Story of the Largest Commercial Orchard in Oregon

Nearly ten years ago, John A. Westerlund, who was then engaged in the immigration bureau of the Harriman lines, first became interested in the Pacific coast as a field for his own personal investments and enterprise. Prior to that time he had been heavily interested in Nebraska agricultural lands, having purchased large holdings from the Union Pacific, which he afterwards disposed of to settlers who became attracted to that country through his untiring efforts to build up its rural population.

Mr. Westerlund's next move, entering the Harriman service in charge of the Northwestern Homeseekers' Bureau, resulted in more than five thousand colonists, actual settlers, being added in one year to the populations of Washington, Idaho and Oregon. It was during this year of 1903 that he first saw the possibilities of the fruit industry on the Pacific coast. Personal investigation only served to confirm his impressions, and he determined to center his activities in the promotion of orchard enterprises. His first location was in the White Salmon district, where he planted a colony known as "Fruithome Tract" and afterwards secured an option on atract of three hundred acres in the Hood River valley. Before concluding this last named purchase, however, Southern Pacific officials persuaded him to first investigate the claims of Southern Oregon, and as a consequence the Hood River option was never taken up, and the Rogue River valley secured one who is today one of its most loyal and public-spirited citizens. "He came, he saw, and he was conquered." In other words, two of the leading members of the old guard, John D. Olwell and Jesse Enyart, met him at the depot "a stranger, and they took him in" —into the ranks of the Boosters' club, from which he has never since been able to release himself.

Buys a Tract

Before leaving this valley, on his first visit, he secured his first tract of four hundred acres, part of the historic old Taylor donation land claim, located on the southern slopes of Roxy Ann. With this tract there passed into Mr. Westerlund's possession, as a trust that he preserves and has jealously guarded, the living monument of one of this valley's old and honored pioneers, familiarly known as "Old Man Taylor's Pine." This noble tree, deserted now by all its fellows, stands like a faithful sentinel over the hallowed memories of early struggles and heroic privations, surrounded by the new-planted generations of a modern commercial orchard. "Boys, let the old tree stand as long as it will, to be my monument," Old Man Taylor's frequent injunction to his stalwart sons, preserves this relic of old days to be the pride of the Monitor orchard. "That tree shall stand," said Mr. Westerlund, in speaking to the writer of its history, "as long as Nature spares it. Whoever purchases the tract which contains it, must first agree to keep the old Taylor Pine sacred from the axe."

Plan Successful

Returning East from his first purchase, Mr. Westerlund went to Chicago, and there formulated the plans which have since been most successfully followed for financing this enterprise, and building up what is now the largest commercial orchard on the coast; still a young orchard, but undoubtedly destined to become a great producing property, whether operated as a whole, as at present, or under separate ownerships, in smaller tracts.

Returning here with funds at his command, Mr. Westerlund at once set about the preliminary work of clearing away the chapparal and scrub oak, traces of which remain to this day in certain favored nooks and corners and on knolls here and there, reserved for building sites in the future, when the time shall be ripe for subdividing the great tract into smaller holdings, with resident owners.

During the succeeding years this first four hundred acres was planted to commercial varieties of pears and apples, and other fruits; and then it was found necessary to employ the capital already secured from eastern investors, to purchase another similar and adjoining tract of four hundred acres, still a part of the old Taylor homestead, and to continue planting until nearly all of this tract also stood covered with a young and promising orchard. These two tracts constitute what is today known as the Monitor Orchard, the whole of Mr. Westerlund's plantings on the east foothills being commonly known as the Westerlund orchards.

Buys More

Still another slice of the Taylor ranch passed into Mr. Westerlund's possession in 1908, this time three hundred and seventy-five acres in extent, west from the Monitor tracts, three hundred acres of this last purchase being now set out in a splendid growing orchard, which has been named, in honor of the great Swedish botanist, the Linnea orchard.

Since 1908, other investments in adjoining tracts have brought the total holdings up to some three thousand acres; a very considerable part of the latest purchases have also been set out in orchard, so that today the planted acres run well over the thousand mark.

