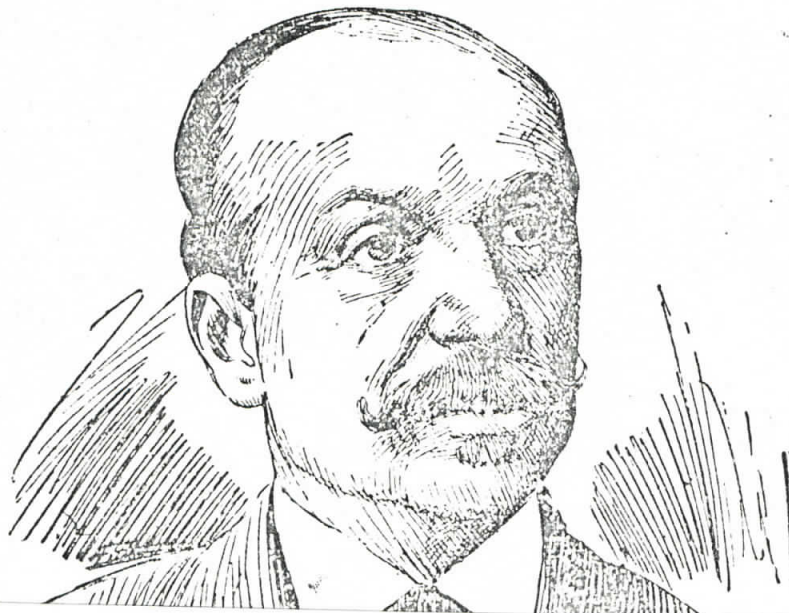


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THE LIFE OF J. H. FLICKINGER /
1830 -- 1897

J. H. FLICKINGER, WHO PASSED AWAY AT
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Acknowledgements

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L.F.G.

LIFE OF J. H. FLICKINGER,

LOUREEN F. GIORDANO

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PREFACE

The "Garden City of the World" has been cemented, subdivided, and redubbed as "Silicon Valley." Though we're grateful for the advances of science (some of them, anyway), many Santa Clara Valley residents do prefer trees to traffic lights and furrows to factories. Every tree that blossoms in the spring superimposes in our minds the image of a past orchard over the now existing parking lot or housing tract.

It isn't that I'm an old old-timer who can dwell on nothing but the past - I grew up when the agriculture of this valley was well past its peak. But I do remember orchards, and packing houses and fields. And I remember textbooks saying, "the Santa Clara Valley, California has some of the richest soil in the world." And then I saw the orchards left to die, the trees chopped up, and the rich soil covered with cement. I saw fewer fields and more freeways. I couldn't help but wonder, "Why?" The sense of loss went beyond a sadness for lost trees or open spaces; it was a heritage lost. Perhaps the tale of the City Mouse and the Country Mouse may seem a simplistic analogy, but I think it applies. There is a danger in our sudden sophistication, our easy adaptation to eating the City Mouse's sweets. In this case, it is the loss of identity. As we hastened to dress San Jose in metropolitan garb, we all but stripped her of her heritage as the

"Garden City."

But looking to people who helped establish our local identity can help us maintain our heritage. For those who settled and built this valley were men and women of particular spirit and foresight. The Franciscan fathers who brought the first fruit trees into California belong to this group of pioneers. So do, Dr. and Mrs. J.M. Dawson who began the first commercial packing house in Santa Clara Valley in 1871. Working in a 12' by 16'' shack, the Dawsons used an ordinary cooking stove in their processing. In spite of the lack of sophisticated equipment, they turned out 300 cases of peaches, pears, cherries, and apricots in the first year, thus beginning the industry that would dominate the Valley for decades to come.

In like manner I would like to present the life of Joseph Henry Flickinger. His creativity and readiness to act tempered with his foresight, helped to advance the Santa Clara Valley fruit industry into world-wide prominence. I firmly believe that if there had been more residents with his enterprising, persevering spirit, the world would still be able to claim San Jose as the Garden City.

