

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **Opium at \$6 a Pound**

Let's skim by dates through 100 years of agricultural history in California in about five minutes' time. This suggestion comes from J. T. Pickett in a talk which he gave before the California Farmers, Inc.'s annual meeting in San Jose recently. We thought for this May column we would adopt his idea and give our readers some of these dates and their history as they concern early farming in California.

The first date mentioned by Mr. Pickett is an editorial published in 1861. The present year there have been sown hemp, flax, rice, sugar cane, tobacco, English walnuts, chestnuts, oranges, and lemons. In 1863 we were importing 23,000,000 pounds of rice, a year to feed the Chinese in California. In 1871 the culture of poppies began near San Jose for opium and oil. Crude opium was selling for \$6 a pound.

Also, in 1871 a specimen of cotton from the ranch of Col. Stump's cotton plantation near Merced was received by the California Pacific Rural Press. This field bids fair to turn out far above the average of the best lands of the Mississippi or Tennessee. The press regarded the experiment as one of the most important ever undertaken in the state. This year the manufacture of artificial butter was started.

In 1872 the Stockton Woolen Mills were making flannel worth 60 to 70 cents a yard. Also, a carload of butter went from San Francisco to New York in 23 days by rail and arrived in good shape. It sold for 40 cents a pound.

In 1873 the American Tobacco Co had 400 acres of tobacco in the upper Santa Clara Valley and cured 100,000 pounds. There were 1,500 acres near Gilroy planted to tobacco and a year later this state raised 1,250,000 pounds of tobacco.

An important date recorded in Glen County was when a man by the same name sold 20,000 tons of wheat for one million dollars. Ten weeks picking of strawberries near Santa Clara produced 30,000 chests at \$8 a chest.

In the year 1878 Congress passed the "Chinese Restriction Act" and some dismay was expressed in California by the farmers. The next year 20,000 Chinese were returned to China never to return to this country. They asked the question: "Who pickee grapes this next year?"

In 1883 the cattle kings were happy, for beef walking around was 9 cents a pound. A State Board of Silk Culture was approved by the government in 1881. In 1885 a complete carload of Moorpark apricots went from San Jose to Chicago. Freight charges were \$600 or about twice the local value of the fruit. In 1887 fifty head of young mules went from Chico to Australia for railroad building. They sold for \$12,000.

An unusual note in the list of California happenings was this: 'A drove of 738 turkeys passes through Fresno for Stockton on foot, then by boat to San Francisco because railroad rates were so high.'

The California Farmer, from which the above information came to us, was established in 1854. 102 years ago, by Colonel Warren. Later he sold out to two young helpers, Baker and Hamilton, and the prosperous hardware firm of that name is still flourishing in San Francisco today.

Warren formed the first State Agricultural Society and was its corresponding secretary. He put on the first two state fairs out of his own pocket, one costing him \$10,000. He later helped to write the bill which provided the funds so the State Agricultural Society could put on the fairs.

In 1871 the Pacific Rural Press was born and took over the niche left by the California Farmer. Prof. E. J. Wickson, became the editor and was an outstanding agricultural leader for 48 years. At one time he was the dean of the College of Agriculture: head of the experiment stations, and editor of the Press. He wrote many books, including the valuable edition entitled "California Fruits and How to Grow Them". It was revised 10 times. Five of his books sold 56,000 volumes in 1921.

Wickson died in 1923 and John E. Pickett took over as editor for the next 28 years. He was a descendant of Gen. George Edward Pickett of Civil War fame and is the J. T. Pickett who talked before the California Farmers, Inc. annual meeting in San Jose and made the statements which we have repeated here.