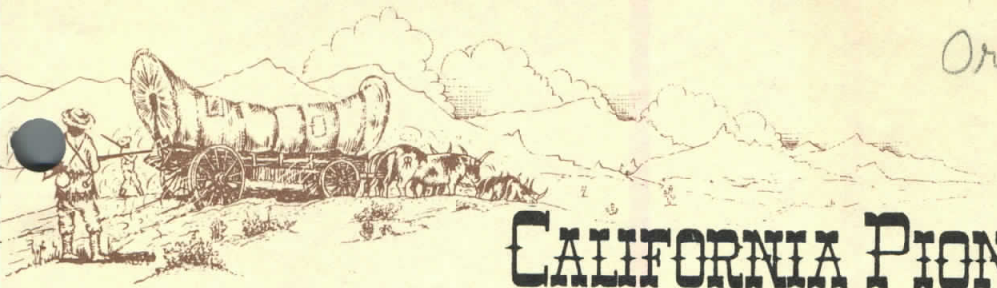


1982

2nd Place - Open

(\$50.00)



Orchards of the Santa
Clara Valley

CALIFORNIA PIONEERS

OF SANTA CLARA COUNTY
SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA

March 9, 1982

Dear Miss Draper:

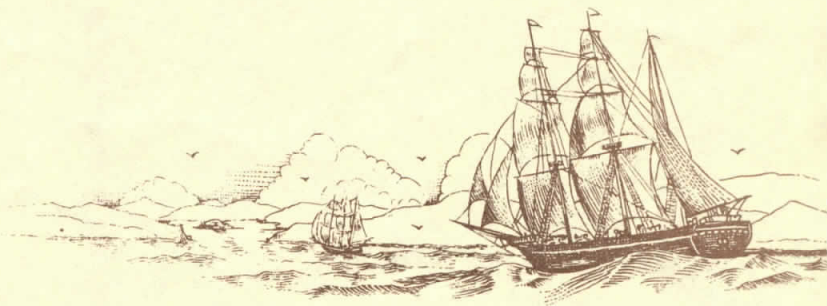
The committee is pleased with your quick response to our essay contest announcement, however we are returning your manuscript so you can make corrections and additions that conform to the rules, a copy of which is enclosed.

Sincerely,

Helen Arbuckle

Helen Arbuckle

Done 4-6-82
Rose Draper
(Castillo)





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CALIFORNIA PIONEERS

OF SANTA CLARA COUNTY
SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA

SANTA CLARA COUNTY HISTORICAL ESSAY CONTEST RULES, 1982

SUBJECT

Historical material on any person, place or subject concerning Santa Clara County.

LENGTH OF ESSAY

Minimum 2500 words.

DEADLINE

April 30, 1982

MAIL OR DELIVER TO

Austen D. Warburton, attorney
12th floor, Bank of America Building
101 Park Center Plaza
San Jose 95113

CONTENTS

The essay must be typewritten, double-space with at least 1 1/4 inch side margins and include the following:

- ✓a) Short introduction or preface
- ✓b) Table of contents
- ✓c) Bibliography
- ✓d) Sources and/or persons consulted
- e) Name, address and telephone number of contestant
- f) Name of school and advisor if high school student
- ✓g) Paper must be submitted in duplicate
- h) Contestant should keep a copy of his/her essay as the Pioneer Society will not be responsible or return papers submitted to the Historical Essay contest.

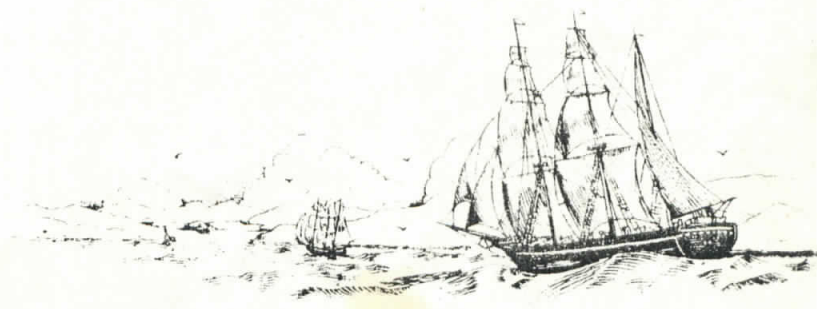
AWARDS

Two categories:

1. Secondary (high school level)
First prize \$200. Second prize \$50. Third prize \$25.
2. General public (college level and all other participants)
First prize \$200. Second prize \$50. Third prize \$25.