EARLY LIFE

Born in Elbesheim, Germany to Adam and Catherine (Katie) Flickinger on May 10, 1830, Joseph Henry Flickinger learned from his parents the habits of life that would lend to his business success in later years. After a voyage to the U.S. in 1838, the family settled with relatives in what is now Erie, Pennsylvania and joined them in farming. And here for the next eleven years Joseph Henry acquired the practices of simplicity and great thrift in combination with the basics of farming. Typical curriculum from the public schools and two years at an Erie academy supplemented this basic education.

Although family and farm had their comforts, Flickinger couldn't content himself with the fields of Erie while the rest of the world was seeing life through gold-tinted glasses. As stories came in of the California gold rush, strange mixtures of truth and fiction, the young Flickinger was drawn by the wonder and excitement of it all. Gold for the taking! Why, a young man with a good head on his shoulders and some gold dust in his pocket could do anything! Many thought this, and many did nothing about it - but the 19 year old Flickinger joined his uncle, John Hechtman, on a trip to New York in April of 1849, and departed on the 24th aboard the Clyde.

VOYAGE

This voyage remained a highlight of his life in spite of other major events, and for good reason, for this gold-seeking voyage almost ended his life. An intense snow storm hit the Clyde while off the Cape, "which incrusted the sails and cordage with ice, and froze the rudder causing the ship to drift for 20 days toward the south pole, during which time of anxiety they were imperiled by floating icebergs, and so near exhausting their provisions that the passengers and crew were put on an allowance of one hard-tack cracker and a cup of water per day!"¹ Both Flickinger and his cabin mate Rufus A. Lockwood, another gold seeker, who ended up a prominent lawyer of San Jose, survived the physical and emotional rigors of the storm, recuperating in Valparaiso, Chile for the last three weeks of August while new crew members were recruited and provisions restocked. The Clyde arrived at last in San Francisco on November 1, 1849.

FIRST ENTERPRISES

Flickinger didn't stay long in San Francisco; he came to San Jose and immediately sprang into action. Using the skills he had acquired, he established a meat market, which he kept open for the duration of the "Legislature of a thousand drinks," which was in session at that time. When that

session closed, Flickinger closed his meat market, and headed for the mines of Marysville. He met with a fair degree of success, enough to convince him that he needn't spend further time and money in mining camps when he could invest those in his own business. He returned to San Jose in September of 1850 and resumed his meat business.

Always willing to invest, expend, and take some risks, Flickinger expanded the market to include not only meat, but general merchandise as well in the Spring of 1851. And seeing another opportunity to better his own business after two years, the young merchant closed the store and devoted his energies to wholesale cattle business. His developing business acumen again brought him success as his undertaking of raising, buying, and selling cattle and sheep grew extensive. Flickinger had acquired 661 acres and based his business at 519 10th Street.² At that time most of the cattle in the valley were owned by the Spanish³, but the **JF** brand borne by Flickinger's cattle was to later exceed in fame any other brand in the county — when it was transferred to canning labels.

It was probably during this time that Flickinger became acquainted with O.H.P. Vennuno (Vennum), another cattle and stock raiser who remained a friend of his for life, keeping photographs and other memorabilia of Flickinger's canning operation.

Almost exactly nine years after the idealistic entrepreneur embarked on his voyage for California, he embarked on another voyage which was to lead him indirectly to more gold than many a miner ever saw. On April 21, 1858 Flickinger married Mary E. Smith in a 3 o'clock ceremony at the Independent Presbyterian Church. Mary was the daughter of Dr. China and Parnell Smith of New York. Now the educated Dr. Smith also had the advantage of a good head for business. Like Flickinger, he had tried mining and met with success in several locations, and like Flickinger, he decided to invest in his own business rather than pursuing mining. He was a pioneer in the San Jose nursery business and the pioneer orchardist in Santa Clara Valley. His 75 acre orchard later became the first portion of Flickinger's money-making property.

