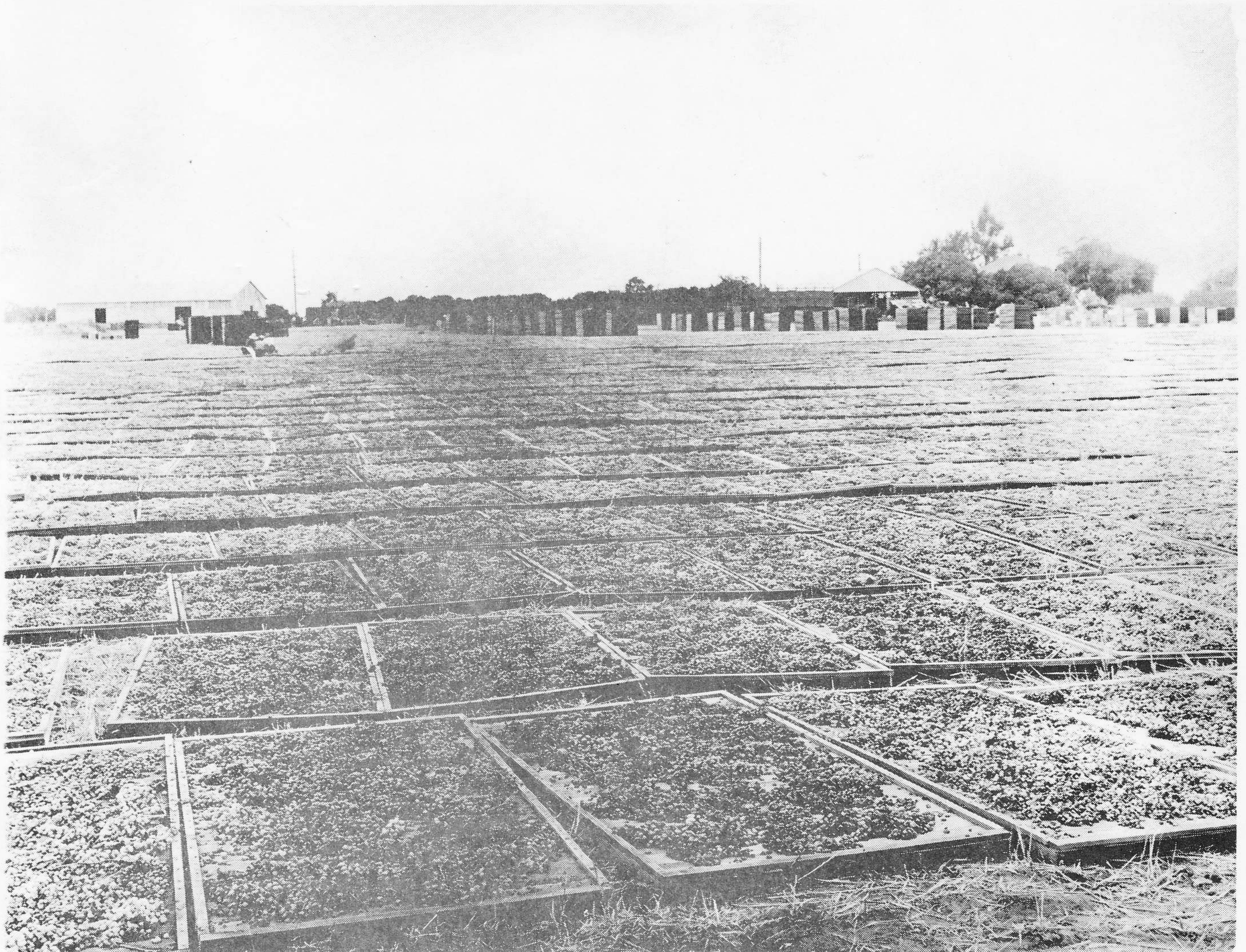
SUTTER COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWS BULLETIN

Vol. XIX No. 1 | YUBA CITY, CALIFORNIA 95991 | January ~~1979~~ 1980



Raisins drying at Harter Packing Company about 1910.

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

To better serve the membership and to improve attendance at our meetings, we would like to try having our January meeting on Sunday afternoon, January 13, 1980. A committee will telephone the membership with information regarding the meeting's time, location and program.

We have begun tape recording interviews with people in our community. The stories, recollections and happenings will provide our "Research" room at the Museum with unusual information. At the present time we are looking for persons with interesting and informative material.

RANDOLPH SCHNABEL
President

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SUTTERANA

This nostalgic paragraph appeared in a letter to the Editor of the Union:

"Sutter's Fort is fast going to decay. The sound of revelry was heard here once, and woman's smile made glad the heart; pilgrims to and from the golden hills and valleys have rested from their toil; and here, too, have babes seen the light; and through the crumbling rooms has walked the spectre Death! There is suspended the old bell that has tolled the hour of prayer and the hour of feasting; and there at the gateway lies a dilapidated old rusty cannon, with the mouth wide open, but no teeth, which seem to say to me as I approached,

'you can go and take a last fond look for I have done all I can do. My old captain is not here to attend to me, and I go to decay, even like these old walls, the scene of his chivalry and my former glory.'"

From the Sacramento Union, September 12, 1851.

HOCK FARM INDIANS - Captain Sutter, who passed through our city on Thursday, informs us that the disease among the Indians on his farm, of which we made mention a few days since, has now clearly ceased its ravages, having swept into eternity over forty souls within the last month. There are still three or four so ill that their recovery is exceedingly doubtful. There remain but eight survivors of this extraordinary and frightful malady.

Sacramento Union, December 17, 1852.

