

One of the early plantings in the Rogue River valley was Eden Valley orchard, known as Burrell orchard when this photograph was taken. It has been home for many years for members of the late Colonel Gordon Voorhies' family. The third generation is now enjoying it.

Men With Ideas Captivated by Blossom Time in Rogue Valley

By EVA HAMILTON
Mail Tribune Staff Writer

"The Pasadena of Oregon."

That's what realtors called Medford in 1910. An ad in a telephone book of that date, which lists 1,310 telephones for Medford, Central Point, Gold Hill and Jacksonville, registers this caption as the highest compliment John D. Olwell, orchardist and promoter, thought he could pay the booming city.

The telephone directory, to be added to the historical exhibit of the Fruit Growers League in the Jacksonville Museum, is a little book but it reveals a lot of big ideas shared by big men, who were captivated by blossom time in the Rogue River valley.

They didn't hold a Pear Blossom festival then. But April wove a spell that made many want to substitute "Medford" for "England" in Browning's famous poem, "Oh to be in England now that April's there."

Drugged By Blooms

Many were drugged by the blooms and verdure while passing through on the "Friendly Southern Pacific." They returned and concocted the lures which persuaded others to come and buy orchard acreages.

The Olwell advertisement continued in this vein: "Every advantage connected with living in a city may be had with an Eden Valley tract. An Eden Valley orchard will pay an income the first year. Buy now. People of refinement, people with means, retired businessmen, professional men, college and university graduates, are coming to the Rogue River Valley by the score. Within the past two years almost a hundred Chicago and Evanston, Ill., people have purchased homes near Medford. New York, Philadelphia, Boston are well represented. St. Paul and Minneapolis have more representatives here than in any other cities, combined. The most fascinating investments are in bearing orchards near Medford."

One from Minneapolis, who came and stayed, was Delroy Getchell. The lead advertisement in the telephone book is by the Farmers and Fruitgrowers bank, which was operated for many years at the corner of West Main and Grape sts. in Medford. Those banking interests were purchased by Getchell in 1909. The officers were G. L. Davis, president; L. Niedermeyer, vice president; L. E. Wakeman, cashier, and L. L. Jacobs, assistant cashier.

Outstanding Stock Promotion

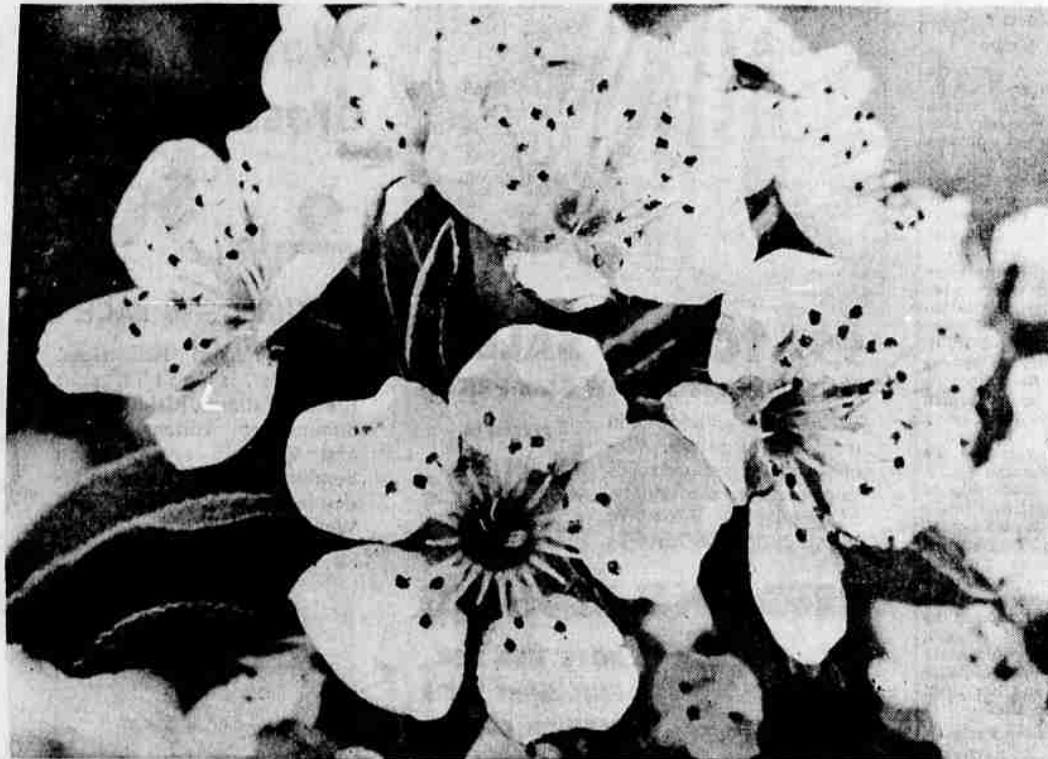
Another souvenir for the museum received by C. B. Cordy, county agent, recalls what was probably the outstanding stock promotion deal in the orchard development.

It is a certificate showing that Axel Nordlow was the owner of two shares of preferred capital stock in the Monitor Orchard company (better known here as the Westerlund orchards). The certificate carries the names of the late Carl Y. Tengwald, as secretary, and J. A. Westerlund, president. The certificate was sent here by Davidson and Seaton of British Columbia who wrote to inquire if the stock was still of value.

The capital stock for the Westerlund venture was \$500,000. The orchard project was started in 1910 but the trees were planted on soil which was not suited to pears. Also, the orchard lands were for the most part on high ground which was impossible to irrigate. Some of the trees flourished in spite of the adverse conditions. During the depression years, however, competition was too keen. The orchards were neglected and insects and diseases took over.