Winners will give a summary of their papers at the Society's quarterly luncheon meeting on June 5th.

For further information call Henry Calloway 294-1786 or Helen Arbuckle 269-5324.



Rose Draper (Castillo)
4544 Alhambra Dr.
Fremont, CA 94536
415-792-6399

PREFACE

My essay on the orchards of Santa Clara valley grew as a result of wanting to share the special joys I experienced while growing up amongst the apricot trees.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

Personal experience from 1945 through 1953 while
residing in Campbell and Willow Glen.

SOURCES

Joe Gomez (Rancher in Campbell) - My parents worked on his
ranch from 1944 to 1947.

Magdalena Mireles: Mother

Stella Yeargain: Sister

Esther Gonzales: Sister

Barbara Thompson: Sister

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415-792-6399

THE APRICOT VALLEY BUNCH

By

Rose Castillo

In 1945, when I was a skinny pig-tailed girl of seven, the Santa Clara Valley of California teemed with orchards. The orchards are almost gone today. In their place, suburbs now stretch as far as the eye can see and wedged in between these suburbs sometimes stands a lone orchard.

But when I was growing up, in San Jose, the orchards extended mile after mile, further than the eye could see and in amongst these orchards stood our neighborhood.

The trees in spring would burst forth in soft hues of pinks and whites standing like so many ballerinas waiting for the maestro's cue. When summer came, the fruit hung heavy on the branches, the limbs destined to dust the fine earth until fall, when the fruit would be gone.

Everyone said our neighborhood was built over a swamp. I believe this is true for from time to time our sidewalks

would buckle then the city would have to send someone out to fix them.

My mother, a fierce woman who practised a one-up-manship with all the adroitness of a sea-captain, considered this swamp buried under tons of dirt her personal vendetta. She would balefully eye the home's foundation through the decades and say, "The house is going to fall down one day."

To my mother, these orchards were like the children she raised: sometimes a nuisance and sometimes a blessing. But to us four little sisters that dashed in amongst those apricot trees, the orchards were of that stuff which dreams are made of.

In the mornings, our mother would clothe us in stiffly starched gingham dresses, and shoo us outside, wagging her finger in our faces. "Don't get dirty," she'd say, and then she'd recite in Spanish her favorite axiom, "Es bueno ser pobre, pero no ser cochino." Or as we girls translated it, "It's all right to be poor, but not dirty."

One hot dry June morning, we trudged listlessly outside with mother's litany still ringing in our ears. It was that kind of morning when the arch of the sky shone a pristine blue with a wisp of cloud smoothed across it.

The apricots in the orchard were ready for picking. Thin planks propped up an occasional branch. Long angular ladders lay about or stood about ready to sink into the soft earth from the first touch of a toe. And wooden boxes stacked in neat

little piles of four boxes high by four boxes wide were there to receive the ripened fruit.

Such a morning was not made for idleness and we, four little girls, soon joined in the spirit of things darting about in search of fallen twigs.

Picking up twigs, we sank to our haunches in the tilted earth, and as we drew we formed a tight circle. More often than not, one drawing stick would change from a pencil to a pick and then another little sister would yell, "You got me dirty," whereupon - poof - down the front of a starched dress ran a fine film of dirt.

Like little puppies, this constituted a melee for the rest, and soon the air would be sprayed with a fine dust. One little sister would break for the opening in the white picket fence, and scramble into the deep cool interior of an apricot tree. The rest would follow in close pursuit, each to veer and to lunge within a separate tree.

A soft panting could then be heard from under those branches, punctuated by an "Ouch! Ouch!" as apricots bounced off heads and shoulders. This would remind us we were thirsty, and we'd pluck from the overhanging branches the fat golden-orange fruit that glimmered like Christmas baubles against a backdrop of thick foliage. As we'd sink our sharp little teeth into its sweet juices, a hushed murmur appeared as if to float in the air, "Uhhh - uhhh."

Our thirst and hunger satisfied, one little sister would

turn and ask, "What shall we play?"

