer as with the prior procedure. Another proposal was the use of uniform grading procedure.

Some growers got together to find a solution to their growing problems by forming associations that received green fruit, dried it, packed it, and marketed it.

There were a number of small cooperatives in the Santa Clara Valley until early in 1892, when Colonel Philo Hersey formed the Santa Clara County Fruit Exchange. And in late 1892, the Fruit Growers Union was headed by F. M. Richter, a large packing and marketing agency, that the growers themselves would own and control. Most of the smaller cooperatives later became part of the Exchange. Its brand was a wagon wheel with each member organization

shown as a spoke. The Exchange built several warehouses, and resisted grower pressure to hold out for high prices.

The Fruit Exchange eventually lost grower support due to packers level price and refusal of growers to deliver the fruit and appreciate the Exchange's efforts to establish marketing stability in the industry.

Despite the problems of the Fruit Exchange, it continued until 1916. The industry's marketing methods were changing. The Fruit Growers Union had their own staff who handled dried fruits almost from the start of production. They guaranteed to pay cash for fruit upon delivery to the packing house. Instead of making a settlement at the end of the season, with other cooperatives, the growers could have their money now.

Some packers became independent handlers, and a part of the California Packing Corporation was among the firms in the dried fruit industry.

One of the founders of C.P.C. was Willard M. Griffin, who arrived on the west coast from Maine in the 1870's, as a shipbuilder. He later entered into the fruit business in Santa Clara Valley where he made the biggest portion of his money.

In 1901, he and his family moved into an 8,947 square foot, six bedroom home located on 98 acres in the Los Altos Hills, which is now part of the campus of Foothill College. The house

needs a \$4 million renovation in order to survive, which the college cannot afford, so it will likely be demolished if a benefactor of the historic home does not come forward.

J. H. Flickinger, a pioneer San Jose area fruit canner, also packed dried fruits. The Fleming brothers established a fruit drying and marketing business in 1887, in Campbell. Even F. M. "Borax" Smith of 20-Mule Team Borax fame owned 250 acres of orchards and its canning and packing plants near Saratoga, which he later sold in 1908.

Increased production and declining prices caused unrest in the industry until Charles Wesley Childs, orchardist and assistant principal of San Jose Normal School (now San Jose State University) offered suggestions that created enough interest that led to calling a convention of central California farmers in San Jose on January 15-17, 1900. More than one thousand growers attended who formed the California Cured Fruit Association. They agreed that when 75 percent of the fruit crop was signed up in the Association, it would try to fix and maintain a price for that crop.

Sixty-five prune packers signed contracts to receive and handle the members' crops. In turn, the packers organized the California Packers Company, a type of cooperative, in which they would pool their sales and receive their net earnings on a prorata basis.

Producers of dried apricots and peaches were not interested in the Association, but it had

4,263 growers having 55,670 acres of prunes, approximately 75% of production.

The prune production of 1900 reached an all-time high and the Cured Fruit Association had to under sell the prunes, as even the European consumer would not buy California prunes since those from France, Bosnia and Serbia were larger and cheaper.

In March, 1901, special advertising in the Midwest and East on how to prepare and serve prunes was tried, but due to poor packaging and unfamiliarity of the prune by people in those areas and fear of the fruit being worm-infested in a few weeks did not buy. At a June of 1901 meeting, it was announced that only 47.5 percent of the 1900 crop was sold. After the meeting, the Cured Fruit Association seemed to fall apart, and the enormous carry-over was sold for about half a cent per pound.

When prices began to increase, farmers attempted to sell individually instead of sticking with the association until growers became dissatisfied with marketing practices and bound themselves by contract to deliver their fruit to their marketing associations and formed a new and different Cured Fruit Exchange.

During the period of new growth, mechanical aids and devices helped the farmers. For example, improved ways of dipping the fruit in lye solution, size grading, and sorting belts were a few of the new conveniences. Filling bulk-pack boxes was speeded up by cut-off gates and box

nailing machines were perfected to speed up bulk-pack box making and closing, but for many years human labor was used by most packing houses.

Growers and packers stumbled through problems when Eastern packers did not put out as good packs as those from California and undercut their prices. Fruit was sent in bulk by Eastern packers to Europe where the fruit was packed there and lower grades were mixed with the better product, offering them as Santa Clara prunes. It was rough competition for the California exported packs.

