

## Family success literally grew on trees

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Leonard Buck's achievements as one of the premier commercial orchardists in the Vacaville area was the foundation for Vacaville's most prominent family.

In the 1888 edition of California No. 1 - The Vacaville Early Fruit District, Edward Wickson called the family's large acreages an example of a successful operation:

"In the foreground there first appears a portion of the beautiful stretch of orchard and vineyard of 187 acres owned jointly by Hon. L. W. Buck and his son Frank H. Buck and operated by the latter. Just north of this is the 55-acre orchard belonging singly to Frank H. Buck; and with his own and the firm property he thus has nearly 250 acres in his charge. The property reaches across the floor of the valley (upper Vaca Valley) from side to side, at one end, and up and down the valley a considerable distance."

After Leonard Buck was elected as a Democrat to the state Senate in 1881, his oldest son Frank H. took over the management of the Buck Company. At the time, Frank Buck was 23 years old. Like his father, he was an experienced horticulturist. He soon acquired a name for both his horticultural knowledge and for his business acumen.

Seven years later, Edward Wickson reported of him: "Frank H. Buck is a young man of celerity and vigor in his action and of good business endowments. He was one of the honorary commissioners appointed by the State Horticultural Society to represent California at the New Orleans World's Fair and discharged his duties with credit."

By the late 1880s, Frank H. Buck had developed the Buck Company into the largest shipping company of the area. In this he was helped by his young wife, Annie Elizabeth Stevenson, daughter of Andrew Stevenson, who operated the Vaca Valley and Clear Lake Railroad. The Buck/Stevenson marriage was one of the social events of the year in 1886.

The Buck Company operated the Bucktown Packing Shed, one of Solano County's largest packing and drying operations at the time. William Nutting photographed its operation extensively in 1886 and Edward Wickson described it in detail: "The nearest building in the foreground of the left bank of Ulatis creek and besides the roadway is the packing-house and drier of L. W. and Frank H. Buck - a near view of the building being given in Fig. 2334. In the foreground of this little picture are seen the orchard trucks to which allusion was made ... The picture shows well the general features of the buildings

which comprise an evaporator, packing-house and cutting shed combined. The drier is of the Blowers pattern.

“The building enclosing the drier is 16x36 feet with the brick furnace bisecting it, and on two sides of this furnace are five chambers or sections, each holding two tiers of trays. On the top of the building is an exhaust fan, which is found of great value, hastening the drying, and thus increasing the capacity of the drier. The fan is run by a portable engine situated outside the building.”

The number of people employed varied throughout the season. The amount of fruit cut, packed fresh or dried and then shipped is truly impressive.

“Near the drier Mr. Buck has a good building, 36x44 feet, two stories. The lower floor is used for packing and cutting, and the upper floor for box-nailing, packing of dried fruit, etc. Around the buildings are broad verandas which add much to the sheltered work spaces. Mr. Buck found last year that he must utilize the sun as well as the drier to use up the vast amount of fruit which he had ripening. He handled an average of twenty tons a day of green fruit during six weeks of July and August. He employed from 80 to 85 hands, and his busy season with different fruits extended from June 15th to October 1st. He handled 370 tons of fruit which yielded 70 tons of dried fruit. For the season of 1888 Mr. Buck has constructed an additional cutting-shed and removed a part of his vineyard to secure larger space for sun drying.”

Vacaville soon grew too small for Frank H. Buck's talents. Early on, he acquired orchards in the San Joaquin Valley. Eventually, by the early 1910s, he was president of the Frank H. Buck Fruit and Shipping Co. and the Booth-Kelly Lumber Company in Oregon; vice-president of West Coast Oil Company, Belridge Oil Company, Rodeo Land and Water Company; and the Lost Hills Investment Company. In addition, he was second vice-president of the Amalgamated Oil Company, a director of Associated Pipe Line Company, Sterling Oil & Development Company, Bakersfield Iron Works & Company, Transportation Company of Bakersfield, and The California Fruit Distributors Company.

Besides his residence on Buck Avenue in Vacaville, he and his family lived mostly in a penthouse at the Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco. It was a far cry from the simpler lifestyle described by Wickson in 1886:

“Almost in the exact center of the landscape is the site of the residence of F. H. Buck, the cottage being completely concealed from view by the majestic oaks which embower it ... It is unpretentious in style of architecture but is exceedingly neat and pretty in all its points ... It is an interesting spot in its contrast between wild and cultivated. The native trees shown are the California maple, outlined against the dark green foliage of the live

oak which is struggling for light and air in the clinging embrace of the wild grape vine, which entangles tree growths all along the creeks of this district.”

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