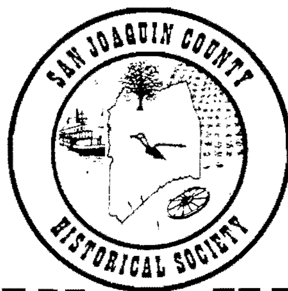
THE SAN JOAQUIN HISTORIAN



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"YANKEE HOG": THE JOHN LYMAN BEECHER STORY

The San Joaquin County Historical Society's Pioneer Family Register was enriched recently by the inclusion of John Lyman Beecher and his wife, Huldah Maria Alling Beecher, whose nomination by Patricia Roberts Roney (their grand-daughter) included documents of striking historic interest written by their son Charles Ashley Beecher (1870 - 1944). The documents are printed here by permission of Mrs. Roney, whose 355-page copyrighted work, Ancestors and Descendants of John Lyman Beecher and H. Maria Alling, California Pioneers ... (Mountain View, CA, 1983), may be consulted in the Museum library. In the first document, a reminiscence written in 1936, Beecher refers to his father as "the Pioneer." Contemporaries earlier had called him "Yankee Hog" because he was one of the first to fence all his fields, to keep out foraging cattle.

Ed.

Six miles due east of Stockton, the Pioneeer founded the Ranch. We know that at one time there was an Indian Rancheria or encampment within its boundaries as we have found many Indian skulls, besides beads and other ornaments with which their Chiefs were buried. There are also evidences that at some later period, it was the location of a Mexican horse or cattle ranch. Heavy oak posts, set deep in the soil, remained for many years after the Pioneer came. These were "snubbing posts" used by the vaqueros to hold and choke down wild horses and cattle after they had been lassoed. Spanish coins were also occasionally picked up near the house.

While there is no doubt but that the Ranch repaid the Pioneer well for his labors in those early years, it must have been a continuous struggle for the young farmer and his wife to meet the high interest payments, retire some part of his indebtedness, and to make improvements necessary to carry on the growing business.

The original house burned about 1860 and was replaced by a two-story part of the present house. The east wing was added as the family needs demanded. During the writer's childhood, there were 15 rooms in the house and all in full use. Beginning with the keystone of the home, the kitchen, which, while far larger than that of the present day apartment, was less convenient. There was no running water and all water was pumped by hand from the old Douglas #4 pump which, while quite an advance on the old oaken bucket that hung in the well, would not come under the head of modern conveniences today.

Adjoining the kitchen was the milk room, lined on 3 sides with shelves from floor to the ceiling. Here the milk was strained in large flat pans. After the cream had raised, it was skimmed off by hand and placed in a large crock to ripen. After reaching the proper degree of acidity, the cream was churned, also by hand, first with a "dasher" and later with a revolving barrel churn. This department was

Mother's own, never to be delegated to the hired help, and her butter held a high reputation among the Stockton grocers.

The large dining room came next and with several hired men added to the Pioneer's family, it was none too large. Among the writer's boyhood grievances was that of having to wash and eat at the "second table" whenever there was company.

In the northwest corner was the sitting room where the family gathered in the evening. Heated in winter by a large wood burning stove, we children would sit in the evening after the school books were closed. By the stove, Mother would read aloud from the Youth's Companion or some current book of the day. No movies then; and all were in bed by 9 o'clock.

South of this room was the standard parlor, without which, no home was complete. Opened only on state occasions such as weddings or funerals, or when the minister visited and we all gathered there for family worship. My memories of this room, however, are by no means somber, as frequent neighborhood gatherings would lighten its more formal use. However, there was a strict ruling that the youngest member of the Pioneer's family should not be in this room alone.