In 1908, the Dried Fruit Association of California was formed in order to deal with the un-uniformity of transportation, legislation, and pure food laws in the industry. It soon drafted a uniform sales contract that would be more equitable to it's members.

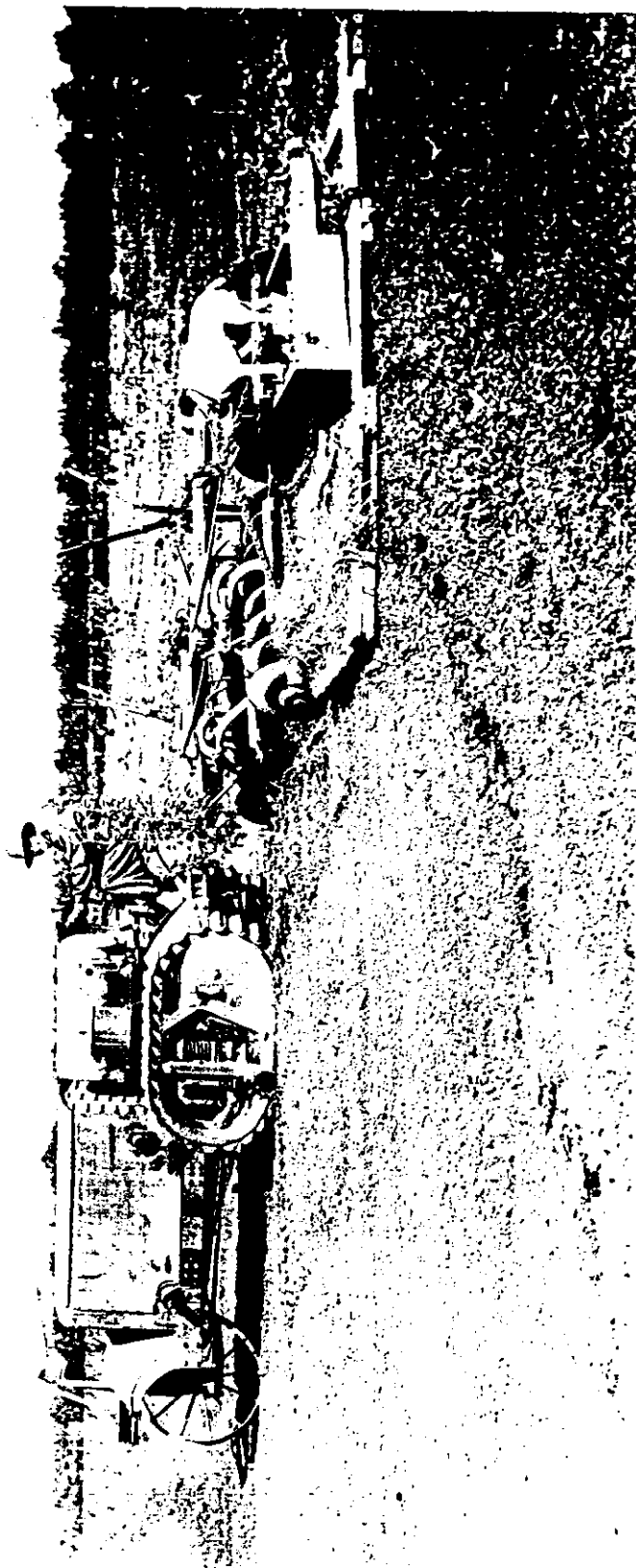
Dried fruit exports were increasing so the Dried Fruit Association proceeded to introduce more orderly and equitable ways in it's exporting procedures. The importers resisted the change, but later came to terms as it also protected the import buyer as well as the exporter.



Women "facing" 25-pound boxes of prunes by hand at Los
Gatos Cured Fruit Company, c. 1910. The rate was 10 cents
per box, but bread was 5 cents a loaf. Courtesy Sun-Diamond
Growers



Oil painting by E. Standish in 1929 captures the "Valley of Heart's Delight" when it most fully deserved the title. Painting was widely reproduced as an inducement to settle in Santa Clara County. *Courtesy Ralph Rambo*



Yuba Model 12 tractor, Detroit-made but California-designed, with track mounted on two-inch ball bearings; if track broke, bearings were scattered, to be mistaken later by archaeology buffs as Spanish cannon shot. Here, woman and her dog disk and slab orchard. c. 1915. *Courtesy, Sun-Diamond Growers*

CHAPTER 10

WAR, WEATHER AND THE ASSOCIATION

The outbreak of World War I in Europe increased the need for foodstuffs in western Europe, but the dried fruit industry benefited little from it. When the United States entered the war in 1917, the U. S. government reserved large quantities of dried fruit for its military. Most of the fruit was scooped up during that time at prices the growers thought were acceptable.

