

## **Book aimed to lure Easterners with fruit tales**

**By Sabine Goerke-Shrode**

Monday, October 16, 2000

Are the people in New Orleans, St. Louis, Chicago, New York, Boston and elsewhere, who have paid a dollar a pound for California cherries in April, or who in 1887 ate nearly 2,000 carloads of California peaches, pears, plums, apricots and grapes, curious to know whence a good part of these fruits come, or to learn the manner of their growth and the appearance of the country?

These are the opening words Edward J. Wickson wrote in the ambitious California Illustrated No. 1 - The Vacaville Early Fruit District, photographed and published by San Francisco publisher William R. Nutting.

California Illustrated No. 1 contains a wealth of information.

The main part covers the whole fruit-growing district, giving an in-depth account of the lands, with a description of each individual fruit ranch and its specific orchards. Each of the chapters is illustrated with one of the famous photograph plates.

An additional 10 chapters cover topics such as the history of the area, the fruit varieties grown in the orchards, the cost of production, dates of shipment, labor supply, soil and water, climate and flora.

To this day, California Illustrated No. 1, with its detailed information, is one of the most important sources for our knowledge of the early fruit ranching activities in the area.

Where else would we learn that a photo shows "... W.W. Smith's apricot orchard of about 12 acres, in which are 1,200 trees of exceptional regularity in size and style with scarcely a single break in a row or a defective tree in the orchard."?

"We doubt that there is a more perfect block of trees in the State. The orchard is of good bearing age and Mr. Smith reports that it yielded him a net return of \$350 per acre last year from dried apricots, although he sold too soon and did not get the best prices," the publication reported.

The book was meant to lure hesitant East Coast people to this area, to buy fruit ranches and settle here.

Success stories such as the Buck family were therefore duly noted.

"Mr. (I.K.) Buck came to California with the excursion of the Knights Templars a few years ago, and found his cousin Senator L. W. Buck doing so well in Vaca Valley, that he concluded to cast his fortunes in the same line. His decision probably influenced his brother, W.H. Buck to follow suit, and then Frank Herbert Buck and Charles Buck, sons of I.K. Buck, also took abode in their valley. ...

"He (I.K. Buck) has lately constructed a good two-story house and seems to have no reason to regret his exchange of the Empire State for California."

Photographs of some of the large homes built by these successful ranchers surely helped convince the serious reader that he, too, might achieve his fortune as a fruit rancher in this area.

The book also gives information about churches, schools, banks, fraternities and other amenities of daily life, such as "The Vacaville Reporter, published every Thursday by James D. McClain, editor and proprietor, is a fitting exponent of a progressive region."

Some of the observations were surely written tongue-in-cheek, such as the description given for the photograph on plate V., showing a young girl.

"Some of our young readers may envy the little girl with her arms full of grapes. That is one of the blessings California children enjoy and it does them good. One of the very best things to do with children in California is to give them the run of a fruit ranch when the fruit is ripe. It damages the fruit, but it improves the children.

"We know of a large family of children who went into Vaca valley last summer when apricots and peaches were in their glory. The children were unused to much fruit and their mother anticipated the direst disasters, but there never was a call for a single drop of peppermint. The children would eat fruit until it was a physical impossibility to get another specimen inside of them, and yet there was never a squally night all summer. Good fruit is one of the grandest things in the world for children, and its effects are not usually fatal to adults."

Few descriptions illustrate the atmosphere of working in the orchards as well as the text to photo 2345 A:

"...Fruit cutting is an occupation which admits of social features and it is not uncommon to see the family, down to the smallest toddler who can hold a knife without danger to its fingers, all at work ...

"Nor does the family alone participate. Many acquaintances and friends come from long distances to help along with the fruit and enjoy a visit at the same time; for it is

quite possible to fix up the affairs of the nation as they should be, or to discuss the foibles of the neighbors, which are as they shouldn't be, while the fingers are busy with the fruit.

"It is so handy, too, to illustrate the softness of neighbor Doodles' head while you are trying to handle an over-ripe free-stone, or to remark on neighbor Skinflints penuriousness while you are struggling to pit an obstinate cling.

"But of course gossip is not the ruling theme; there are grand good times out among the trees and under the bower-like shelters of the orchards. Good nature is the result of plenty of pure air and rich ripe fruit and refreshing night's repose. Music lends her charms to the occasion, and all around it is hard to imagine an outing more healthful and delightful and at the same time more profitable to all concerned."

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