NOTE: This "malady" was cholera which struck the diggings at Rose Bar, killing many miners as it swept down the Yuba during the summer and fall of 1852.

HOCK FARM - The Marysville Herald of Thursday says that the water on Tuesday afternoon was on the lower floors of General Sutter's house at Hock Farm. The grounds adjacent to the house were overflowed, and we much fear that his large and beautiful garden has sustained great injury.

Sacramento Union, April 1, 1953.

COMMUNITY MEMORIAL MUSEUM NOTES
Jean Gustin, Director

The museum has booked the following Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibits for 1980. We hope that you will plan to attend these special exhibits. The museum will also continue its program of rotating loan exhibits from local sources.

April 5 through May 4 — AMERICAN AGRICULTURE: A CONTINUING REVOLUTION. In 1776, roughly ninety per cent of the American population were one-family subsistence farmers. Today, there are less than five per cent who can be called farmers. This exhibition, with illustrations and text, graphically traces the transformation of American agriculture from an individual's livelihood to the agribusiness of today through three distinct agricultural revolutions: the "horsepower revolution," beginning about 1830; the "mechanized revolution" of the mid-19th century; and the "green revolution" at the turn of the century. Each step brought increased yields and quality of the crops and livestock raised.

July 12 through Aug. 10 — FIVE CRITICAL ELECTIONS. A critical election is defined as having one or more of the following elements: a response to a significant event, the emergence of major issues, an obvious contest between political parties, shifts in national alignments, or the appearance of new leaders. This photographic exhibition offers an indepth study of how five presidential elections, those of 1800, 1828, 1860, 1896, and 1936 affected this country. The role of changing types of campaign devices is also examined.

Sep. 13 through Oct. 12 — PHOTOGRAPHING THE FRONTIER. To document the massive move of settlers to the American West came the photographers. Their photographs in this exhibition picture virtually everything that defined frontier existence in the American West at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries: covered wagons, crude cabins and large families, "Main Street, U.S.A." with its liveries, hotels, and saloons, one-room schools, harvests, handicrafts, and, of course, hangings.

COMMUNITY MEMORIAL MUSEUM CONCERT SERIES
Donation $1.00 - 2:00 p.m. - In the Museum

January 27 -- Violinist, Ellen Townsend; Double Harpsicord Concerto, Jane Roberts and Wendel Jacobs.

February 24 - Program not set at this time.

LIST OF DONORS TO THE COMMUNITY MEMORIAL MUSEUM TRUST FUND
August 2, 1979 through November 13, 1979

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Carolyn Walton Williams & Mrs. Virgil Walton	in memory of Corrine Newkom Forman
Frederic & Helen Covell	in memory of Corrine Newkom Forman

* * * * * * * *

When South Carolina was about to secede from the Union a legislative committee was instructed to ascertain the number of school teachers in the state who were from the north, assuming that it would be wise to get rid of them. The committee reported that nearly all teachers were northerners and that it would be impossible to replace them with southerners. But the committee declared that the teachers were not considered dangerous as long as they continued to hold their tongues.

Appeal, July 26, 1861.

REPORT ON CONFERENCE OF CALIFORNIA HISTORICAL SOCIETIES
NORTHERN CALIFORNIA - SEPTEMBER 1979

Registration for the Conference of California Historical Societies Northern California Symposium, 1979, was held in the Duarte Garage and Lincoln Highway Museum in Livermore, California, September 28 between one and four p.m. The Duarte Garage is now an historical landmark that had on display restored antique cars and trucks. Registrants were given their packets and program for the conference. The schedule was informative and the packet contained maps that designated where meetings in Livermore and Pleasanton were to be held. Included in the packet were several brochures of information about local historic sites.

The first meeting began at the beautiful Castlewood Country Club near Pleasanton (about six miles from Livermore) with no-host cocktails at 6:30 p.m. and dinner at 7:30. Delegates were welcomed by Dagmar Fulton, president of the Amador-Livermore Valley Historical Society. Dr. William A. Bullough, Professor of History at California State University, Hayward, spoke on "Christopher Buckley, Blind Boss of San Francisco and Lord of Livermore." Dr. Bullough, who has written a biography of Buckley, took the position that the Blind Boss was different from the popular conception of the nineteenth century, arrogant, corrupt city bosses, that, instead Buckley turned San Francisco of the 1880's from its politically corrupt, disorganized government into one that functioned well, was relatively free of graft, and served its citizens well.

The following day, Saturday, September 29, the delegates

met in an open forum, with Ruth Marra presiding, at Chabot College near Livermore. Following the forum, Dan L. Mosier, a geologist, spoke about the now defunct coal mines in eastern Alameda County. These mines were important to the local economy in the 1890's until 1908. Employment in them helped men survive the dry winters that made ranching difficult.

A box lunch was served at noon on the Ravenswood Estate at Livermore. This estate was owned by the Blind Boss of San Francisco, Christopher A. Buckley. In 1891 he built an elegant home on the estate in addition to a guest cottage, barns, and other buildings. He raised grapes for his winery and brandy distillery.

In the mid-eighteen-eighties, his son attended high school in Livermore with Jack London. Buckley entertained prominent guests at his estate. The main house has been restored and the house and grounds are now open to the public. An interesting fashion show featuring fashions of long ago was held during the outdoor lunch.

During the afternoon delegates rode buses for a tour of the area. Stops were made at a winery for a refreshing interval of wine tasting. Wine grapes are an important industry of Amador Valley. Last stop of the tour was at the Lawrence Livermore Laboratory Visitors Center.