It was during 1917, the California Prune and Apricot Growers, Inc. was formed when growers joined the organization on believing that they could control the price for their finished product. There were twenty-five trustees and thirteen directors. The trustees were elected by the growers and the directors selected by the trustees. The fruit growers had to buy into the association and on April 30th it was announced that 75 percent of prune and apricot acreage had been signed on to the association membership contracts. The new association chose the trade mark brand as "Sunsweet."

The association became operational in March the same year, but had some problems in prices, marketing and advertising, but it learned as it went along. The by-laws were amended by the end of the year regarding dividends so the association could retain enough capital from the

sale of their product to buy warehouses. By spring of 1918, the first year of the association's operations turned out well, but the crop of 1918 was almost a total washout due to heavy rains in September, in the midst of the prune harvest. Many growers lost their whole crop while others saved part of theirs. In Santa Clara Valley, the storm began on the 12th of September and it rained almost daily for two weeks ending with a downpour when seven inches of rain fell in 48 hours. The storm happened in the midst of the flue epidemic and most of the able-bodied men were in the service of their country. The growers tried to salvage their crops by stacking the trays of dried fruit, but some of the soggy fruit could not be saved. Desperate growers begged their association to take their partly spoiled fruit, but the association's trustees and directors took a firm stand that if any of the poor fruit reached consumers it would help destroy the market for prunes rather than improve it.

By 1919, the market improved due to the country's unprecedented prosperity and revival of export trade.

The 1920 crop season had bright prospects, but with the reorganization of the association and dried fruit industry resulted from the collapse of the United States food commodity market. It then was necessary for the association and packers to sell dried fruits in small quantities and current prices.

Growers did not like the prices and payments promised, and many had to refund advance payments paid on the projection of crop production. The association tried to make the best of a bad situation and launched an advertising campaign to the major eastern markets.

In 1918, the association built its headquarters at the southeast corner of Market and San Antonio streets in San Jose. Many conflicts occurred within the trustees, directors and management, but it still had to do its job of receiving, packing and marketing the dried fruits of its members so it opened branch sales offices in San Francisco and Los Angeles. It also introduced the two-pound consumer pack as a convenience pack and introduced many new innovations to market dried prunes and apricots.

By 1919, there were more prunes grown in Santa Clara Valley than the whole United States. There were 7,652,000 prune trees here. Apricots were second with 665,000, peaches third with 482,000 and cherries fourth with 380,000 trees. That amount of trees produced an income of \$49 million.

In January, 1921, the association launched a membership campaign, urging growers to sign up for seven-year contracts. That would give the association seven years of peace.

By 1922, there were 30 packing houses owned and operated by the California Prune & Apricot Growers Association, plus nine affiliated to that organization, and eighteen independent

packers. In the busy season the payroll totaled over \$2 million.

There was much dissent and unrest in the association during the new few years until another reorganization in November, 1927, at which time the association voted to:

1) decentralize and form local units. 2) provide an annual withdrawal privilege during a specific time when a member may withdraw, and 3) local units might operate their own packing houses to give growers more direct control over packing.



Seventeen-acre driveway of Campbell Fruit Growers Union, organized in 1892, and taken over by Sunsweet in 1917. workers are scraping dried fruit from trays into boxes. View south toward Los Catos gap c. 1900. Courtesy Campbell Historical Museum



CHAPTER 11

THE GARNISH

When you think of fruit salad, you think of pears, peaches, pineapple, cherries and sometimes, even apricots and prunes. But what would fruit salad be without the final ingredient, or grapes, to add to that tasty and healthy food. But this chapter refers, not to the growers of table grapes, but vintners.

The first plantings was by Charles Lefranc at New Almaden in 1852. In 1857, he married a daughter of the owner of half the property in the area. He later purchased the other half and became sole owner of the Almaden vineyard.

In 1858, Frank Stock planted a vineyard at the corner of Eighth and Williams Street in San Jose. In 1869, the vineyard was discontinued and Mr. Stock presented his vines to Mr. Lefranc, which consisted of valuable German varieties. Then Mr. Lefranc turned his interest to wine making and his vineyards grew to 131 acres.