Across the front hall was the bedroom of the Pioneer and his wife. In this room the writer was born and in this room, Father went to his last rest. With a bathroom and conservatory added in later years, this completed the lower floor. Outside was the large woodshed with a room in the corner for the Chinese cook. Back of this shed was the smoke house where the hams, bacon and strips of beef were smoked after being cured in salt brine in big barrels in the cellar. This department of the home was by no means unimportant for here was stored most of the foodstuffs required for the sustenance of the family and the writer was familiar with the location of all the delicacies. During wet winters, however, it was necessary to move everything out, as the cellar would fill with water which some-times remained for weeks. Chills and fevers were fashionable in the family during such periods and the taste of raw quinine still lingers.

The second floor was, of course, devoted to bedrooms, eight in all: the one over the kitchen with separate staircase being used by the better class of farm labor. After an exciting experience with a case of delirium tremens one night, Mother ruled that the rougher element had to bunk outside and Father put beds for them in the shop.

Our supply of water for irrigating the yard came from a windmill and tank, located a few feet north of the house. At intervals during the year, we would have long periods in which the wind would not blow and Mother would mourn over her drying flowers and shrubs.

During the early sixties, Father built his first large barn, still in use by the writer as a dairy farm. This had stanchions and mangers for the dairy cows on the south side, stalls for the work horses in the center and an open shed for loose stock on the north side. Overhead was a haymow and at first this was filled each year by hand, a slow, hard task. As soon as the modern hay carrier came on the market, Father was one of the first to install it. It was the writer's proud privilege to drive "fork-horses" the first time the barn was filled by the new method. About 1876, another barn was built adjoining the first for the purpose of storing baled hay to be held for higher prices in the winter. Before the day of the automobile, truck and tractor, there was a big demand for hay, for seeding work and driving horses, so that next to wheat, hay was one of the Pioneer's most profitable crops.

About 1880, the stock barn was built. At this time, the Pioneer was raising horses and mules for sale and greater accommodations for feed and shelter were needed. South of this building was the old hog pen, a smelly institution which was wrecked many years ago. Although not desirable from an esthetic point of view, this department of the Ranch was by no means unprofitable. With the earlier, inefficient methods of grain raising, much

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John Lyman Beecher

H. Maria Beecher

grain was left in the fields and the hogs roamed at large after the harvest, making pork out of feed which otherwise would have been lost. Father butchered 10 or 12 hogs each year as soon as the cold weather set in, providing hams, bacon, lard, spare-ribs, head cheese, pickled feet, and other delicacies. Butchering time was a gala time for the small boy of the Ranch, his perquisite being the tails. These, after being carefully cleaned and scraped, were wrapped in a ball of wet clay, buried in the hot coals until the clay was thoroughly baked and cracked open. With the addition of a little salt and pepper, these fat pig tails were good!

Between the two large barns was another important building, the granary. Built in an early day before Father became connected with the Farmer's Union and had the use of their huge warehouses, it was often desirable from a price stand-point, to hold the grain for some time after harvest. After the wheat was threshed, at that time by a stationary threshing machine, the sacks were not sewed as at present, but tied at the neck and hauled to the granary, then carried up a flight of stairs and dumped into 4 bins below. Later, when it was time to sell, the grain was drawn out through chutes at the bottom of each bin and re-sacked for market. Again, those were the days of real sport for the children of the Ranch; climbing to the top of the bins and jumping into the loose wheat below.

At the northwest corner of the dooryard was the Work Shop, a very necessary adjunct to a large farm of that period. Father had the usual Yankee knack of handling tools and during stormy weather would usually be found at work in the shop, blacksmithing or doing odd jobs of carpentry, painting or repairing harness. There is still in the shop, an old harnessmaker's "horse" or clamp used for holding pieces of leather together for sewing. The original building, being too small for his needs, was moved west where it served Mother as a poultry house. The present two-story shop was built about 1880 on the same site as the old one. These buildings, besides two long sheds used for storing wagons and farm machinery when not in use, must have cost Father many times the original purchase price of the land. That he built well is indicated by the fact that the life of a frame building is supposed to be 50 years but several of these buildings, although somewhat down at the heels, are still in active service.