That evening, following no-host cocktails, delegates enjoyed a most delicious steak dinner at the Livermore-Pleasanton Rod and Gun Club near Livermore. After a welcome by Chairman C. Dudley Cantua, Joseph Downs, a teacher of history at Chabot College,

spoke on "American Indians, Stone Age to Destruction." His talk centered on California Indians. Since the California environment offered Indians easy living, they became more numerous per square mile than those of any other state. They also were more indolent, much less belligerent, and less organized into tribes. The Spanish mission system depraved them (actually enslaved them) and decimated their numbers. The Anglo Saxon further decimated their numbers. From an estimated 200,000 California Indians at the time of the arrival of the Spaniards, the population of California Indians had declined to about 18,000 by 1890 according to Mr. Dudley.

A brunch, presided over by Chairman Pete Hegarty, at the delightfully restored Pleasanton Hotel in Pleasanton Sunday morning ended the conference. Garrett B. Drummond spoke on "Architectural Surveys." He illustrated how a committee could survey a community's older houses and buildings in order to determine their condition and types of architecture. This information is useful in determining what buildings could be restored and made into historical landmarks.

In this beautiful setting of the Pleasanton Hotel ended the symposium. A conference that was interesting and informative because it had excellent speakers and was very well organized and executed.

WILBUR HOFFMAN

GLEANINGS

Removing the Bump.

Motorists of both counties will be pleased to learn that work has been commenced in removing a bad bump in the flooring of the Feather River bridge approach, by several men and it is expected that the work will be completed shortly. For the last several months this crack, placed purposely to permit expansion in the bridge, has been spreading wider apart each day until the distance became so great that passing vehicles or machines would strike both sides with a severe jolt and not only loosen their mode of conveyance but their vocabularies as well.
Democrat, February 14, 1916.

May "Sting" County

Should he carry out his assertions, Andy Daniels, a well known resident of Live Oak, will soon commence a novel action against the County of Sutter to recover damages caused by the bite of a mosquito and file a claim for $500 under the employer's liability act. He was at work on road repairing when a pesky mosquito entered his ear, inserting his drill and causing a tiny wound which developed an irritation and acute inflammation. As a result of this Daniels ceased work for a month, and now asks compensation for time lost, money expended, pain suffered and impaired hearing. All caused by that mosquito thrust.
Democrat, February 19, 1916.

Police Station -- No arrests yesterday. The city was as quiet as a New England village or as some of the Southern cities will be after a few years of secession.
Appeal, March 29, 1861.

THE THOMPSON SEEDLESS

by

Carol Withington
(Compiled from articles published in the Appeal Democrat in 1961, by Jessica Bird.)

Among the most influential and well-known public spirited citizens of Sutter City was George Thompson, a native of Yorkshire, England. In 1872 he and his father received three grape cuttings from Elwanger and Barry of Rochester, New York. They grafted them onto the roots of one of their grapevines and, because of a flood that Spring, only one of their three sprouts grew.

During this time another Sutter County resident was to become interested in this sprout from which a seedless raisin grape was to be developed. A man of "remarkable foresight and optimism," John Paxton Onstott had unwittingly gained knowledge of this grape because of his fondness for honey. According to his descendants, Onstott knew that the Thompsons kept several hives of bees. So one fine day in 1872, he hitched his team to a light rig and drove the few miles to get his winter's supply.

It was during this occasion that Thompson told him of receving the free samples of three untagged grape cuttings. He further disclosed that only one survived, and although the Thompsons were pleased with the vigorously-growing cutting, they were disappointed that it did not produce any fruit.

As Onstott wanted a quick-developing vine to plant on an arbor, he gladly took cuttings from this grape. Little did he

know on his way home that he had the potential for a new agricultural industry destined to spread to other parts of California and eventually, the Nation.

Experimenting with the "new" grape, Onstott discovered that the reason the original vine had not been productive was that the wrong pruning methods had been used. The Thompsons had pruned the new vine as they did Muscats and other grapes, and unwittingly had cut off all the fruit wood. On vines allowed to go unpruned, heavy clusters of seedless grapes developed.

Following intensive cultivation of the variety, it was also established that the variety produced only one crop annually; all the grapes ripening at the same time which made for less expensive harvesting.

Another discovery was that the variety should never be irrigated in order to obtain larger and more flavorful raisins. Later, Onstott estimated that the seedless grapes, dried on wooden trays in the vineyard rows under the California sun, had a ration of 3.27 pound of ripe grapes to one pound of raisins.

The experiment-minded farmer passed the word to Thompson about pruning and the "long-cane" method thereafter was used.

The Thompson Seedless also laid claim to several superior qualities. The medium-sized, oblong grape which grows in large clusters or bunches is entirely free from seeds. In addition, the grapes possess a high sugar content and have a luscious flavor.

By August 10, 1875, when the seventh annual Marysville Fair opened, the Thompsons exhibited several branches of these

seedless grapes. And in order to have the required entry name, an entry clerk wrote "Thompson's Seedless" on the label and thus tagged the grapes. This name eventually was formally changed to Thompson Seedless by the Sutter County Agricultural Society.

By 1882, Onstott established nurseries in Fresno and in Los Angeles where he propagated the Thompson Seedless. He also supplied the growers all over the San Joaquin Valley in Southern California with Thompson Seedless roots.

As his vineyard thrived, Onstott purchased additional lands until he owned more than 1,000 acres in Sutter County.

Onstott was the first to ship Thompson Seedless raisins to various points in the East in carload lots. According to research, these shipments brought about many substantial returns, for his check was received at his home as soon as the car was ready for transit.

The late Polly Sullivan, the former Mrs. Henry Onstott and daughter-in-law of John Paxton Onstott, related that in mid-July through September up to 500 men were employed at the "dip" and drying yard on the Onstott ranch. Four Chinese cooks were also hired to feed this crew.