There were other plantings by other grape growers between 1868 and 1871, especially in the Cupertino district. Later the area converted to a variety of orchards

Before Prohibition, California had 700 wineries that produced an average total of 45 million gallons.

1977
W. H. Mirassou

Santa Clara

Cabernet Sauvignon

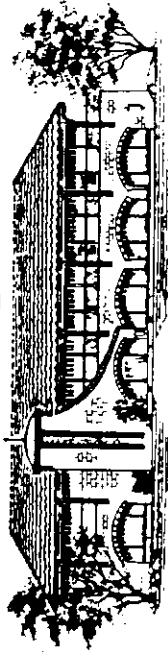
*Produced and Bottled by W. H. Mirassou Vineyards
 San Jose, California · Est. 1877 · No. 123 By Vol.*



VINTAGE 1979

Charles Lefranc

*A Founder's
 Wine*



MONTEREY COUNTY
Fumé Blanc

Here is one of the most remarkable full bodied dry wines of its kind. Fumé Blanc means white smoke and is made predominantly from the SAUVIGNON BLANC grape. Sauvignon Blanc prospers and reaches perfection in Monterey County, producing a wine of extraordinary fragrance and breed.

PRODUCED AND BOTTLED BY
 ALMADEN VINEYARDS, SAN JOSE, CA BW 145
 ALCOHOL 12.5% BY VOLUME

In south county, the Gilroy area was part of that number, but all wineries faced a dilemma when the 18th Amendment of the U. S. Constitution went into effect on January 16, 1920. The law created jurisdictions in which states and the federal government exercised control over the sale and use of intoxicating liquor. Overall control was by the Internal Revenue Service, which had been collecting taxes on liquor sales.

During Prohibition about 150 of the wineries continued to operate, producing less than 10 million gallons annually. But they were licensed only to produce the product for sacramental, medicinal or non-beverage purposes. It was legal for the vintner to grow and harvest his own grapes and drink his own wine in the privacy of his own home, but not to sell it to anyone.

Local wine makers turned to other means of selling their product as Eastern buyers came up with the idea to make grape syrup. Condensed down to one-quarter of the original product, it had a high sugar content and was used as a soft drink flavoring. Some even suggested drying the grapes for raisins. Some wine producers, unsuccessfully, even tried to produce non-alcoholic wines.

Representatives from the National Ice and Cold Storage Company of San Francisco met with Gilroy officials and the largest dehydrator in California was built on south Monterey Street in Gilroy. Several thousand tons of prunes, apricots, pumpkins and other products were

dehydrated in 1920 and 1921.

In November, 1920, a local grower was arrested by the Feds when they discovered four whiskey stills on his Hecker Pass ranch, along with a large quantity of wine. It was later determined the grower had been distilling about twenty gallons a day, which he loaded in his car and drove to Oakland to sell.

Despite Prohibition, it was determined that alcohol consumption was on the increase, not decrease, during the thirteen years the law was in effect. In 1922, there were 2,850 acres of vineyards in Santa Clara Valley.

Finally the 21st Amendment was enacted, repealing Prohibition in 1933, during Franklin Roosevelt's first term in office. What had started out as the "great experiment" to prohibit alcohol consumption in the country created more problems than was worth the effort to stop it.

Olives was also grown in the area. In 1919, there were 23,000 olive trees in Santa Clara County. The largest plantings was on Quito Road near its junction with Saratoga Avenue. The property was originally a Spanish rancho which was divided in 1882. Edward E. Goodrich became owner and slowly improved the property where he processed the olives into oil. The property was sold one year before Mr. Goodrich's death in 1920.

Citrus fruits were also produced on a small scale in Santa Clara Valley. Orange and

lemon trees were first planted mostly in the eastern and western foothills of the valley, and after six years brought a large harvest. But citrus fruit harvesting never became popular as it did not pay as well as other fruit varieties and was more expensive to grow.

CHAPTER 12

THE GREAT DEPRESSION AND THE FRUIT GROWING INDUSTRY

When the Depression hit in October of 1929, it did not have a large impact until the 1930 fruit crop.. By July of that year, the association had borrowed about \$1 million by setting up a revolving fund to assist members in production financing. By the latter half of the Depression of the 1930's, the California dried fruit industry tottered on the brink of bankruptcy and collapse.