During the year, the Ranch required many employees, some of whom worked steadily, others during the harvest periods. One fixed position on every ranch was that of the Chinese cook. Much has been written by California historians about this interesting class of workers, their honesty and loyalty to their employer's interest, and it has not been exaggerated. On the Ranch, Mother was aided for many years by a Chinaman named King Po. His name

The Ranch House, 1931

is even yet engraved on the wall of his room in the woodshed, done with a small boy's jack knife many years ago. I do not remember when King first came to the Ranch, but I do know that he collaborated with my Grandfather (Charles M. Beecher) in my early training and from him I acquired a varied Chinese vocabulary. I realized later what a trial I must have been to him. In spite of his large stock of common sense, King held to all the superstitions of his race and I never lost a chance to play upon this trait. Although busy with his duties in the kitchen, he was always ready in an emergency to lend a hand in the garden, poultry yard or even on the Ranch. I well recall our mutual sorrow when the day came for him to leave and return to his native land.

The Ranch was a Mecca for young men just arriving from the East, especially New England, and many, who later became prominent in the county, served their apprenticeship under Father's direction. It was from this class that the steady help was obtained and they were of such character that they could join the family circle to our mutual benefit.

During the busy seasons, the sons of neighboring farmers were sometimes available but most of the time we depended upon the transient class we called "tramps". Among these men were found all types, highly educated, coming from good families, but from some cause or another, family trouble, drink, or just a case of "itching foot", they had become drifters. As a rule they were good workers but after having earned a few dollars, would move on, probably to a job no better. To me, as a boy, these men were interesting and I never lost a chance to quiz them in hopes of getting their story. I usually succeeded in getting a story, whether their own or not, I could not tell, but it was always a page out of life.

Father had a soft spot in his heart for these men, especially the older ones, and the kitchen help was always instructed to feed them when they called at the back door. During his last year, Mother found him there entertaining three old tramps. When she remonstrated with him for giving them her freshly baked pie, he replied: "Well, the poor old devils needed one more square feed."...

The large rooms of our house were attractive to our neighbors and we had much company. Mother's brother, Norman Alling, and her sister, Elizabeth Stowe, had both located near the Ranch and had raised families about the same age as my older brothers and sister, so there was much visiting back and forth. One of the earliest affairs that I can recall was when Mother invited the Pastor of her church, Rev. Samuel B. Morse, who had just returned from a visit to the Holy Land, to give a lecture at the Ranch on his experiences, illustrated with stereopticon views. In later life I have attended many forms of entertainment but I do not think I ever got the thrill that I did from this neighborhood affair.

Dances were rare at the Ranch as Mother did not approve of that form of entertainment. I believe that there was one occasion that she allowed herself to be persuaded against her convictions, but evidently it did not change her opinion as it was never repeated.

As the older children of Father's family married and established their homes in the neighborhood on land that he

Contemporary drawing of The Ranch, ca. 1890

had previously purchased and had been farming, the family frequently came together. Thanksgiving Day and Christmas were always celebrated at the Ranch and with visiting friends and relatives, the old house was packed.

In closing this saga of the Ranch, I would refer to one peculiarity, perhaps not uncommon to other properties, long in the possession of one family. The Beecher family and their friends always spoke of the Ranch as if it were a place apart, personified, as it were. The children of the Pioneer and their children, after acquiring their own homes, might speak of going home to their own places, but if they said that "they were going to the Ranch", it meant but one place, that of the Pioneer; so I have spelled the word with a capital "R".

It is the twilight hour of a hot day in late summer. We sit out at the west of the old house to catch the cooling breeze coming up from the Golden Gate. The cattle are coming in from pasture to bed down for the night by the barn. The night birds begin to call and flit through the trees. The old Ranch dozes as it prepares for its night's rest and as it nods it ponders over its history for the past eighty years under the hands of the Pioneer and his descendants, and wonders...wonders... "What will the future bring?"