By this time, Onstott had built a packing house and installed a stemmer on the place. According to Mrs. Sullivan, this stemmer machine was made up of wheels with brushes that would take the stems off.

The stemmed grapes were then placed in 25-pound boxes and loaded in freight cars on the Northern Electric. After arriving

in Yuba City, they were reloaded on the Southern Pacific and shipped to such places as San Francisco, Chicago and Philadelphia. During this time, Onstott received 7 1/2 cents a pound for his stemmed grapes. However, by the late 1920's and early 1930's, the price went down to 2 1/2 cents.

Mrs. Sullivan had fond memories of her father-in-law. He always wore tailor-made suits and a tuxedo collar and usually had a special salt fish for breakfast. His Japanese cook always provided him with this delicacy which was kept in barrels on the premises.

Mrs. Sullivan, who kept the books for the operation during the weekends, also did much of the correspondence.

According to the February 20 issue of the Sutter County Farmer, "Onstott was one of the few growers who did not bleach his raisins for fancy prices, but being an extensive grower he was able to command a good price every season and sold direct to the Eastern market himself and not through any coast agents or commission houses."

On February 17, 1914, at the age of 72, Onstott died at the family home. He had suffered a stroke of paralysis sometime before, and his condition gradually worsened.

The following year, George Thompson then 76, and his wife, the former Sarah Burgett of Meridian, were sent to the San Francisco Exposition as representatives of Sutter County to educate the people on the origin and history of the Thompson Seedless grapes.

Over forty years had passed since that fateful day when

Onstott's love for honey had led him to the Thompson's. And while the Thompson Seedless was becoming such a valuable and versatile part of the table, wine and raisin industry, efforts were made to belittle the share which Thompson took in the grape's establishment.

During these years, rumors became rampant as to the originator of the famous grape. Articles began to appear in the Chicago and New York newspapers giving credit to others instead of Thompson.

In retaliation, George Thompson wrote the following letter to the Marysville Appeal dated February 11, 1911. The letter reads:

> "Mr. Editor: I write you a true history of the Thompson Seedless grape. In the year 1872, William Thompson Sr. received a catalogue from Elwanger and Barry of Rochester, New York. They had 600 cuttings for sale at $1.00 per cutting. My father sent for three cuttings in the spring of 1872 and grafted them on three Los Angeles grapevines and only one lived. That summer the vine grew lots of wood and in the fall of 1875, the vine had 500 pounds of grapes. He exhibited them at the District Fair in Marysville and received a first premium in 1875. The Horticultural Society of Yuba City gave them the name Thompson Seedless. My father thought it an honor to have the name "Thompson Seedless". There has been many a dispute about the grape and where it came from. We sent to the firm 20 years ago to find out where the cuttings came from. The booklet didn't state where they came from.
>
> Bioletti (sic) of the University of California said they were hoodoo with 15 other varieties. He said the legislature ought to have the grape. We have the right to the name for out of the 6,000 cuttings only one grew. My father gave the cuttings away to several families.
>
> The Chicago Evening Post gave an alleged history of the seedless grape, but it is not true history. Mr. Onstott said he received the cuttings from Chandler at one time. Now he finds them in the fence corner. The Thompson Seedless grape was found on the Thompson ranch 2 1/2 miles west of Sutter City, California.
>
> Signed, George Thompson, son of William Thompson, Sr."

In addition, pertinent historical data and writings seem to prove conclusively the claims of both Thompson and Onstott and their rightful honors.

E. J. Wickson, a former dean of the College of Agriculture of the University of California, in his book "California Fruits and How to Grow Them" wrote: "An undetermined seedless variety resembling the Sultana in some respects, but in others superior, is grown in Sutter County and locally known as Thompson's Seedless. In the vineyard of J. P. Onstott, Sr. of Yuba City the vines are exceedingly prolific and the fruit very fine."

Two other books by Ernest E. Sowell of Pacific Grove entitled "John Paxton Onstott (1841-1914) and "Purple Gold: The Birth of California's Thompson Seedless Grape and Raisin Industry" also detail the story of the first culture of the grape in Sutter County and its eventual success. Both are dedicated to the memory of the author's wife, Dora Onstott Sowell, the only daughter of John Paxton Onstott, Sr.

Sowell was a native of Yuba County, born and raised near Wheatland. He eventually became a lawyer and lived in this area and in Sacramento, later moving to the Bay area.

"Onstott has been called the father of the Thompson Seedless grape and raisin industry in California," wrote Sowell. "The first time we hear of the Sultana being propagated on the North American continent is when William Thompson, Sr. received three nameless cuttings from a New York nurseryman who carried the variety as a hothouse grape under the name of Lady de Coverly."

"It is further significant that every Thompson Seedless vine in California is the descendant of the original unclassified surviving cutting which Thompson planted in Sutter County in 1872. While to William Thompson, Sr. and his son George, goes the credit for introducing the Thompson Seedless, Onstott gets the credit for introducing Thompson Seedless grapes and raisins in the United States."

William Thompson, Sr. died in Sutter County at the age of 82. George lived for more than a quarter of a century on the Matthew Nall ranch in Sutter County. In 1903 he returned to the Thompson place near Sutter. He had a family of nine children. He died at the age of 95 on September 17, 1934.

The raisin industry still continues as one of the agricultural giants of California. But never should be forgotten, are those names of the Sutter County pioneer farmers that nurtured it -- Thompson and Onstott.

NOTE: When Jessica Bird was writing her article about Thompson, she came across the following article written by Tom Patterson for the Riverside Enterprise newspaper. In view of the many claims about who was responsible for the popularity of the seedless grape, we the editorial staff, thought that this might be of interest to our readers.