Many growers had bank loans through the Bank of America (Bank of Italy prior to 1930). It offered lower farm mortgage rates than other banks. Through its loans, the bank encouraged farmers to cultivate more profitable crops. During the 1930's, California Lands, Inc., subsidiary owned, foreclosed on 1,718 farms totaling 395,000 acres valued at \$25 million. That mostly included raisin, dairy and livestock industries.

When we, the Olson family, moved to Santa Clara Valley from San Benito County in June, 1934, we moved to a home on a ten acre apricot ranch on the north side of Noble Avenue in the Berryessa district of San Jose, which at that time was still in the county. The ranch was owned by California Lands and the property was sold six months after we moved in.

Many growers who expended their orchards at considerable expense received low prices

for their product. Prior to World War II growers struggled with growing and marketing their product until the outbreak of war in Europe in 1939, when German troops invaded Poland.

In 1931, during the Great Depression, the county's farmers formed another cooperative to buy their equipment cheaply. It was called Orchard Supply Hardware, and located on Tenth Street in San Jose.

Following the end of World War II, the cooperative moved to enlarged quarters at 720 West San Carlos Street where it still stands today.

In 1980, the cooperative was sold to W. R. Grace Company. Today there are 75 store branches located in the state.

During the Depression and dust bowl in Oklahoma and nearby states, families packed their belongings and headed to California for a better life. Some would pitch tents in the fruit orchards to be near the work of cutting apricots and picking prunes. Even small children were expected to help work in the cutting sheds or on their hands and knees under the prune trees. A good example of their plight was shown in the movie of John Steinbeck's "Grapes of Wrath."

During the 1930's, the practice of dehydrating prunes, rather than sun drying the fruit, was found to be more favorable as growers wished to avoid the risk of unfavorable weather during the fruit harvest as the rains of September, 1918, that ruined over half the crop. The men hired to

work in those facilities were paid an hourly wage while apricot cutters and prune pickers were paid by piece work. Scraping trays was considered light work and could even be done by teen-age girls. The work consisted of picking out different cuts of dried apricots, such as premium, culls and slabs (usually the soft fruit laid on the tray).



Preparation of pears for canning at
Schuck & Co., Summerville, 1940s.
Despite improvements, much work is
still done by hand. Increasing
mechanization has steadily reduced
number of such jobs. Schuck shut
down in 1985. Courtesy: *Iron Cold* and
Summerville Historical Society and Museum
Association.