The second document by Charles A. Beecher is on farming practices, viewed with the insight of this college-educated San Joaquin County native, born and brought up on a successful working farm, who with his father, The Pioneer, had also been deeply involved in the business aspects of agriculture. John L. Beecher was a co-founder in 1873 of the Farmers' Cooperative Union and from 1882 to 1892 was its president. This document was provided to the Chattanooga (Tenn.) News by a relative, and published on September 22, 1903.

Ed.

Agricultural methods of the state vary with location. Some irreverent observer has remarked that after the Lord made the rest of the world He took the remnants that were left over and made California. This is true to the extent that there is no agricultural product in the world but can be profitably grown in this state.

Aside from the staples -- wheat, oats, barley, corn and rye -- for which the state has long been noted, rice, tobacco, ramie, cotton, hemp, sugar cane, sugar beets, etc., are grown on a greater or lesser scale, while to all eastern people California is synonymous with "fruits and flowers."

Thus an article on farm conditions of the state as a whole would be more in the realm of an Encyclopedia than a newspaper article.

So the writer will touch only on methods in the section with which he is most familiar -- the great San Joaquin Valley -- which, in fact, is a pocket edition of the state.

Thirty years ago this region, in itself larger than some of the states of the union, was devoted wholly to grain. Then, as the virgin fertility of the soil began to lessen and newer grain lands in other countries came into competition, the farmer turned his attention to other products.

Now, in the place of thousand-acre fields of grain, one can ride for hours through a continuous stretch of orchard, vineyard or alfalfa.

Wheat farming, however, is by no means abandoned, and on the lands less adapted to the more profitable products it still flourishes, aided by improved machinery. There are thousands of small grain farms where methods of work are similar to those in vogue in the east, but a few words as to the working of the larger tracts may be more interesting. The plowing of winter wheat which begins as soon as the rainy season opens, usually November, is done by what is called "gang plows," which are from four to six ten-inch plows arranged on standards to one frame. This is pulled by eight or ten animals driven two abreast with but one line, called a "jerk line," running through rings on the harness of the hinder horses to the bit of the leader. This line serves, of course, only to guide the team. If the animals become frisky and want to run the driver merely raises the lever, lets the plows deeper into the ground, and, climbing aboard, lets them run. They usually have plenty of room and are soon satisfied.

Within the last few years the traction engine has come into use. With this for motive power the plows are arranged behind in series, and one man can attend to six or more plows. To give an idea of the extent of the work, one outfit reported last winter, as the result of a twelve-hour run, the plowing of 48 acres.

On light soils the drill is largely used for seeding, while on the heavier lands a broadcast seeder throws the grain in a strip from forty to sixty feet. This is followed by a wide harrow drawn by eight horses and covering about thirty acres a day. This done and the crop is planted. If the season is unusually dry the farmer

sometimes re-harrows after the grain has sprouted and then rolls the land to prevent excess evaporation, but it is very seldom but what the winter rainfall is sufficient to carry the crop to maturity. Grain harvest begins usually about June 15.

The smaller combined harvester cuts from eighteen to twenty-four feet, threshes, cleans and sacks the grain as it travels over its thirty acres a day. The team of twenty-four is driven by one man, who sits perched high above his wheelers. A good harvester driver is in demand at top wages. He must gauge the speed of the machinery by the hum; must watch each of his twenty-five head of horses or mules to detect the laggards, and be able to throw a clod of dirt where it will do the most good, and he must above all be able to drive, as he has to guide this unwieldy outfit for miles along fences without striking the posts; must dodge trees and turn sharp corners without wasting the grain. Four men only are required -- the driver, sack sewer, header-tender and oiler.

On the larger ranches the oil-burning traction engine, drawing a fifty-foot cut machine, is coming into general use.

The good work of these machines, however, is dependent upon the skill and willingness of the men operating them, and many small farmers are reverting to the reaper and binder and the stationary thresher to harvest their crop, believing that the saving in grain more than offsets the increased cost.