Surely Flickinger noticed the fertility of the valley, and must have agreed with the local resident who wrote:

. . . the soil productivity is beyond anything that I ever saw. . . producing the most luxuriant crops of wheat, oats, barley, potatoes, pears and in short, any and everything that grows out of the ground.⁴

And maybe he could say with that writer,

We do not pretend to feed stock of any kind during the winter or summer, nature

herself furnishing at all times abundant ranges for the thousands of cattle that are scattered over the valey[sic].⁵

But if nature herself could do so well, why not profit by it? With the abundance of nature and some work - who knows? So Flickinger began to turn his thoughts to a gold mine of rich earth which didn't glitter with ore but blossomed in the springtime.

LAND - ORCHARD

In 1880, he purchased 75 acres of orchard land in the Berryessa district from his father-in-law, and in characteristic fashion immediately began grooming it for fruit production. Writers of his day saw him not as a passive, patient farmer, but as an agricultural warrior. In an often plagiarized passage in Pen Pictures from the Garden of the World, Foote declares that Flickinger "inaugurated a revolution" and "fought" against the existing sovereigns of that land - the gophers, squirrels, grains and mustard. He spared no expense in clearing the ground of these nuisances along with a number of giant oak trees in order to plant his orchard.

No opportunity passed him by; Flickinger bought up land by degrees until he had 250 acres at Berryessa Avenue and Lundy's Lane by 1888. And on this land he had planted

25,000 trees bearing carefully selected varieties of cherries, apricots, peaches, and prunes. Peaches (Yellow Crawford, Lemon Cling, and Salway) comprised the largest percentage of the fruit, with 10,000 trees; apricots (Moorpark and Hemskirk) were next with 8,000 trees; the famous French prunes grew on 6,000 trees; and the cherries on 1,000. By the 1890's the orchardist had well over 500 acres and 50,000 trees on which he produced not only the above mentioned fruits, but Bartlett pears, plums of the Egg and Green Gage varieties, and tomatoes which were particularly noted for their firmness and sweetness. The shrewd and enterprising Flickinger also acquired two other orchards, one in San Martin, the other near Lawrence Station (which is now El Camino and Lawrence Expressway), each of 100 acres.

With the care of a mother and the precision of a scientist Flickinger and his employees watched the trees constantly, recording the growth and progress of each tree. Excess fruit they removed immediately so that the rest could ripen and develop in optimum conditions; thinning process often bore repetition. Invading insects met with the wrath of the agricultural "warrior." And diseased trees were cared for immediately. Healthy trees were laden with fruit until it attained the peak of its ripeness.

It is no wonder then, that Berryessa drew attention to itself. Very likely it was of Flickinger's orchard that

the reporter wrote:

the extensive orchards are all in bloom,
and show the best care and culture. They
are all well trimmed and cultivated, free
from weeds, and give promise of excellent
crops.⁶

But it wasn't just the beauty of its orchards that brought Berryessa fame . One source names the Flickinger Fruit Cannery as the most important industry in the area.⁷ Certainly the fruit business was common enough at the time, and canneries were thereby successful. But what made Flickinger's operation different? Why was he able to outstrip the competition?

THE CANNERY

At the time that J. H. Flickinger purchased his first orchard land, the only fruit canneries and packing houses in California were located in San Francisco. Santa Clara County fruit growers as well as growers from all over the State had to ship their produce at great cost financially and the cost of quality to the consumer. Growers could either pick the fruit while it was still green, or they could allow it to ripen, and pick it, only to find it overripe and fit only for

jam by the time it reached the cannery. Neither choice was ideal.

Flickinger examined that consequent waste of time, produce, and expense of the existing process, and designed a method by which he could circumvent such waste. Twenty eight April's after his marriage to Katie, he opened J. H. Flickinger's Orchard Cannery in 1886, right on the orchard premises. Having thus eliminated shipping costs and the need for premature picking, he was able to concentrate on insuring high quality.