The development of such an enterprise has been no small task, indeed, either from the financial point of view, or that of the horticulturist. Suffice it to say for the latter, at present, that the Westerlund tracts will bear comparison today with any similar plantings in the valley, and that fruit already produced has taken first or second prize, and sometimes both, at all of the leading national apple shows, during the last four years.

Buys Supplies Here

It is an easier task, comparatively speaking, to raise a thousand or more acres of orchard, than it is to raise a half million and more of dollars to put into the first named proposition. Mr. Westerlund has done both, and his enterprise stands today, as it has stood from the very beginning, built and paid for, with never a mortgage on it, and never a bill for supplies furnished or done without the money on hand to meet the obligation. It is worthy of mention here that practically every dollar of this investment has been spent in Jackson county, and most of it in Medford. Every tree set out has been purchased from resident nurserymen, and Medford merchants have profited from practically every purchase of supplies. Seven or eight families have always lived on the tract, and from twenty to forty men have been employed, whose wages were necessarily spent here. Mr. Westerlund is not one to rock the boat in which he has taken passage; he has never been known anywhere as a knocker, or a mail-order buyer; on the contrary, he believes it his duty, as a business man and a citizen, to spend his money at home.

"Cash on Hand"

The secret of his financial success, and the consequent success of his horticultural enterprise, lies in his faithful adherence to one principle, best expressed in his own reference to "My cash in hand and free of debt policy." To start right, with a clear title to the land, to place no mortgage on it for improvements or otherwise, to build the orchard no faster than funds could be pledged for the entire growing period of years ahead for each and every acre planted, as planted—this was the original plan of this enterprise, and it has remained its guiding principle throughout. Mr. Westerlund has sought to get for his enterprise a dollar's worth of value for every dollar expended for labor and supplies, and to give his Eastern investors value over their investment for every dollar entrusted to his care. As a result of this policy, the enterprise stands today, financially sound, with the highest banking and mercantile credit, with no encumbrance on it, and no floating debt to harass its management.

Said the manager: "We have spent our money on the orchard; that is what is was brought here for, and we have guarded every penny of expenditure as carefully as we could; there has been no 'overhead expense' that could in any way be avoided. We have however always employed competent help to look after the various departments of our business, and the best legal talent procurable has always been consulted at every step, to safeguard our enterprise, examine titles and protect the interests of our investors and friends. In addition, we have had interested with us, step by step, the best horticultural and business experience in Medford. We have taken no chances, and have made no foolhardy experiments. 'Business first' has been our watchword all along. The only grafting that has been done on these orchards is what has been done on the trees."

Elected to Office

That Mr. Westerlund's substantial character as a citizen and a business man has not gone without fitting recognition from his fellow townsmen and other citizens of Jackson county, is evidenced by the fact of his being twice chosen to represent them in the lower house of the state legislature. During his first term, in the session of 1911, he served as chairman of the horticultural committee, and he is today mentioned as a possible candidate for the speakership in the coming session. In his first term, he justified the confidence given him by yeoman work for the Rogue river valley, and the horticultural interests generally, in procuring the state experimental station, now located near Talent, and in pushing the bill establishing a standard sized fruit box, and Professor O'Gara's bill to prevent the sale of misbranded spraying materials. Mr. Westerlund introduced these measures in the house, and stayed with the fight for them until they became laws. He also fought hard, even though unavailingly at the time, against the attempt of the reactionary elements in the legislature to repeal the initiative law passed by the people at the previous election, closing the Rogue river to commercial fishing; the Hume interests mustered a sufficient representation of moss-backism and modern commercial graft in the legislative ranks to pass their repeal over the heads of the people's representatives, fighting with their back to the wall; Governor West's veto, however, backed up the fight made in the chamber, with a stern rebuke to those who sought to override the people's expressed will, and to emasculate the initiative and referendum; because of this fight and this veto, the Rogue river remains today closed to monopoly, and open to the people. Any attempt to reverse this position of affairs at the coming session, in the interests of any private monopoly, is destined to meet with the same determined opposition from Jackson county's senior representative.