Regarding fruit farming conditions, they are quite similar to those in many parts of the east. In the southern part of the valley where a few years ago the land was considered but little better than a desert, now thousands of acres are planted to vineyards, irrigated from mountain reservoirs. Wine, raisin and table grapes are raised, giving employment to a host of laborers during the busy season.

With the coming of the irrigating ditch also came alfalfa, king of fodder plants, and with alfalfa came dairy farming. Some dairy farmers in the more favored sections, such as the reclaimed lands near Stockton, claim that one acre of alfalfa will support a cow in luxury for twelve months. An average cow will give $60 worth of butterfat in that time, which after deducting $20 for labor in milking and feeding, leaves $40 net profit, which is not bad for a single acre, considering that the crop needs planting but once every ten years. Owing to the mild climate but little equipment is needed. A case which came under the writer's notice illustrates this. A dairy farmer rented 160 acres of reclaimed land lying below the level of the San Joaquin river and put on it fifty milch cows, two tents, a barbed-wire milking

Stationary harvester, Beecher Ranch, 1888

Harvester, Beecher Ranch, ca. 1900

corral and a horse and wagon for conveying the milk to the creamery. Two men cared for and milked the cows.

At the end of the year, after paying for this labor and $1,600 rent for the land, he had a net profit of about $1,000 as interest on an investment of probably not over $3,000. To demonstate how safe an industry dairying is considered by capital, corporations of capitalists plant large tracts to alfafa, sub-divide them and sell to small dairy farmers, taking as payment a pro rata of each month's creamery checks.

Thus the land pays for itself and supports the buyer while doing so. One of the most hopeful signs for the agricultural prosperity of this section is the fact that monied men are investing their capital in developing such enterprises.

On the foot hills bordering the San Joaquin Valley the livestock industry thrives. Large flocks of sheep and cattle follow the snow back to the summits as summer advances, returning to the lower levels, where snow seldom or never falls, for their winter quarters. Many of the wealthiest men of the state derived their money from this source.

The pioneers who named California "the Golden State" did wisely: following the gold from the mines came the golden wheat fields, and now the gold washed from the churn instead of the rocker follows to market the golden wheat, and for ten months of every twelve California's state flower, the golden poppy, waves welcome to our friends as they cross the snow-bound Rockies.

Charles Ashley Beecher.

BEECHER STORY ADDENDUM

Following the Beecher family line through several generations, we note that Charles Morris Beecher, cousin of the famous Henry Ward Beecher, was born in New Haven, Connecticut, in 1798. His first wife was Sarah Sage, who gave birth to John Lyman Beecher, "The Pioneer," in 1828 at New Marlborough, Massachusetts. Because his mother died when he was only three years old, John lived in several households while growing up which, with his apprenticeship to a German farmer in Maine at age fifteen or sixteen, may have contributed to his readiness to go to California in 1852. The "easy" gold was already gone by then and he soon turned to farming in the Stockton area. He partially supported himself in early California years by chopping wood for sale and by freighting. He was successful and optimistic enough by 1855 to return home, marry Huldah Maria Alling in East Granville, Massachusetts, and bring her via Panama back to San Joaquin County -- along with her mother and a sister.

His property forfeited because of a defective title, The Pioneer worked awhile for wages but in 1856 or soon after (precise date uncertain) he acquired the first part of the property which, with later adjacent purchases, six miles east of Stockton, came to be "The Ranch" of the Beecher family. John and H. Maria were the parents of John Jr. (1856-1928), Clarance Greenwood (Sibley) (1858-1949), Elliot Stowe (1859-1922), Ellen May (1868-1868), and Charles Ashley (1870-1944). All lived in the two-story house built in 1861 to replace one that burned down in 1860. With later additions it had fifteen rooms and is the residence still in 1988 of Beecher descendants. To this place Charles Morris Beecher came at age seventy-one, to live out his seven remaining years and to help his namesake grandson get a good start in life. Charles Ashley Beecher wrote in 1936 that the family thought of his grandfather as "a lovable old man, fonder of reading and conversation than hard work." He added:

