

Remember When a Day's Pay Was \$1.25?

By John Rico

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LET'S TALK INFLATION — If you noted the following prices in today's newspaper, you would know someone was out on a lark and wanting to have some fun. But, these prices actually appeared in advertisements in The Reporter back in 1932: pound of coffee 19c, loaf of bread 10c, pound of beef stew 9c, pound of bacon 14c, fresh pumpkin pie 15c, head of lettuce 4c, can of olives 9c, pound of butter 22c, bunch of vegetables 2c, a pack of cigarettes 10c, and you could send Junior to the Vacaville Theatre for 10c. That all added up to \$1.24.

Back in 1932, Vacaville ranch hands were disappointed at the \$1.25-per-day wage being offered by area ranchers. Spearheaded into action by a group called the Agricultural Workers Industrial League, the laborers went on strike during the tree pruning season, and made the following demands:

The daily wage be \$1.50 per day;

That the work day be eight hours;

There be no discrimination because of race or color;

Free transportation to and from jobs be offered;

Free tools be made available.

After nearly two months of hectic days in Vacaville, when friends became enemies and there were injuries, a special committee appointed by the Federated Trades Council in Sacramento issued its report on Vacaville's labor troubles.

The lengthy report sympathized with both worker and owner; laying the cause at the doorstep of economic conditions which prevailed throughout the world.

An interesting paragraph in the lengthy review said: "It is evident that the women and girls of the strikers were the aggressors in physical attacks upon peace officers and ranch workers who were not members of their union."

The beleaguered ranchers, facing heavy losses in their fruit producing endeavors, stood fast on their \$1.25-per-day offer and after two months of strife, AWIL offered to

accept the wage, but asked for the following reservations: no discrimination, regardless of race, creed or color; no discrimination against persons who have participated in the strike; and no blacklisting of strikers.

The counter-proposal was offered to Vacaville's largest ranchers, who retaliated with a statement that they at no time recognized a strike was in progress. So, that was that, and final.

It is interesting to note that if a housewife went to one of Vacaville's many grocery stores today and purchased a similar list of articles as the one bought by a housewife in 1932, the figure would be \$14. Taking into consideration that inflation is at a run-away pace, the worker today making minimum wages is far better off than those unfortunate souls back in 1932.

Back in 1888, Edward Wickson did a comprehensive study on the fruit industry in the Vacaville area, going into detail in all phases. His book was called California Illustrated No. 2.

In his review of wages paid on local area ranches, he placed emphasis on the availability of work during the long growing season. He made comparisons between accomplishments in their jobs by whites and orientals; he told of profits to be made; lands to purchase; crops to grow; weather; etc.

In reviewing wages paid on ranches here, Wickson interviewed several of the larger land owners, and received the following expressions:

W. P. Buckingham — Wages are \$1 per day and board for whites; Chinamen board themselves; during the rush of the season \$1.25 has sometimes to be paid;

O. Garlich — Wages for farm hands are \$25 per month.

L. J. Harbison — White help can be had in the orchard for \$1 per day and board. House servants get \$16 to \$25 per month.

A. McKeivitt — House servants are in great demand and find steady employment at from \$20 to \$30 per month.

Sears and Clarke — House help is scarce and good girls command from \$20 to \$25 per month with steady employment.

Wickson went on to report: Men and women with nimble fingers can earn \$2 a day in cutting fruit by the 100 pounds. One young woman is known to have made \$2.50 in a

single half-day and a 10-year-old boy averaged \$1 per day.

Let's go back to those depression days of 1932: Wages in non-farm jobs were considerably higher. Chief of Police O. E. Alley received \$169 a month as salary and expenses; Barney Clark, superintendent of streets, was paid \$95; all of the electricity used during the month of December 1932 by the City of Vacaville amounted to \$289; and the Pacific Telephone bill for that same month was \$12.81.

In this month of October 1979, people not only in the United States, but around the world, will observe the 50th anniversary of the worst stock market crash in history. It all took place in late October 1929.

Vacaville ranchers, and workers, too, had been riding the prosperity wave of the 1920 period, and money flowed freely. There was profit in the fruit industry, leaving ranchers with excess monies to invest in stocks. Unfortunately, many ranchers, and others, mortgaged their belongings to plunge into get-rich-quick stocks.

In 1904, A. P. Giannini had founded his Bank of Italy in San Francisco. He spared no efforts in expanding his banking empire into other cities around the state, taking over the Bank of Vacaville January 1923. Giannini had also founded the Transamerica Corporation, which also spread like an octopus.

Giannini knew there was extra cash in the Vacaville area and lost no time in personally making trips here to promote the Bank of Italy and Transamerica. He was successful in enticing investors, many of them far beyond their financial means.

Then came that day in October 1929 and the roof fell in. Down the drain went more than \$100 billion in stock values across the nation. The Great Depression was at hand.

Today, 50 years after that crash; the nation and the world find themselves with too much money in circulation. The malady is diagnosed as inflation.

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