The fruit remained on the trees until perfectly ripe, at which time it was picked and canned on the same day. Fruit picking halted daily at 4PM so that cannery workers could can all of the day's fruit and leave none behind. Only the best fruit was canned. Workers sorted the fruit using boards with round holes cut out of them; apricots that passed through a 2 inch hole, and peaches and pears which passed through a 2 7/8" hole were rejected as too small. Size wasn't the only determining factor, however. Bruised, damaged, or unripe fruit was also sorted out.

True to his thrifty nature, Flickinger did not allow these discards to go to waste. The rejected fruit, along with the parings from the fruit that had to be trimmed to fit the cans, was immediately cut and laid out for drying on "clean white pine trays."⁸

In this practice again, he was an innovator. No other growers in the area were drying their own fruit and making a profit from what might otherwise have been considered rubbish.

Not only did Flickinger and Company supply the fruit for canning and can the fruit themselves, but they also manufactured all of their own cans. As with the fruit itself, high quality was a prime consideration. The cans were tested for leaks under high pressure. They were sealed with resin to prevent poisoning. Afterwards they were hand soldered. By the mid 1890's they were manufacturing over a million cans annually.

Flickinger's foresight caused him to invest in the latest and best equipment possible. Two main engines of sixty and twenty horsepower respectively ran the machinery. And one of the buildings on the property was an electric plant which powered the 150 incandescent lamps throughout the operation.

The use of such innovations contributed to the company's rapid growth. After its first year in operation, the company employed over 400 men and women, and took in over \$100 thousand. The original \$20 thousand outlay for the orchard and cannery was soon returned. The company survived the rigors of fruit growers disputes with the railroads in the late '80's. The current rate (\$200 - \$400 per 10 ton car) still made it cheaper to send goods around the Horn than by rail-

road. But even the setting of new rates by the commissioners did not prove to be a set back. Flickinger's products made their way back East, and even to "all parts of Europe, Australia, Japan and China."⁹ "So great has the industry which he founded become" remarked one writer, "that there is not a country of any greatness on earth where his brands of canned fruit cannot be found."¹⁰

The company's growth resulted in its incorporation as the J. H. Flickinger Company in 1893, with a capital stock of \$1 million. Most of the stock was taken by family members and by 1895 almost half of it was paid up. Joseph H. Flickinger himself was president, while his two sons, H. Allen and Charles Flickinger were Secretary and Assistant Superintendent respectively. L.F. Graham served as Vice-President and General Superintendent, while Joseph R. Patton held the offices of Treasurer and Attorney.

FAMILY

The "Copy of the Great Register of Santa Clara County of 1892" lists voter #3924 as Joseph Henry Flickinger, a man of light complexion with gray eyes and hair, standing 5' 5 3/4" with no visible marks or scars. Although he may have had no distinguishing physical marks, one distinct mark of his character was his devotion to his family. Research doesn't yield evidence of lavish displays of affection for his wife and children, but it does reveal his consistent provision for

their needs, his consideration for their welfare and happiness during his lifetime and after his death.

Joseph and Katie Flickinger had five children over a period of ten years. Katie (Catherine) and Charles S., twins born in 1860, were both to have major roles in their father's company. Henry Allen born in 1864, held a company office. Nellie Parnell born in 1868, later married J.R. Patton. And Sarah born in 1870, later attended the San Jose Normal School.

Mr. Flickinger gave each of his children a preferred station in the company. His eldest son, Charles described in the Great Register as a fair complected man with blue eyes and light hair, standing 5' 5 $\frac{1}{4}$ ". At the printing of the Register (1892), he was listed as an orchardist. He worked under his father as Assistant Superintendent, and after his father's death, he continued with the company, holding the Treasurer's office, and eventually becoming manager of the Lawrence orchard. He resided in Lawrence Station near the orchard. Lacking his father's skill and enterprising spirit, Charles' conservatism could not push the company forward at a time when canning had become competitive.