CHAPTER 13

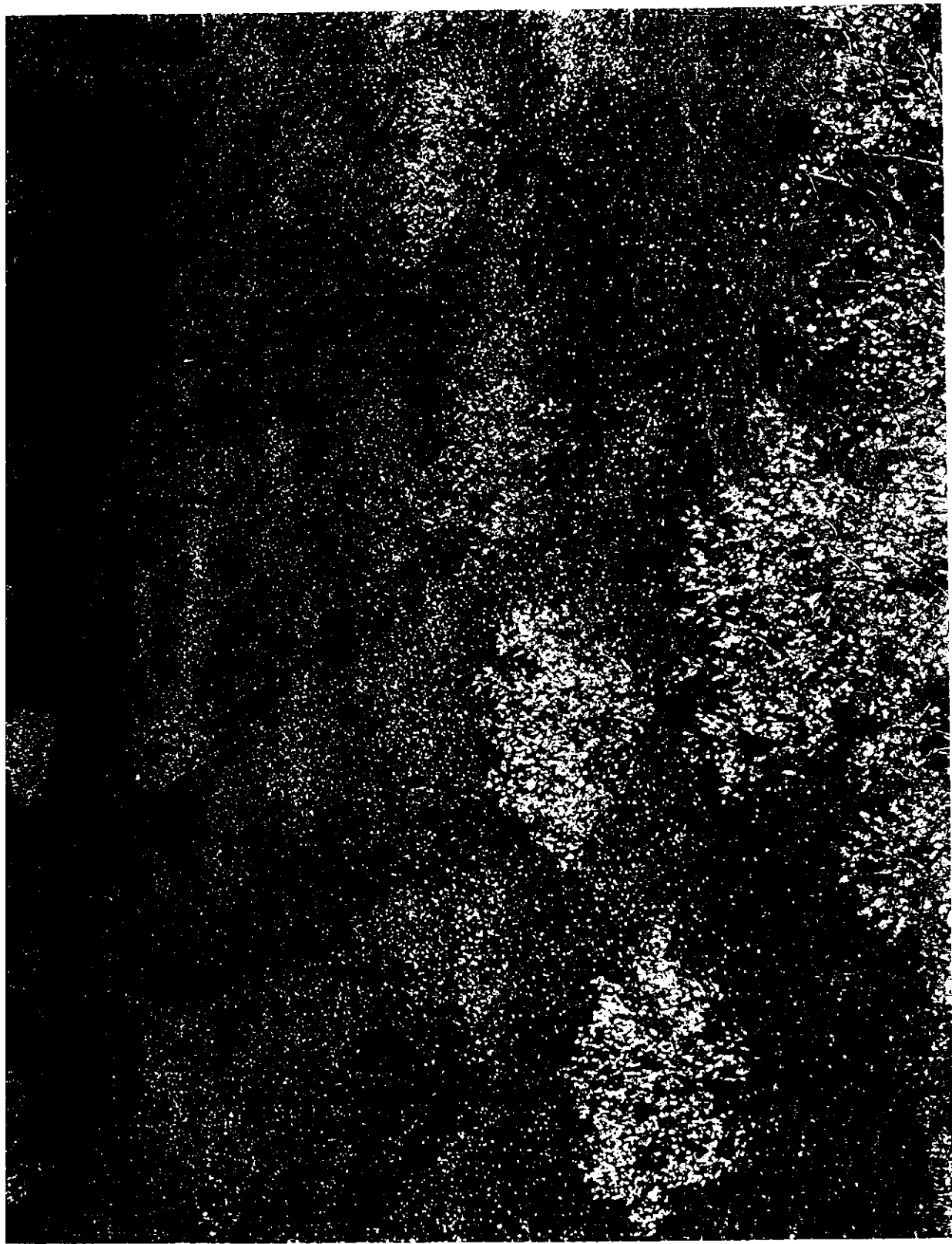
THE LABOR FORCE AND WORLD WAR II

Not only men, but women and children played an important role in the harvesting, packing and preparing fruit for shipment in the fruit growing areas.

A major source of labor was Chinese immigrants. During the 1870's, the out of work Chinese railroad workers eventually left San Francisco to travel to the interior of the state to work in speciality crops. By 1882, Chinese labor represented over half of the total farm labor force. They planted vineyards, vegetable acreage, fruit orchards and sugar beets. Growers took advantage of that source as cheap labor to compensate for high shipping costs to far away markets. In the following years, other nationalities joined in the labor force as the Chinese eventually lessened in numbers.

When packing plants opened, men usually did the more heavy work, like lifting trays, shoveling dried prunes and pits, etc., while the women packed the fruit in packing boxes. Other women and children cut apricots and picked prunes.

I was told by my mother that she had me in a fruit box under her tray while she cut apricots, as I was not even one year old. My two older sisters cut together, and when I was five years old I learned to spread apricots on my mother's tray while she cut the fruit. And when I



And there came a time when the farmer stopped caring for his
orchard and left it abandoned. Orchard near Stanton. 1940.
Photograph by and courtesy of Ansel Adams.

turned six years old, I was able to cut and spread my own fruit working opposite my mother.

The four of us cut apricots every summer until approximately the summer of 1941, when my sister, Norma, and I were old enough to cut fruit on our own, each working in separate facilities.

By the summer of 1942, six months after Pearl Harbor, the dried fruit industry realized it would be operating under wartime controls. Federal controls regulated fruit procurement, handling, packing and marketing as the government wanted to insure an adequate supply for the armed services.

War industries and the armed services reduced the supply of able-bodied manpower in the California agriculture industry. The internment of Japanese, also, reduced not only that source of manpower, but farms were deserted where the people had previously lived and worked.

In August of 1942, the Federal Employment Service put into effect an emergency program to bring in Mexican farm workers. That program continued in one way or another until the end of 1965.

That same summer my sister, Norma, and I picked string beans on a ranch located on White Road near Cunningham Avenue. We worked there about three weeks and made two cents for each pound of picked beans. When we both turned 16 years of age, during World War II, and

with a working permit, could work in canneries and packing houses to help in the processing of fruit for the war effort.

When the war ended on August 14, 1945, wartime conditions continued through the 1945 crop marketing season as the government extended its subsidy program on prune export. There was unrest among the growers regarding peacetime prices and shipping their product.