THE OLD MAN AND THE GRAPE
By Tom Patterson

"Since about 1920 when I was a small boy the name of the Thompson Seedless grape has always caused me to wonder who Thompson was and what he did to have his name so honored.

People say there are still such men as we used to call tramps or bums or bindlestiffs. A few may be entitled to the name, but from reading of their activities in a recent story from the Coachella Valley I think they must be reduced to a much smaller segment of the outer edge of economic society.

Many men with many backgrounds used to walk along the rails when I was a lad. Our house was a half-mile outside Wikenburg, Ariz., well removed from both the highway and the rails. Still we had many callers asking for handouts. The one who saddled me with the question about the origin of the Thompson Seedless came twice, with about a month between visits.

He was a garrulous old man, shabbily dressed and carrying the usual bedroll. He had an impressive white beard and, when he removed his droopy hat, a mane of distinguished white hair. The most extraordinary part of his apparel were his shoes. They were made of short sections of old tire casings (high pressure tires were narrower than today's) with canvas tops he had somehow fastened to the rubber. He seemd to rock along rather than to walk.

While he waited for my mother to prepare him a handout, he broke into gospel songs -- many of them, it seems, but the one I remember was the one that goes, 'He's the fairest of ten thousand to my soul.'

I seem to recall that he talked about everything, but I remember in particular only what he said about the Thompson Seedless. That was on his second visit, which was on a Sunday.

He had a large audience. Children of my family were numerous. My parents had an adult guest, and we made the old man the center of attention.

I think he fully believed all he said and that it was the way he held up his self-respect. Way over in California the seedless grape had been invented, or discovered, or seeded; anyway, produced. He had done it. At this point I feel that I recall his exact words, 'Then Thompson came along and got all the credit for it. He stole it.'

I also remember that he was technical. He may not have known what he was talking about, but none of us listening could question either his science or his information. Because of his social condition, we were inclined to doubt.

Nevertheless, the image stuck with me: A singular erect old man in strange improvised shoes, singing gospel songs and giving a scientific harangue to explain how he had been robbed and his life blighted by a slicker named Thompson whom the world honors wrongly.

I have since asked several horticultural scientists who Thompson was and where the grape came from. They didn't know. I asked a produce marketing specialist and, though he had no idea who Thompson might have been, he remarked, 'But the Thompson Seedless is nothing but the Sultana grape imported into this country.'

I have a habit of picking up old books on California, and some time ago I found that even those on agriculture can contain interesting historical sidelights. When I chanced upon

one at a rummage sale entitled "California Fruits," by E. J. Wickson, one time dean of the University of California College of Agriculture, I bought it without delay.

It was published in 1919. It contained a compilation of information on thousands of fruits, their culture and the varieties grown in California. I found the section on grapes and proceeded through a non-alphabetized list: Madeleine, Chasselas Dore, Black Malvoise, Muscat, Malaga and so on to Sultana. The marketing man had been entirely right about Sultana because, according to Wickson, the Sultana 'has more acid and therefore greater piquancy of flavor than the Thompson Seedless.'

The next entry was the first real clue I have found in the mystery of my old friend's possible connection with the Thompson Seedless. Its name in the listing was 'Thompson's Seedless; syn. Sultanina.' There was much about its size, flavor, color, shape and culture. Here is what Dr. Wickson said about its development, discovery and naming:

'Named by Sutter County Horticultural Society, after W. Thompson, Sr., of Yuba City, who procured the cutting in 1878, from Ellwanger & Barry of Rochester, New York. It was by then described as a grape from Constantinople, named Lady Decoverly. When it fruited in Sutter County, it was seen to be superior to the Sultana, and has been propagated largely. It was first widely distributed by J. P. Onstott, of Yuba City and others, and is now to be found in all parts of the state.'

I doubt that anyone has ever fully invented a story out

of whole cloth to extoll himself. I suspect the garrulous old man was somewhere within the story behind this Wickson account. Maybe he planted one first but Thompson made it better known sooner.

There are many other maybes, including the possibility that my old acquaintance just heard the story and imagined his part in it. But from my observation of the mechanics of self-delusion, I suspect he had more to do with it than he was given credit for and less than he claimed.

Anyway, despite so brief an acquaintance, he has become for me unforgettable, even though I never had the idea that he ought to be remembered.

* * * * * * * *

Appeal, June 19, 1861.

Recorder's Court. -- P. Randolph plead guilty to a charge of fast driving and was fined $25 with the alternative of twelve days in jail.

Appeal, June 23, 1861.

Exempt Fire Certificates -- Any person who belonged to any regularly organized fire company of the State for five years, can, on presenting his certificate attested to by the officers of the fire department, be exempted from jury duty and military service.

Appeal, June 25, 1861.

The University of the Pacific at Santa Clara held its annual commencement or exhibition. Five men received the degree of

Bachelor of Arts, and three young ladies the degree of Mistress of Science.

Marysville Appeal, June 13, 1861.

Item quoted from an Ohio paper states "One of the fairest and most distinguisehd of Kentucky's daughters has at various times conveyed out of the City of Cincinnati 200 colts revolvers under her hoops."

NOTE: These revolvers went to the Confederate Army.

Appeal, June 20, 1861.

At a Democratic nominating convention only Irish names were proposed to the convention. "Would it not be a good idea to put a native-born American on the ticket, so as to catch the floating American vote?"

Marysville Appeal, June 18, 1861.