Henry Allen, standing taller than the rest at 5'7", had blue eyes, brown hair, and the fair Flickinger complexion. He was also listed as an orchardist, having served as Secretary of the company. After his father's death, however, he

pursued other interests, namely mining. Henry's mining undertakings extended from Northern California to Alaska. Ironically, while enroute to Nome he had a shipboard experience similar to his father's many years before. When the Portland became ice bound. Fortunately, the physical and emotional distress wasn't as severe with the passengers of the Portland.

Women's libbers might not agree that Flickinger's daughters received an equal cut of the pie, but Flickinger favored his daughters in the mode of the day by giving preference to their husbands. Nellie's husband, Joseph R. Patton, served as Treasurer and Attorney for the company. And Katie's husband, L. F. Graham, was General Superintendent and Vice President, succeeding Flickiner as President after his death. Graham's leadership ability recognized by Flickinger, was later acknowledged by others. His name was put on a list of potential directors of the Pacific Coast Fruit Association, incorporated in January of 1899. Records show that he purchased \$5 of stock.¹¹

In life Flickinger revealed his loving preference for his children and in his will, he showed forethought and consideration for his wife. Drawn up on September 17, 1887, the will names Mary Flickinger as "executrix" of the will, giving her unrestricted authority to "sell, dispose, and convey" all or any part of the estate as she saw fit. He declared that all of his property was community property and that he bequeathed

only his own half of what he and his wife had acquired since marriage. He desired that his property be "held, used, and enjoyed"¹² by Mary until her death, or until she saw fit to divide it equally among the children.

SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

Flickinger was not an idle man. Neither was he singularly obsessed with his business. Instead, he linked himself with a number of groups that seemed to reflect his own pioneer spirit. Even the church in which he was married, of which he was a member throughout his life, was a pioneer. The Independent Presbyterian Church (later the First Presbyterian Church) was the original Presbyterian church in the city. It was established in 1849 (the year Flickinger arrived), and parts of the first building made the same journey he did; they were shipped around the Horn in 1850.

He became a member of the Society of California Pioneers of San Francisco, and often met with other "49'ers" at the society's meetings. And it is in the pages of the Pioneer, the society's monthly publication that many of the facts of Flickinger's life are recorded.

Lodge #34 of the Independent Order of the Oddfellows was another source of social interaction activity for the canner. Picnics and dances, along with the regular lodge activities allowed him to relax with men of similar social

position and business interests. For example, the 86th Anniversary Ball of Turn Verein Hall afforded him the opportunity to enjoy hearing his canning competitor Elmer Chase as he sang in a trio.

Not content to sit passively while others made decisions, Flickinger became active in the Republican party. It is likely that he met with the members of the Third Ward Republicans who gathered at the Empire Engine house to select delegates and prepare for elections in April of 1887,¹³ for it was no secret that the successful canner would withhold neither time nor funds to assist a candidate or an idea he thought was worthwhile. His backing of Fremont and Dayton, two senators, helped to make their elections successful in Santa Clara County.

In spite of his influence, Flickinger never sought office for himself. One of the only references to official public service we find is the brief mention of his appointment to the venire of jurors which was to try Minda Johnson for grand larceny.

Flickinger's success and thrift could have rendered him a bit on the Scrooge-ish side; fortunately he seemed to hold his wealth and possessions with a steady but open hand. His appreciation of the Valley and desire to further improve it encouraged him to set up a subdivision on Coyote Street "as an inducement to settlers in San Jose."¹⁴ He assisted

friends who needed financial help, and backed up his belief in solid schools and churches by providing funds for buildings whenever necessary. Flickinger's willingness to expend his energies and his wealth on his friends and neighbors left an indelible mark on his community.

CLOSING

The energetic pace of Joseph H. Flickinger's life began winding down in April of 1897. His illness forced him to take to his bed on the 25th, and after the next few weeks, it became evident that no reversal could be expected. The intense pain he suffered for two months eased up in the last hours of his life so that he slipped away peacefully.