During the war, the government assured the growers it would assist them in adjusting to peacetime conditions, but it proved to be a larger undertaking than anyone realized. From 1947 through 1951, the Federal government put \$40,319,000 into the prune industry, accounting for the disposal of 323,642 tons of fruit. The problem was more on a production than a price level.

CHAPTER 14

THE SCORSUR CONNECTION

The legacy of Benjamin Scorsur, mentioned earlier, continued and through his sons, John, Nick, and daughter, Pauline, with their fruit growing profession.

Mr. Scorsur's youngest daughter, Pauline, married Paul Vlastelica on January 25, 1920, just about two weeks before her eighteenth birthday.

The saying goes, "God has a plan," and that plan was when the Olson family moved from the north side of Noble Avenue to the south side of Noble Avenue in January, 1935. My parents rented a five-room home from the Vlastelicas there in the middle of a ten-acre apricot ranch. That is where Paul and Pauline's eldest son, Paul, Jr., met my sister, Norma, when they were both nine years of age.

After three summers of cutting apricots and playing together, the two families bonded. During that time, father, Paul, was foreman for the California Packing Corporation, producers and distributors of Del Monte products.

Paul and Norma graduated from San Jose High School in June, 1943, when Norma pursued a business career in downtown San Jose while Paul was drafted into the U. S. Army as an infantryman.

During World War II Norma and Paul corresponded, but their relationship did not blossom until Paul returned from the service in April, 1946.

When Paul returned home he pursued his career in producing and harvesting fruit alongside his father, and also, my sister. But it didn't take that long, as my sister once said as a child that when she grew up, she was going to marry Paul.

The couple was engaged in April, 1947, and married in October of that same year when the apricot harvest was completed. They later purchased an 11-acre fruit ranch of apricots and prunes where they lived, and worked side by side, on Yerba Buena Road in the Evergreen district.

Their two children, Paul and Mary, also helped in the fruit harvesting. When they were old enough, they would rise early and pick windfalls (apricots that fell from the trees to the ground overnight). They also worked beside their mother and grandmother cutting apricots.

My mother and I would help cut apricots on weekends during the peak of the fruit harvest until 1969, which was the last fruit harvest on their property. July 20th of that year still remains strong in my memory as we took a long lunch hour to watch television when the "Eagle" landed on the surface of the moon.

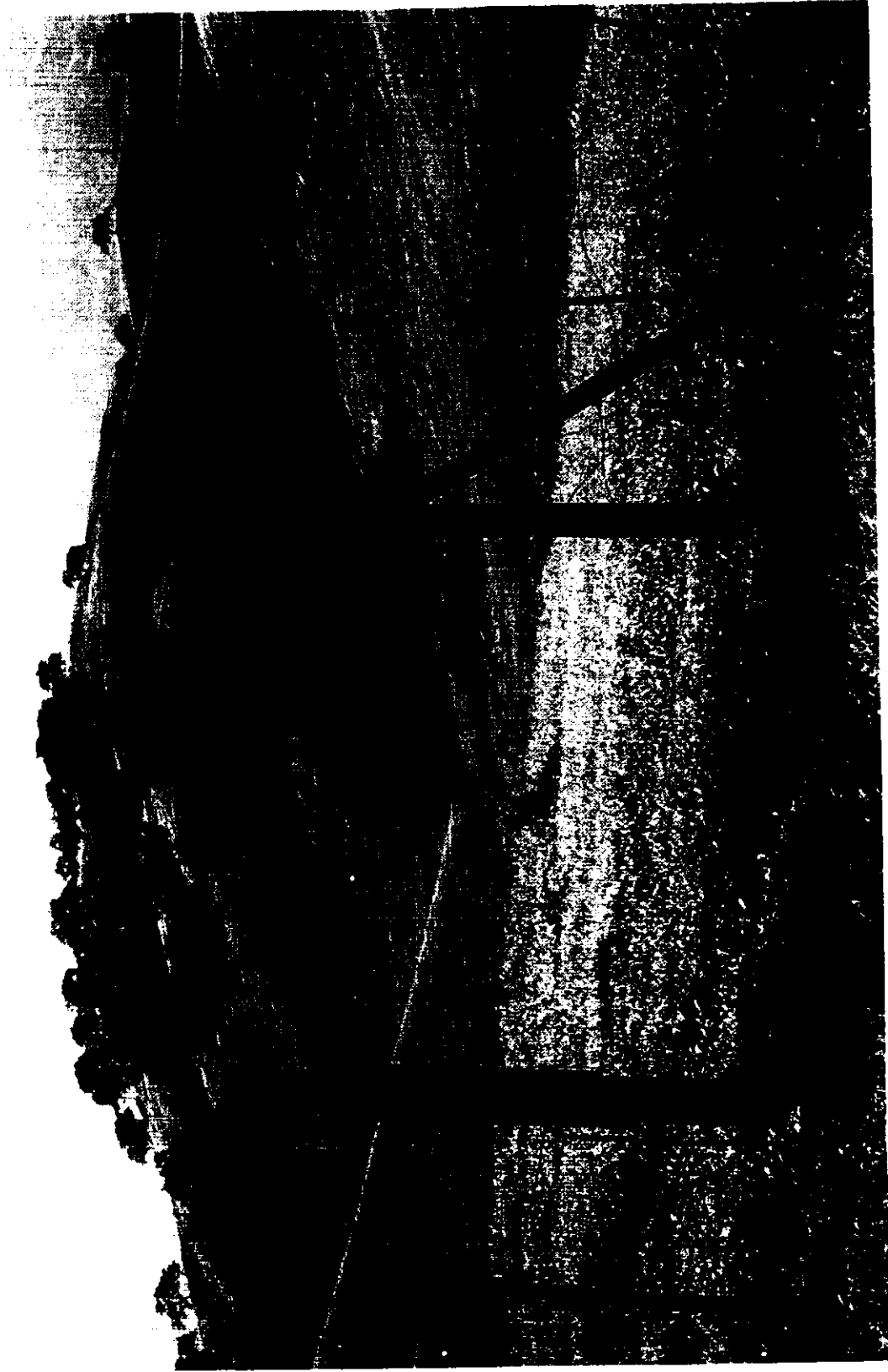
Early the same year the property was purchased by the City of San Jose to use as a roadway entrance to Evergreen Community College.

