

An 1879 tour saw a plethora of growers

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In the spring of 1879, reporters from the Weekly Solano Republican set out to explore the countryside in the Vacaville Township and the town of Vacaville. They described the various ranches and farms and who owned the land. Many of today's streets were named for these early growers.

Looking southward down the narrow Pleasants Valley, was a picturesque scene of fruit trees and vineyards as far as the eye could see. The valley opened up into the wider Vaca Valley where grain fields took over, but orchards, though smaller than in the Pleasants Valley, still prevailed.

J.M. Pleasants had located in Pleasants Valley in 1851. He had some 800 acres of valley and hill land. The land along the creek was planted in orchards and vegetables, while the hills were planted in grain. This hill land also served as pasture land. The Pleasant Valley schoolhouse was established by this time, as was a flour mill established by Pleasants. The mill's power was achieved by a team of five oxen on a tread wheel.

Pleasants enjoyed recalling the days when he first arrived, when the valley was "home to vast herds of wild animals, such as elk, deer, grizzly bears, California lions and wolves. I have counted 100 deer in a short day's hunt. One afternoon, I saw 11 grizzly bears in two miles travel."

Pleasants lived in a tent the first year, hunting bears and deer for the Sacramento market. Then John Wolfskill, his neighbor, encouraged him to plant fruit trees, selling Pleasants cuttings and plants and sharing his knowledge. Pleasants first plantings were apricots, apples and pears in 1852.

W.J. Pleasants' place was across the creek from the mill. He had 1,050 acres planted in orchard, vegetables and grain.

John Dolan Sr., another fruit rancher, had planted 10,000 grape vines and about 1,000 each of peach and apricot trees. Mrs. Pearson's place, 101 acres, was next to Dolan's and was being farmed by Wash Johnson. Eight acres were planted in orchard, mainly peaches. The remainder of the acreage was set for grazing.

Next was M.R. Miller's 320-acre ranch. He had arrived in the valley in 1851, and by

1879 his 100 acres planted in orchard and vines were well established. A grove of oaks surrounded the brick home he had built in 1859. Miller had taken care of his water supply in a rather unique manner for the times. He was taking water from a spring two miles away and 400 feet above his home. The water from this height reached his home easily through pipes he had laid. His house, barn and corrals were all supplied from this source and he was also able to use this water for irrigation purposes, a method not commonly used in the valley.

On the east side of the valley at an elevation of 350 feet was the ranch of Charles Martels, who had apparently transplanted himself from Rio Vista. On his mountain top of 50 acres he had planted orchards, vines and orange and lemon trees. He had built a cozy house, but was still a bachelor.

Next to his place was John Huckins' spread, 350 acres. One hundred and fifty acres were cultivated in grain and fruit - his primary fruit crops were peaches and apricots. J.M. Robinson's place, next in line, was a vast 2,000 acres which was used as grazing land. Robinson was also trying his hand at fruit ranching with a young orchard underway.

The Oakdale schoolhouse was the noted division point between the Pleasants and Vaca valleys. Below the school was the ranch of W.M. Cantelow, 532 acres in the hills. The greater portion of his land was developed for grazing, but he also had an orchard planted. His house on a hill commanded a spectacular view of the valley.

South of Cantelow's and skirting the hills was a farm owned by R.D. Robbins. His 160 acres was being farmed by James French. Half of this ranch was in fruit trees. The other half was devoted to grazing land. W.W. Smith had a 52-acre farm, which was being rented by a Chinese man. The land was cultivated with fruit trees and vines. Next to this farm was L.L. Decker's. His 152 acres was being rented by a man named Crawford who was concentrating his efforts in growing grain. L. Korn had 126 acres next in line in the valley and he was also chiefly in grain, although he also had an assortment of fruit trees.

Next came the beautiful ranch owned by L.W. Buck. His spread consisted of 156 acres. Buck allowed the reporters a grand tour of his orchards and vineyards. He had 27 vines of choice varieties, 12,000 cherry trees and an extensive number of apple, peach and apricot trees. He also had 125 orange and lemon trees to harvest. Evidence of careful management and good farming were attributed to his place.

To the south of Buck's was John Dolan Jr.'s place, 50 acres. He had built a cottage, was growing grain and was just preparing to plant some trees and vines as well. Next to Dolan's was the 40-acre ranch belonging to G. and N. Baker. They were raising grain

as were their neighbors Richard and W. Long. The Longs were among the first inhabitants of Vacaville.

J.R. Collins, also located in the Valley, had 280 acres planted in fruit trees and vines and grazing land. His home was nestled in the hillside. Across the road was Mr. Mogevelt's place, 50 acres mostly in grain, but also boasting a modest orchard. Continuing on was the tract owned by Gates and Long. Their land was set for grazing stock.

At the junction in the road leading to Vacaville was the Alamo schoolhouse, then a relatively new building and freshly painted. J. Wykoff's grain and vegetable ranch was just east of the school.

Next came W.W. Smith's second land holding. This was Smith's main ranch. With 165 acres, this was perhaps the largest orchard in the valley and his cherry orchard was said to be one of the biggest in the state with 4,000 beautiful trees. His house stood back from the road with an avenue leading to it. The house and barn were set in amongst a forest of trees and an extensive field of corn.

His neighbor, W.M. Dwyer, had a smaller place, which was set for raising grain and vegetables. Passing his place and going up Gibson Canyon road, the first home site was that of J. Conley. His 50 acres were in fruit, vines and vegetables. Next, in a sheltered glen, was the 100-acre farm of Robert Parke. At least 30 acres were in fruit trees and vines. He also had 150 lemon and orange trees. The rest of his land was in grain and vegetables.

J.M. Pepper's 178 acres were planted in grain. As much of his land was on a hill, it was only suitable as grazing land. The Jagger estate, 125 acres, was being rented by A.H. Schroeder who was raising grain and vegetables. On the highest hill he was growing squash. East of this was H.A. Schroeder's home which was surrounded with trees. His small 33-acre farm was in grain and vegetables.

Next in line was the 111-acre farm belonging to A. Steiger who had planted fruits and vegetables. Likewise J.V. Stark had his small 30-acre spread planted in fruit and vegetables. Across the road was the 60-acre farm belonging to J. Poiser. Poiser's land reflected his great love of flowers with a profusion of blooms surrounding his home. Commercially, his farm was planted with fruits and vegetables.

G.W. Gibbs had 40 acres planted in vegetables and was just beginning an orchard. The avenue leading to his home was bordered on either side with evergreens. Next to Gibbs was R. Scott's small hill farm. Next to his place was G. Troutman's 105 acres. Troutman had just settled at this place in the last two years.

Dr. W.J. Dobbins' vast land holdings were next to Troutman. Dobbins had a grand 1,495 acres. This acreage extended into the town of Vacaville. The level land was planted in grain. The hilly side was set for grazing purposes.

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