The death of Flickinger at 5:40PM in his home at 306 South Eleventh Street on June 24, 1897 possibly brought him more personal attention by the media than he received in his entire life. All of the local papers carried his biography, highlighting "His Perilous Trip Around the Horn in Coming to this State," and openly plagiarizing previous sources and each other. Several papers carried a sketched portrait of him. The articles called him "A Good Citizen," a "Pioneer," a "Remarkable Success." They touched on every aspect of his life, and ended on the ironic note that Flickinger's favorite uncle, Henry Hechtman, also died that very day in Spokane, Washington.

But few, if any, portrayed his life as anything but a series of business transactions. Many missed the essence of his life. Though German born, he was the American's American. He couldn't have worked harder if he'd been a Puritan seeking success as the sign of his salvation, but he didn't cling lavishly to his success. He came to California with dreams and ambitions, seeking gold. He found some; he spent it, never looking back and wringing his hands over what he didn't find. He built, he prospered, he shared freely. He prospered all the more. He looked to the future with an open mind, and to his fellow man with an open heart.

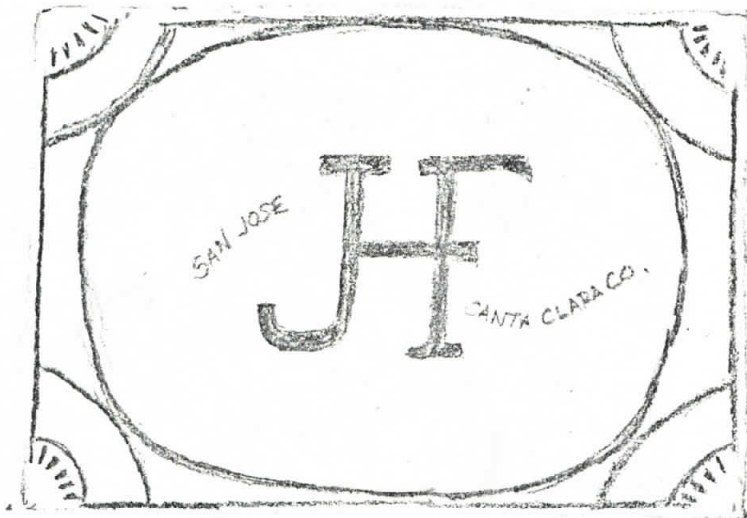
After the 2 o'clock funeral at the Flickinger home and the subsequent internment at Oak Hill, The Pioneers of Santa Clara County were gathered at Alum Rock Park for their annual reunion. A. P. Murgotten eulogized his "friend and comrade," and then the audience sang. The words by 49'er S.C. Upham, reflect the spirit of the life of Joseph Henry Flickinger:

We are a band of Argonauts,
Of the Eureka State,
By some the golden fleece was found,
Whilst others mourned their fate.
We dugged in gulch and delved in mine,
From morn till setting sun,
With aching limbs and moistened brows,
But perseverance won.

Hillside, ravine and tule marsh
Now blossom as the rose,
And round Diablo's verdant base,
The crystal streamlet flows.

Now glory be to God on high:
Let this our pæan be,
And peace on earth, good will to man,
Our prayer, O God, to thee.

The Flickinger Label



Sketched after viewing a remnant
at the Society of the California Pioneers
of San Francisco.

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³Michael Sainos, Letter to Geroge Sainos, 17 Jan. 1860. San Jose Archives, San Jose, California.

⁴Sainos.

⁵Sainos.

⁶"Berryessa Incidents," The Daily Times, 15 April, 1887.

⁷Eugene T. Sawyer, "Berryessa," in History of Santa Clara County California. (Los Angeles: Historic Record Co., 1922), 301.

⁸Sunshine, Fruits and Flowers (San Jose: Smith and Eaton, 1895), 290.

⁹"San Jose Loses a Good Citizen," Call 25 June 1897.

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