In 1963, my sister and brother-in-law moved to Fitzgerald Avenue in San Martin where they owned a twenty-acre prune ranch nearby. The children helped in the prune harvest there, as well.

The couple remained in San Martin until after both their children were married in 1975, when the couple later purchased a home in Gilroy.

The couple later sold their prune ranch and Paul worked as manager of a fertilizer company in Gilroy until his early death in 1984.

Norma survived Paul until her own death seventeen years later. Now they are both together again in that big fruit orchard in the sky.



Eastern foothills of Evergreen district, San Jose, as seen from
Charles Kuhn's ranch, Yerba Buena Road, 1981. At present
these foothills are classified agricultural but for how long?

CHAPTER 15

HOW THINGS CHANGE

It began in the 1950's, when low yielding orchards were bulldozed out, and especially Santa Clara Valley saw the spread of urbanization, when most orchards were lost.

Many conditions and circumstances have changed since World War II. Packaging and growing techniques have improved, and Sunsweet joined with Sun-Maid Raisin Growers of California to better advertise their products.

When our family moved from San Benito County to Santa Clara Valley, there were 33 canneries and 21 dried fruit houses in the area. The surrounding countryside was filled with orchards of apricots, prunes, cherries, pears and peaches. When the fruit trees were in bloom, one could drive for miles and find a sea of white blossoms with yellow mustard growing between the rows of trees. The area was known as "The Valley of Heart's Delight."

Today that is all part of the history of fruit production, as now this valley produces the silicon and microchips instead, and the name on Sunsweet's foil packaging is now called plums instead of prunes.

Many old-time farm families have sold to developers since the increase in land value. The Central Valley is now where most of the fruit and produce is grown in this state and soon the

last of the fruit trees will be gone in Santa Clara Valley and paved with homes and streets.

What was once known as the world's fruit producing area of the world is now known around the world as "Silicon Valley."



Santa Clara Valley from Blossom Hill Road in Los Gatos, 1974
A remnant of an apricot orchard provides one last place to run
Courtesy San Jose Mercury News



It takes a bulldozer less than a minute to push down a tree, a common sight in Santa Clara Valley since World War II
Courtesy Santa Clara County Planning Department



Mechanical shaker has replaced hand held hooks to bring down walnuts. (Purdue photo). Same machine can take pines which are caught as they fall by a wire is skirt fitted around the tree (Purdue photo). San Jose

Albany News

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