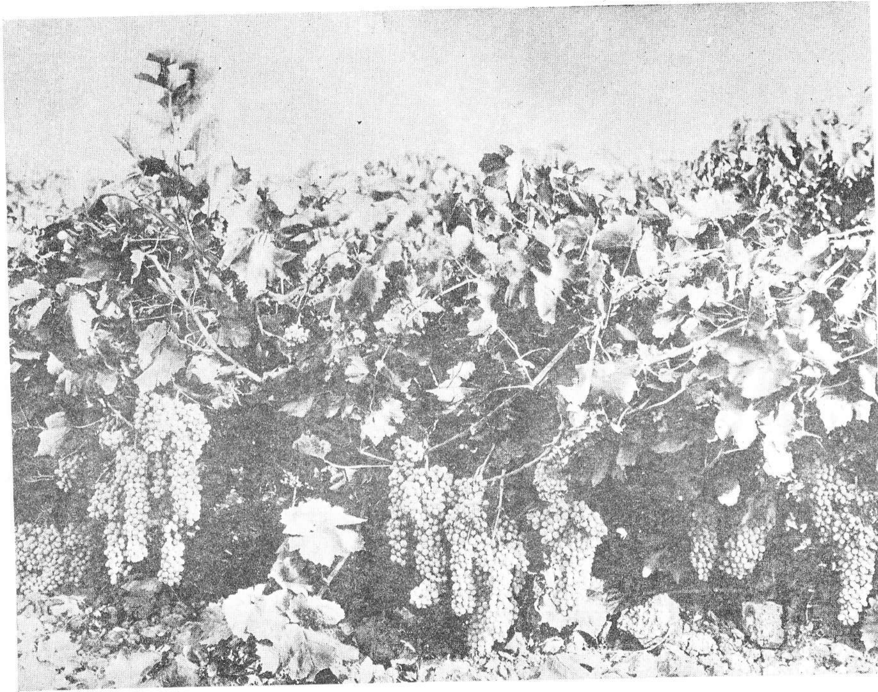
T. Ernest,

Ladies and Gentlemen's Hair Dresser

101 Second Street near C, Marysville, informs the public that for the accommodation of everybody, he has reduced the prices as follows:

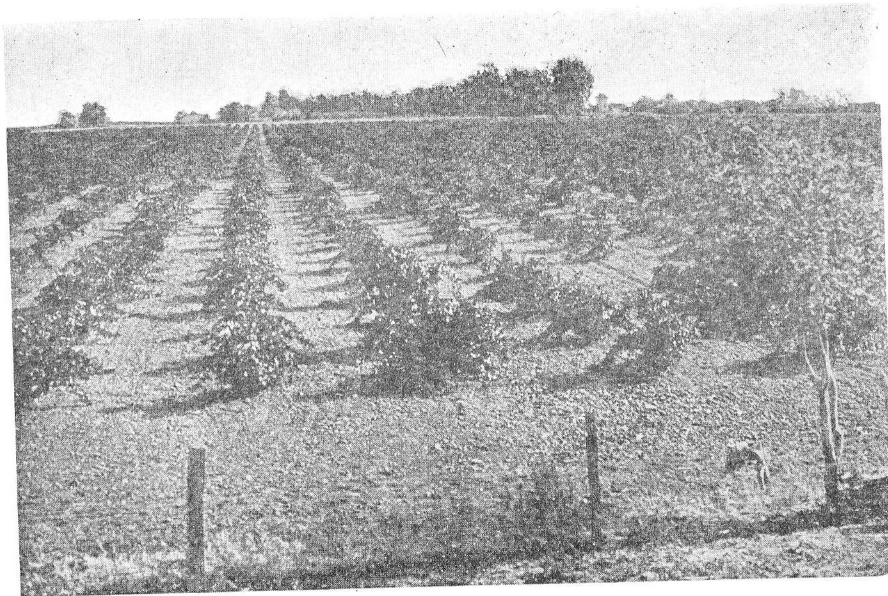
Hair Cutting . . . . 25 cents

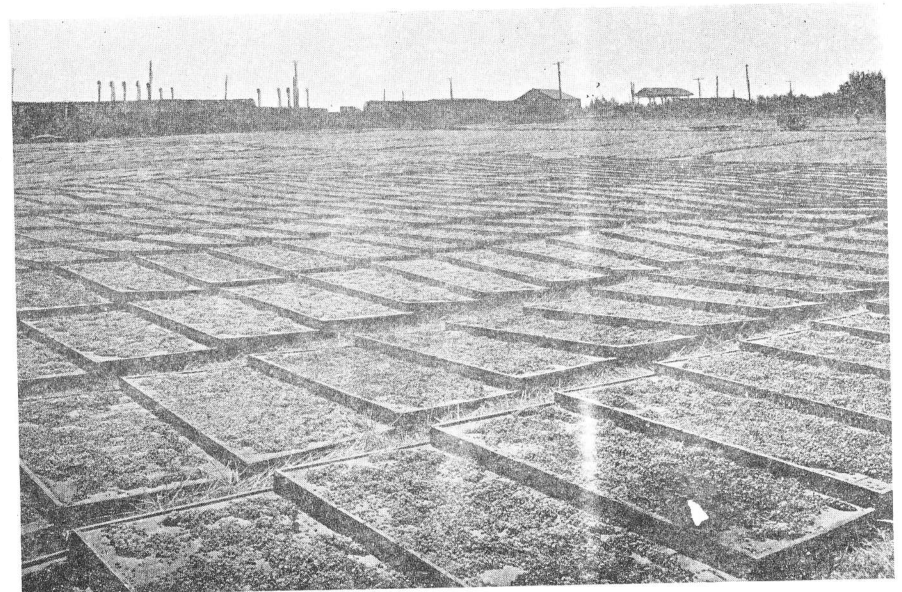
Shampooing . . . . 25 cents



Thompson Seedless grapes on the vine. Picking a grape crop,

Sun curing Thompson Seedless grapes in drying-yard, Sutter County





George Thompson in his vineyard.