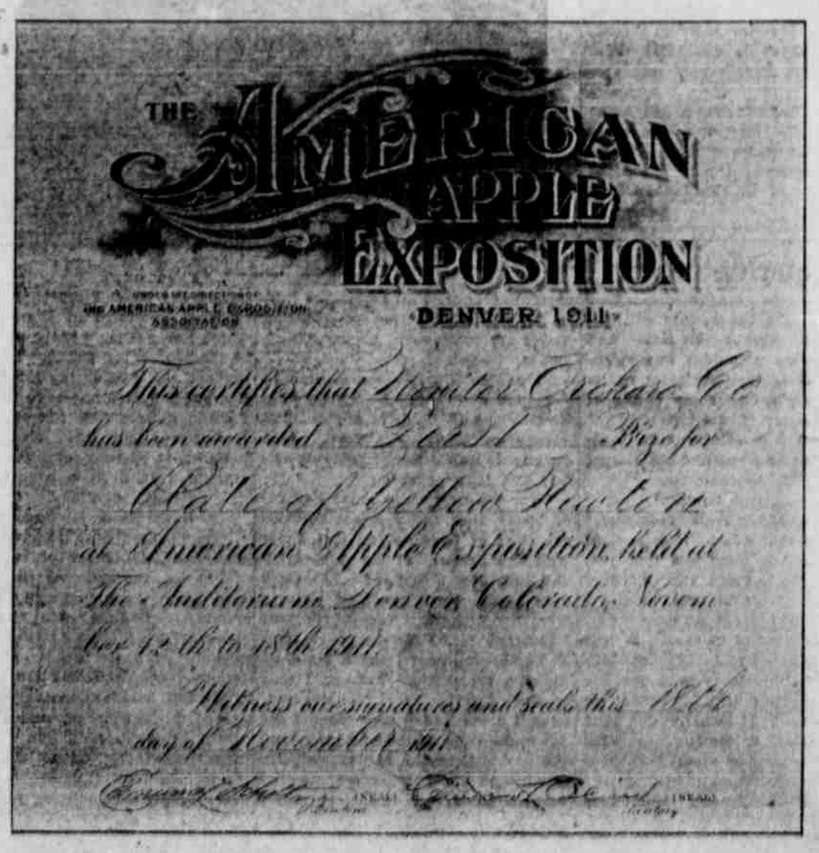
Born in Illinois

Mr. Westerlund was born at Orion, Henry county, Illinois, where his boyhood was spent on his father's farm, until he entered Bethany College at Lindsborg, Kansas, where he spent six years, graduating from the classical course, with the degree of A. B., in 1891. His subsequent business experiences led to that connection with the Union Pacific and Harriman interests which has already been mentioned as leading up to his location in Medford, where he has since resided. He is a firm believer in the future of Medford; and being a man who likes to keep all of his eggs in one basket, since coming here he has disposed of practically all of his former large holdings in Nebraska lands, and has invested the proceeds in two modern business structures on North Fir street, the handsome new Hotel Holland building and the north half of the Mail-Tribune building adjoining, both of which structures he still owns. He is a member of the Illinois society and of the University club. It goes without saying that he is also a leading member of the Commercial club, of which he is a director, and that he stands in the front rank of the Boosters for Medford and the Rogue river valley.

A Corner of the First Planted Apple Trees on Monitor Orchard

John A. Westerlund and Some of His Big Apples

General View of Linnea Orchard Showing Younger Groves of Fruit Trees.



The Monitor and Linnea Orchards

The Monitor and Linnea orchards are situated on the east foothills, about two and one-half miles from Medford, joining the noted Hillcrest orchard, already world-famous, and reputed to be the finest producing commercial orchard ever planted. In soil, exposure, planting, and all other general conditions, the Monitor and Linnea orchards compare favorably with the other, and there seems to be no reason for doubting the belief of the present owners of the younger plantations that they will in time duplicate the well-known fame and the commercial success already achieved by their older neighbor.

The soil for the most part is the famous "black sticky"—the soil that "never wears out." This is the soil on which your genuine old-timer always banked to produce a crop, without irrigation and without artificial fertilization, year in and year out—and the history of agriculture in this valley shows that your old-timer was never disappointed.