I recall him as a tall, dark-haired man, who in spite of his 70 odd years, carried himself erect. His merry disposition and ability as a conversationalist, as well as a

Charles Morris Beecher (1798-1876)

1874 -- Charles A. Beecher -- ca. 1893

violin player, made him popular with young and old. Mother was glad to turn over the responsibility for me as soon as I could travel under my own power and I spent most of my waking hours in Grandfather's company. From him I learned the alphabet and to read and also picking up a considerable vocabulary of long words which have since been somewhat of a nuisance....

During his 76th year, Grandfather was helping the men stack straw. A guy rope holding the high derrick broke and as his hearing had become very poor, he was struck to the ground by the falling mast. After the accident, he delegated me to the duty of gathering the eggs and my last memory of him was his cheerful commendation when making my evening report.... That night Grandfather was called home.

John L. Beecher, The Pioneer, gave credit to the German farmer in Maine "for teaching him habits of industry and thrift that lasted through his life." Adding native intelligence, integrity, leadership qualities and, no doubt, some good luck to those good habits, The Pioneer made a grand success of himself in San Joaquin County. His family flourished as The Ranch grew with acquisition of neighboring parcels, and eventually parcels of land elsewhere, even in other counties, for investment. The 1870 U.S. Census schedule carries the names of four men, resident on The Ranch, as laborers, plus one servant, Mary Gleason, aged 27, born in Ireland; and the real estate was valued at $16,000, a very substantial amount in those days.

Wheat was the main crop until at least the turn of the century, hauled thirty-four miles in earliest days to be milled at Knight's Ferry where one of the first American flour mills in California was established. Much of the flour was then sold in Mother Lode communities for high prices. Horses, beef cattle, dairy cows, hogs, and poultry all had their place too, from earliest times. The Pioneer was also involved prominently in the establishment of facilities which, after the transcontinental railroad and improved water shipping made the whole world a market place for California wheat, transformed wheat farming, milling and marketing into major industries. Paying $100 per share, he was an original subscriber to one hundred shares of the San Joaquin Land and Water Company in 1887, and he presided over the company's organizational meeting, also serving on the board of directors for some time. The company's purpose was to acquire land and water rights in San Joaquin and nearby counties, and to "purchase, erect and construct dams, reservoirs, canals, aqueducts and other ways in and by which the water so procured...can be utilized...for mining, farming, drinking, irrigation and other purposes...."

John L. Beecher's prominence in this effort reflected his relatively greater role as a founder and long-time leader of the Farmers' Cooperative Union. American farmers everywhere in the 1860s and 1870s were victimized by middlemen who took exorbitant profits, in the agriculturalists' view, for warehousing, processing, re-selling, and transporting farm products including wheat and flour. The Grange movement flourished in many parts of the United States -- here in San

Beecher Reunion, 1893. Standing, l. to r.: Arthur W. Beecher, Cora G. Beecher, John L. Beecher Jr., Charles A. Beecher, Nellie B. Beecher, Myra P. Beecher, Eliot S. Beecher, Clara B. Sibley holding Hazel, Walter Frank Sibley. Middle row: Austin H. Beecher, **John L. Beecher Sr., Leland E. Beecher, H. Maria Beecher, Algie Beecher. Seated on ground:** Edith and **Nellie Beecher (twins), Maurice Sibley, Mabel Beecher.**

Joaquin County Beecher and others formed the Farmers' Cooperative Union on March 24, 1873. Taking investments of $1,300 each from the original stockholders, they opened an office in Stockton on Levee Street, rented the Eureka Warehouses for $6,000, handled a gross business in the first year of $612,251, and returned each investor a dividend of $1,600. Perhaps the name, "Cooperative Union," sounded socialistic -- let's hear it for this kind of capitalistic enterprise, and the middlemen can go hang!