Charles Thompson, 94 – grandson of WM. Thompson Sr.

MULE PACK TRAINS

by

Wilbur Hoffman

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During 1849 and the 1850's many gold rush towns were beyond the reach of wagon roads or river transport and thus were dependent solely on pack animals for supplies. Steamers carried supplies from San Francisco up river to ports like Sacramento, Stockton, and Marysville. From these communities, pack animals, thousands of them, dispatched freight to the gold diggings.

The pack animal overwhelmingly preferred in the West was the mule, although horses and burros were widely used. Mules possessed several superior qualities that made them ideal pack animals. Sired by a jackass and born of a mare, mules seem to have inherited the most desirable characteristics of each, especially those of the jackass. Mules are, however, unable to reproduce themselves. It has been said that they have no pride of ancestry, nor hope of posterity.

The popular conception of a mule is that he is stupid. True, a mule's stolid countenance, expressionless eyes, long ears that impassively wig and wag, and manner of braying convey an appearance of gross deficiency of intellect. Notwithstanding, mules are surprisingly intelligent.

Though not an eager pupil, a trainer with patience can teach a mule all the necessary tasks, and, having learned these duties, a mule will remember them well and perform each without further guidance. Mules require less forage than do horses,

and mules do not overeat or overdrink, an attribute not inherited from the gluttonous equine side of their family.

Smaller than horses, the mule, nevertheless, is sturdy and will perform a more complete day's work than a horse. He will plod along at a steady, less fatiguing pace that will enable him to carry more weight for a longer period of time. When ladened with a full pack (two hundred to two hundred fifty pounds), the trained pack mule will fall into his ambling gait. The mule quickly learned this gait will not rock his load, thus enabling him to travel five or six miles an hour without undue fatigue. And unlike horses, mules work better in hot weather.

Mules are not without faults. No animal is more ornery nor stubborn than "them 'ere mules." They can be cantankerous and unpredictable. On the trail they may suddenly stop for reasons known only to the mule; then it takes a skillful muleteer, usually utilizing the most glowing profanity, to get the obdurate beast underway once again.

A mule is shy and any sudden movement around his hindquarters will produce a kicking tantrum that might be dangerous to anyone in close proximity. For this reason mules were often blindfolded while being loaded and on the trail should the pack require adjusting. Frightened mules will tend to bunch up especially while crossing streams with a train.

An effective way to control and calm a mule is with the bell mare. A strange affinity exists between a mule and a mare. The reason might be that a mare is a mule's mother and he has acquired a love and respect for motherhood. He associates the

bell tied around the bell mare's neck with his own beloved mare and will follow her anyplace. At night the bell mare is often tethered amongst the mules and her closeness, assured by the occasional tinkling of the bell, comforts pack mules and quiets their fears.

The Spaniards and Mexicans packed with mules along the trails of Old Mexico long before this beast of burden was introduced into America. In 1823 Stephen Cooper, returning to Franklin, Missouri, from a trading expedition to Santa Fe, herded four hundred mules, jennies, and Spanish jacks that he had purchased in Santa Fe. These jacks sired the first Missouri mules. From this modest beginning, ultimately sprang a great herd of thousands of mules that became renowned, desired, exploited, loved, and hated according to the circumstances. Although mules are unable to reproduce themselves, the rapid expansion of their kind is quite remarkable. In fact, the Missouri mule, as onery as he is, qualifies as an American institution.

During the California gold rush of 1849, the mule was of great economic importance to the pack trains operating out of the Marysville area, bound for the remote gold diggings in the Sierra Nevada. Marysville soon became an important shipping center to the gold country. On easterly trails out of this settlement in the early 1850's, mile long columns of dust drifted from the hooves of a thousand mules plodding toward the distant Sierra Nevada. "All along the Yuba Road at any hour of the day droves of pack mules can be seen on their way to the

hills," reported the Marysville Herald on March 29, 1851.

Following the discovery of gold in the Northern Sierra in 1848, thousands of gold hungry emigrants swarmed into the area. By 1852 the population of the Marysville region had swollen to nearly forty thousand. These pioneers were not only hungry for gold; they were eager for supplies. Provisions for the gold miners were funneled through Marysville via a long, treacherous, expensive route. Beginning on the East coast, freight was loaded aboard sailing vessels for the three months' trip around the Horn to San Francisco. It was reloaded onto whale boats, skiffs, small schooners, and steamers that plied the Sacramento River to Sacramento. Once again the supplies were reloaded onto smaller vessels for trans-shipment up the Feather River to Marysville. At this point modern transportation ended and primitive began. Because of insufficient roads, it was 1853 before wagon-hauled supplies rolled out of Marysville.

Thousands of mules were needed to transport the thirty-five thousand yearly tons of supplies from Marysville dock to the gold fields. Soon Marysville acquired the distinction of being the jackass capital of California. So many mules were stabled around the town (over four thousand) that the mule population often exceeded the human inhabitants. The cacophonic braying of that many mules must have created a din worthy of the town's unique distinction.

Many of these Marysville animals had been imported from Mexico and were also owned and driven by Mexicans. The average

Mexican understood the beast and knew his unpredictable moves. Not long after, many local residents and merchants purchased their own mules, learned how to handle them, and organized their own packing companies. One Edward McIllhany, perhaps the most known and enterprising, began with a string of thirty mules purchased from a Mexican for $5,000.