Removes Considerable Acreage

The county removed a considerable acreage of the diseased trees for the protection of neighboring orchardists, who were trying to keep down the blight in their



plantings. After the depression, the orchards were taken off the tax rolls, Cordy said.

There is still a small block of trees being cared for. The rest stand abandoned on the lower slopes of Roxy Ann, gnarled reminders that a tree cannot grow above the ground if it is not nurtured below the earth's surface.

On the other side of the ledger are the reports of fruit sales, showing that in 1909 Comice pears from the Rogue River valley brought \$10.08 per box in London. (Local orchardists, the lucky ones, are getting half that price in 1963).

The first car of fruit was shipped out of the valley in 1890. By 1903, 100 acres had been planted to apples and pears. In 1897 the Weeks and Orr fruit ranch, two miles south of Medford, had 15,000 trees in bearing, on 150 acres.

Credited With First Tree

It is J. H. Stewart, however, who is credited with planting the first pear orchard in the Rogue River valley. His plantings are now a part of the Eden Valley orchard and Bear Creek orchards. Stewart, a nurseryman from Missouri, bought the old Justice place in 1884 and planted the first pear orchard in 1885. The Stewart family is still represented here. Ted Hill of Central Point and Gilbert Hill of Talent are grandsons, both sons of Dillon Hill. Another grandson is J. S. Weeks of Trail.

Many firsts in the story of the fruit industry have been uncovered in the assembling of the museum exhibit. A picture shows the first walnut trees planted in the valley in 1854. They were planted by B. F. Myer, uncle of the late Ralph Billings' mother. Apple and pear seedlings were planted about the same time by Billings' grandmother.

The first commercial packing plant was established in the Rogue River valley by J. A. Whitman in 1890.

Reuben F. Maury was the first grower in the valley to spray for scale, according to the records of the late Mrs. Victor Bursell, whose husband was Jackson county commissioner for many years. J. W. Corum, Mrs. Bursell's father, brought the first yellow transparent apples to the Rogue River valley.

First Valley Irrigation

The first irrigation was developed in 1852 on the Fred Rapp place. Water was taken from Wagner Creek for this project.

The first fruit sold by the box was sold by Governor Briggs in 1859-60 for \$1 per box.

John Norton set out the first D'Anjous in the valley—three rows in 1865. The first Bartlett trees were set out by Henry Barneburg in 1854 and are still in the Crystal Springs orchard.

The first row of Comice, aristocrats of the pear family, was planted the full length of Stewart ave. from the highway to Oakdale on the north side. A splice of the root stock is now in the Jacksonville museum. When Copco bought the land for the construction of plant buildings in that area the pear trees were bulldozed out. There are still a few, however, in the yards of the neighborhood, preserved as shade trees by homeowners.

Comice Pear Obtained

The Comice were obtained, according to Ted Hill, from seeds of winter nellis pears, which were stomped out of the fruit and planted. The shoots, which developed, were grafted to Comice in 1897.

The problems which confronted the young orchardists of the early 1900s were many. Some knew more about show girls, opera and Greek history, than they knew about the composition of the soil. They had studied neither horticulture nor agriculture. Some of them departed with the first frost, so to speak.

The opinions of the experts also went through many changes. The department of agriculture, which now tells growers not to cultivate were then advising them to stir the ground up every week. In late summer, some recall, you could see a cloud of dust rising from every orchard in the valley, where now abundant cover crops grow.

Apples Being Pulled Out

Apples, which had been planted heavily up to approximately 1909 and 1910, were being pulled out a few years later before many local bards had started to sing the popular melody of the times, "When It's Apple Blossom Time in Normandy."

The unhealthy phase of the apple deal, according to exhibit records, resulted from the fact that many planters were not intending to raise fruit but to sell out to remittance men from the east and Europe. Good nursery grown trees were trimmed off at the roots to make it easier to push them down into the soil. Legend claims 1,800 acres were planted in this manner.

At the turn of the century there were two nurseries in the valley furnishing trees, Beesons at Talent and Norcross at Central Point. The Barnum family, which still operates Carlton Nursery south of Medford, came to Phoenix in 1900. The Col. E. C. Washburn orchard in the Table Rock district (all apples) was "booming." The Modoc and Redskin pear blocks in that same community were planted in 1908 and 1909. The Potter Palmers of Chicago had purchased the lands which became Modoc orchards.

Fabulous Mansion Stories

Stories of a fabulous mansion to be built on the slopes of Upper Table Rock were being told in livery stables and at tea tables. The foundation was constructed but the mansion never rose to compete with the mountain's grandeur. E. W. Carlton, brother of Newcomb Carlton, president of the Western Union, developed the Redskin orchard.

In 1913, Carlton was instrumental in the organization of the Fruit Growers League, which is now sponsoring the museum display. The year was one of severe blight infestation. To promote a clean-up, a committee of orchardists and other citizens was formed. The Jackson county court appointed a dozen or more inspectors to assist growers in their eradication work.

Carlton was secretary of the committee. From this effort the permanent organization grew. It was first known as the Farmers and Fruit Growers League. The farming interests ceased to participate and the organization became the Fruit Growers League.

Today, this organization spearheads the protection of the \$15 million fruit industry. It also directs cooperation between the fruitmen and southern Oregon society, of which those who came and stayed and put down their roots as the trees deepened their's have become an integral part.



The first commercial packing house in Medford stood on South Fir and belonged to J. A. Whitman. This photo taken in the 1890s is preserved in the Jacksonville Museum. Particularly interesting today are the clothes worn by men and women for work during that period.



"Like father, like son" residents should comment as they view this photo. It is one of L. E. Hoover, father of Charley Hoover, Jackson county's "tree man." And he is accepting delivery of 100,000 fruit trees at the Medford station. The photo was taken in 1905. The trees were shipped by Woodburn Nurseries.