"Let's play house," Barbara, the youngest replied.

"Oh, no, I don't want to play that." I, being the oldest, said, "Let's play princesses and dragons. And we'll pretend knights in shining armor come and rescue us."

"Okay!" The twins, Esther and Estella, shouted.

And with this, the orchard began to ring with our child-like ideas - a fragmented statement here - a whole sentence there. "The tree will be our castle. One of us can climb to the top and guard. I know we'll use the apricot boxes to build a bridge and a moat."

And so the morning wore on until from far away over the noon whistle could be heard our mother's call. "Yoo hoo, Rosy, Stella, Esther, Barbara."

We would crawl out from under boxes and branches, and as we drew nearer to home we'd remember her warning. "Don't get dirty." Then our legs and bodies would begin to shiver, and our minds would rush about in search of an excuse.

But, at the early age of 7, 5, and 4 we intuitively unearthed an ancient ritual. Like the Aztecs who thrust a victim forward to appease the Gods, we too now chose in whispers.

"You go first, Rosy," Esther whimpers.

"No. No. Let, Stella, go. She's her favorite," I answer.

"I went first the other day," Stella grumbles, rubbing her round little rump. "Let, Barbara, go. She's the baby."

We seize her. She howls and bites and kicks at us as we wrestle her to the ground. Since she is built like Baby Hercules, this is no easy task for us.

The shadow of our mother looms over us at this very moment. We jump to our feet and three of us rush to stand behind the chosen victim.

"Look at you," she growls. She raises a newspaper over her head. "You're filthy." Barbara stands rooted to the spot, and the rest of us bolt for home.

Many idyllic summers of playing in the orchards passed by, filled with rich dreams of tomorrow and of course we got older. It was the summer of '53, school had drawn to an end and we were in those teenage years of greed. For us this was the time when the world was layed out like a carnival display and we hungered to take all that it had to offer.

And we began to badger our mother for these things of the world that we so longed for. "A new girl in class has a cashmere sweater, can I?" I ask.

"We want a bike like the rest of the kids in school," the twins say.

This appears very heady to Barbara, the youngest at 12, and she throws in a most outrageous request. "I wish I had a father."

My mother turns her attention to this last statement. "Well you don't. He's dead. Anyway, I've told you girls before, stop asking for such foolish things."

We slowly drift outside, and go to lean against the picket fence. Although the orchards are thick with apricots and ready for picking, we do not run to them.

In the distance, through the trees we see a truck bouncing down a dirt lane, a puff of dust following behind. The truck stops and some men jump out. With a clatter, they toss off boxes and ladders are quickly shelved beneath the trees.

Another truck arrives and men in straw hats wearing plaid shirts and jeans hop off. The women wear bandannas wrapped tight around their hair and are dressed in jeans rolled up to their knees, slide off the end of the pickup.

Our curiosity is aroused, and one by one we slip through the crack in the picket fence and move closer to watch the workers.

The men snap the ladders open and plunge them into place. A young woman laces her arm through a shiny metallic bucket and it jingles and teeters in the air as she climbs higher and higher up the ladder until finally at the top she leans out, plucks a fat apricot, and drops it into the bucket. Soon other men and women are stepping up to the ladders. The ladders sink slowly into the soft earth from the weight of the pickers, and as their buckets brim over with cots, the ladders burrow further into the ground.

Our attention is diverted from this buzz of activity when apricots begin to hail down upon our heads and shoulders.

"Ooh. Owch," we squeal, and search for the source of the attack.

A blonde young boy of seventeen or so with a strawhat shadowing his blue eyes grins at us from atop of a pick up. "Are you lazy girls going to play or work this summer?" He asks, a tell-tale apricot in his hand.

"Could we pick apricots," I ask him?

"Oh, no. You're too young. But you can cut them."

"How do we get the job," Esther asks? Her twin sister follows with, "Will we have to work very long hours?"

We see Barbara has a trouble^d look, that perhaps she is thinking she doesn't want to be alone all summer so we all ask. "Is it all right if Barbara comes?"

"Sure," he says. He points his finger down the dirt road to where it meets the street. "Just be there at seven in the morning. A truck will pick you up."

"But how do we know we'll get to cut apricots?" I ask.