This soil lies twenty to thirty feet deep, on average, over practically the entire tract. So abundant is the sub-irrigation from the slopes of Roxy Ann, and so perfect is the retention of moisture by the black sticky, that after months of uninterrupted sunshine, with never a cloud across the sky, a mere scratching of the surface brings to view a moisture-laden soil that can be rolled into a "mud-ball" between the fingers. The frequent, thorough and careful cultivation that is bestowed on these acres conserves this priceless soil quality, and makes it fully available for the growing young trees, as their flourishing condition amply testifies.

Land Lies Right

Nature seems to have arranged the land in an ideal way to favor the planting of an orchard on these slopes. The great, rounded "ridges" and intervening "draws" lie like the spread-out fingers of a human hand pointing sunward down the mountainside. The natural result of this formation, coupled with the high elevation of the entire tract, is a continuous circulation of an upward current of warm air, which guarantees the frost-proof conditions justly claimed for these orchards. And more than that, the temperature in the spring, in blossoming time, is always from six to eight degrees warmer than in the valley below. Strawberries ripen in the plot above the superintendent's house at least ten days ahead of any others in the valley; and far on the upper end of the last-planted acres, just under the north line of the property, overlooking every other fruit tree planted in the Rogue River Valley, there is a tract of two acres of apricots, whose fruit has no peer in point of size, flavor, quality or color, produced at an elevation of 2100 feet above sea-level and nine hundred feet above the city of Medford. No part of the orchards is less than four hundred feet above the town. These apricots won the gold medal at the Seattle Exposition, in the year when the River Valley took the Grand Sweepstakes Prize at Spokane on a car-lot exhibit of apples.

Kinds and Variety of Fruit Planted

To write a detailed description of the various plantings throughout a tract of this size, would require far more space than we have at our command. A brief notice must suffice, and for any further and more particular report we can only quote the manager's own words: "We don't want any interested person, citizen of Medford or any other, to take the manager's word for the merits of these trees. We want them to come out here and see for themselves. Whenever we sell a part of this tract we shall want the buyer to see what he is getting first, and buy afterwards. No sore-heads for ours. A buyer well pleased is a friend well made, and we want that sort of friendships to grow out of our business transactions."

The cut published with this article, showing "A corner of the first planted apple trees in the Monitor orchard," Jonathans by the way, lends point to these words. Certainly there are no finer looking tres for their age anywhere else in any commercial orchard; and the later plantings all give promise of the same good results. The management's experience has shown that at this elevation a longer time, from two to three years, is required to bring a commercial apple or pear tree to the first bearing stage, but that this delay is more than compensated by the greater solidity of growth attained. As for longevity and fruitfulness, the old "family orchards," planted by the Taylors and other former owners, give ample assurance as to these qualities. In one of them is a fifty-one-year-old pear tree which has a recent record of fifty-four bushels of fine fruit; and included in their later plantings, now a part of the Monitor orchard, are eighteen Newtown Pippins which have produced as high as ninety-three boxes of the finest commercial fruit, which sold here for $183.00 or nearly two dollars per box. The smaller fruits, cherries and peaches, plums and prunes, have already shown good promise of becoming prolific bearers; we have elsewhere noticed the remarkable record made by apricots at the highest elevation on the tract.

Cherry Lined Drive

After leaving the main entrance gate, near the Hillcrest orchard, the drive into the Westerlund orchards leads first through "Cherry Lane," the longest cherry-lined avenue in the country, and the pride of the manager's eye. The young and thrifty-looking trees stand on either side of the good auto road, for a mile and a half into the heart of the orchard; there the road turns southeastward, and while the cherry rows keep straight on through the plantation, their place along the road is taken, from the turn to the superintendent's headquarters, by serried ranks of walnuts and chestnuts. It requires little effort of the imagination to picture the future beauty of this drive, when, at no distant date, the shade of these noble trees shall be flung across the roadway, with their branches intermingling from side to side, in one long, cool, green vaulted canopy overhead. We pre-

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