The number of mules in single pack trains increased rapidly. During 1850 some Marysville merchants were sending one hundred pack mules at a time to the mines, while other traders sent as many as five trains of ten to thirty mules each. By the end of the year as many as one thousand mules made the run from the Plaza to the mines at the height of the freight season, with each mule carrying two hundred to two hundred fifty pounds. Two hundred pounds of freight and fifty pounds of forage, such as barley, was a normal load. (General Crook of Indian War fame demonstrated that by lavishing love upon the humble mule and providing him with a special harness, the animal could be persuaded to carry 320 pounds on his back. So great was Crook's admiration for this animal that he charged into battle astride one.) A train of one thousand mules could pack as much as 150 to 200 tons at a time. Since steamers at this time unloaded over 200 tons daily at the Plaza, the animals were hardpressed to keep the freight moving. As Shakespeare wrote about the lowly ass, they had to "groan and sweat under the business...."

Mule freight rates varied greatly, ranging from $1 per pound during the early 1850's to 4 or 5 cents by 1856, when rates had stablized. The winter season, of course, brought the

highest tariff. McIllhany charged 75 cents a pound for hauling freight to Onion Valley in November 1850. Just one year later he charged $1 per pound for a load he took to Downieville. Rates such as these brought wealth to early mule packers.

Since freight packing was lucrative and in demand, the business of mule trading soon developed in Marysville. The Lower Plaza region and even street corners echoed to the blend of braying mules and chanting mule auctioneers. Prices varied from $100 to $150 per head.

Though mule packing was profitable, it was also perilous. Danger lurked on trails to such remote mountain areas as La Porte, Port Wine, and Spanish Diggings. Road agents coveted the expensive cargo and mules and were often lurking along the trail. Renegade Indians were especially found of mule meat. So serious was this threat that packers at times fought pitched battles with the Indians. Some muleteers even preyed on their own kind. As the trails penetrated deeper into the mountain county, they became more treacherous. Normally sure-footed mules at times slipped from narrow trails to fall hundreds of feet. So hardy were these animals that frequently such falls failed to injure them.

The most hazardous time in the Sierra was winter. Packers tried to avoid winter travel, but high packing rates and near starvation in the mountain country attracted the most venturesome. Miners in their lust for gold failed to realize the severity of winter in the Sierra Nevada and were often unprepared.

And there were times when the steamers and pack trains were unable to move sufficient supplies to the mines during the regular freighting season to provide winter stockpiles, thus severe privation, hardship, and near starvation became a spectre during winter.

In November 1850, Edward McIllhany and his Mexican muleteers with a train of three hundred mules were moving badly needed provisions (and Christmas supplies) to Onion Valley high in the Sierra Nevada. One morning two feet of snow covered the trail and a blizzard cut visibility to about seventy-five feet. The lead bell mare was unable to follow the trail, so McIllhany, who knew the trail well, mounted a large mule and broke trail. In the howling blizzard, a Mexican muleteer and seven mules disappeared. On McIllhany's return trip to Marysville, he fed his mules on one-dollar-per-pound barley. He managed to get his mules to Marysville, and later, the Mexican returned, but the seven missing mules had frozen to death. More unfortunate during the same winter was another pack train on the trail to La Porte. Before reaching their destination, eighteen men and sixty mules had frozen to death.

The most disastrous winter for pack teams was that of the 1852-1853 season. An extreme shortage of provisions in the mountains and high freight rates lured many packers to the trail. The ventures, however, proved costly. For example, forty-two mules perished in snow drifts between Litte Grass Valley and Onion Valley. Another train had to be abandoned above Foster's Bar. By the following summer, the bleached

bones of many unfortunate mules were strewn along the mountain trails.

After the mid-1850's, wagon trails had been built from Marysville into foothill points. As these roads were extended, mule trains leaving Marysville gradually diminished until Downieville, La Porte, and Oroville became the main mule packing centers. These beasts were used for many years from wagon road termini into the far reaches of the Sierra Nevada.

Mules packed newly mined gold from the diggings to stagecoach stations. They also packed gold eastward across the Isthmus of Panama, gold which had been shipped to Panama City from San Francisco. On their return westward over the Isthmus, these same mules carted supplies to Panama City for reshipment to San Francisco. One momentous treasure-packing convoy over the Isthmus involved nearly one thousand mules ladened with $2,600,000 in gold. Five hundred armed guards and homeward returning miners accompanied the pack mule train that strung over a mile through the twisting jungle trail. Suddenly screaming banditos emerged from the jungle, pistols blazing. Prospectors and guards opened fire. The easily excitable mules reared and kicked. Some broke from the line and bolted into the jungle. Four bandits were killed and others driven off, but not before they had stolen over $100,000 in gold from the animals that had bolted.

The United States Army used pack mules to good advantage during campaigns against the Indians. On forced marches the beasts were able to keep up with the troops, whereas slower

moving freight wagons could not. Mules also packed supplies over terrain impassable to wagons. On night marches the mule's highly developed sense of smell kept him on the trail.

When pack mules accompanied the cavalry, they were at a disadvantage at the beginning of a march. In the morning the spirited cavalry mounts eagerly pranced along the trail, outpacing the slower plodding mules. But after thirty miles of march, the mules kept pace with the horses. In a march of seventy-five to one hundred miles, the mules retained their original plodding pace leaving the tiring horses far to the rear.

General Custer praised his mules: ". . . .don't ever flatter yourself . . . that a mule hasn't sense. He's got more wisdom than half the horses in the line."

During the initial phases of the ill-fated battle of the Little Big Horn, Custer's last dispatch to Benteen was an urgent request to bring up the pack train quickly.

For many years these lowly beasts of burden plodded their way over the desert and mountain country of the American West packing vitally needed supplies. They helped tame the West and create a great empire.

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The author is a retired teacher of English living in Yuba City. Further information about him is in the October 1978 Sutter County Historical Society News Bulletin.