"Oh didn't I tell you," he says with a mischievous grin, "My father owns all these orchards hereabouts." A wave of his hand and he is gone on the pickup truck.

We pat each other on the back, and break for the crack in the picket fence, our shirttails flapping against stiff new levis that rustle ever so softly as we slow to a trot and finally collapse upon the fence with peels of laughter.

On the other side of the fence, mother is bent over a basket of wet clothes ready for hanging.

"We have a job, Ma Ma," we shout to her.

"Yes, please, please, can we work," the twins chant.

"Cutting cots," I add.

"Yes. Yes," she says. "It's about time. You're too big to play in the orchards."

We bombard her with descriptions of the blonde boy we will meet tomorrow until she shoves us away. "Here, finish the clothes. I'm going in to rest," she says.

The next morning, we shiver in the crisp new light as we tumble into the pickup already filled with other workers, some young and some old.

"Bye, Ma Ma, Bye, Ma Ma," we cheer and wave to her until her figure becomes small and then a speck.

"Did you see that," Stella asks, "Ma Ma made bacon and eggs just for us."

"Yeah, she's never done that before," Esther says.

"Hot tortillias too," Barbara adds.

"I wonder why," I ask to no one in particular, "she only does that for company."

As we jolt along in the back of the pickup, we lean close to the window, our knees drawn tight. The wind whips by and we scrunch up into a ball. The truck comes to a halt in front of a large shed and the blonde boy is there to meet us. He grins merrily, and asks if he can give us a tour of the place.

His father, a short rotunded man with flushed pink skin is heaving apricot boxes off a large flat-bed. Sweat is pouring down his face, and the sun isn't overhead yet.

Under the shed long slatted trays are resting atop wooden horses, some with apricots heaped on one edge; while others are

being dumped onto the trays causing a great commotion. Behind the shed, apricots are lying out to dry. Row after row of trays are placed side by side, some with plump fresh apricot halves while other trays hold withered and crinkled cots that look like wizened faces with curled inward mouths.

At last we begin to slice apricots in half, munching on every third or fourth one. We wipe our hands on the plastic aprons we wear, and the fruit dries to a sticky smear as the sun pulls higher over head. After awhile we bore of cutting and we decide the twins will challenge Barbara and I to a race to see who can finish a tray first. Our interest is doubly spurred for with each box we empty, Jerry, the blonde boy comes to replace it. The noon whistle peels and we whoop and lay down our paring knives. We wash our hands and tired and aching, we dig in our brown bags for our lunches. We sink to the earth beneath the shade of an awning tree. Jerry joins us bringing some boys and girls - some are new faces and some we recognize from school.

We banter and raise questions of, "How much did you cut? And, how many trays did you finish?" We continue in this vein until one girl says she's cut her finger. A boy nearby teases her that she isn't suppose to cut herself and with that he tosses a slushy apricot on her lap. She stretches back, and picks one herself, and throws but misses her mark and the gooey apricot splatters on Jerry.

Not to be out down, he picks up two, and we hop up as fruit rains down upon our heads. We divide like soldiers, and rush

to hide or scramble in amongst the trees. All too soon, the lunch whistle calls us back to work. The afternoon goes the same as the morning, except we eat less apricots and gossip more with our new friends.

On the way home, we speak regretably that our new stiff levis are grimy with dirt and apricots and we also wonder what our mother will say. At our corner we part from our new friends and slip through the crack in the picket fence. We open the backdoor and the good smell of meat frying and beans bubbling attacks our noses.

Mother turns to us, she eyes us for what seems a long time and says, "You're dinner is ready. Wash up."

We hurry to clean, our stomachs taut with hunger. On our return, we grab a plate but she says, "Sit down. Sit down. You've worked hard today."

She sets a plate heaped with steaming food in front of us and we eye each other. She begins a friendly chatter. "How did the work go? Did you cut much?"

My chest puffs out, and I gravely tell her how many trays we finished today. As she listens, I lower my head to avoid her gaze and a rich euphoric feeling permeates my being. For all the days to follow, our lives would be much changed by the heady discovery that we made in the orchards that summer. The unique revelation of knowing that in our mother's eyes we had sprung into the world of respect to be admired and pampered by her word and hand.