The Union's business flourished, based on such a satisfactory first year. They built a wharf and several more warehouses of their own on the levee, taking advantage of the juncture of rail and water transportation in Stockton. Upon the death of the first president of the Union in 1882, Beecher became president and moved the family residence to 265 El Dorado Street in Stockton. He served ten years as president, and as a member of the board of directors until his death in 1899, by which time he had moved back out to The Ranch where he had always continued close oversight. Among his other activities were service on the board of trustees of the First Baptist Church of Stockton, in which Mrs. Beecher was notably active, and his long-time membership in the San Joaquin Agricultural Society, which conducted the annual county fair.

The Pioneer supported elementary education generously, building and paying all expenses to conduct a school on Ranch property, attended by his own children as well as any who were sent by neighbors, in the 1870s, before Chartville School District was formed. He was "not so enthusiastic" about higher education, but did assent to his son Charles attending California College in Oakland before going to work for the Farmers' Cooperative as a bookkeeper. As a music lover he helped educate one of his sisters in the Boston Conservatory of Music. As his children married they each received grants of land from his holdings.

Regrettably, space limits prevent our recital of more of the fascinating, both typical and unique, history of The Pioneer and his descendants. Happily, members of the family are conscious of the high value of their inheritance. "Clan reunions" have been held at The Ranch in 1893, 1934, 1966 and, more recently, more frequently. Happily also, the San Joaquin County Historical Society's Pioneer Family Register now includes this Beecher Family, and our archives have been enriched by copies of the records on which the above account was based.

Ed.

LODI'S GERMAN-RUSSIAN HERITAGE -- THE BEGINNINGS

By Sandra L. Cole

Even to the casual observer, there is something unique about the modest agricultural community of Lodi. Located in the flood plain of the Mokelumne River in the fertile San Joaquin Valley, and encircled by a sea of vineyards, Lodi has developed a rare environment compared to other California towns that started as farming settlements. The highest standards of civic pride among its residents are reflected in the tree-lined avenues and well-tended homes. The abundance of churches gracing the street corners display a zealous devotion to the freedom of religious worship. The large city parks within well-planned residential sections show an appreciation for the close-knit relationship between man and nature that is the basis for farming life.

The comparison between Lodi and her sister city Stockton, just ten miles to the south, is striking. Stockton has encouraged industrial growth and continues to encroach upon its agricultural land with housing developments. Lodi has fought against such developments and industrial expansion, striving to maintain its character and preserve its environment, and to protect the industry which has given it world renown -- the wine industry. All this reflects the characteristics of an ethnic group that settled in the Lodi area at the opening of the present century. The history of their migrations and cultural traditions bears testimony to the degree that Lodi has been influenced by its German-Russian heritage.

The term German-Russian is the label assigned to an ethnic group that migrated out of Teutonic homelands into the vast grasslands of the Russian European plain. The group had been particularly affected by the turmoil in Central Europe during the Protestant Reformation, and especially by the Thirty Years War that ended in 1648. What had not been damaged by internecine fighting was vandalized by the French armies of Louis XIV, and then laid waste by the Russian Cossacks who forced the French out. A century of suffering ensued, allowing little satisfaction of normal human desires, dreams and demands. Germans sought satisfaction by moving to other places -- especially younger sons caught in the primogeniture system, unable to acquire land -- so continually and in such numbers as to establish emigration as a natural, even traditional thing.

Whole communities responded, thus, when Catherine the Great in 1762 actively began to lure immigrants to the scarcely populated, vast plains of Russia. They were promised subsidies, self-government, religious freedom, exclusion from military service, and more, for themselves and descendants. They went to the Volga River area first, and also to the Black Sea and Volhynia areas among others. Most were Protestants but some Catholics were dispersed in the Volga and Black Sea regions, and Mennonite migration out of Germany began in 1789. Under strong church influence, German language, customs and moral standards were preserved. The settlements grew and prospered under their own industrious leadership -- until 1871.

Two great world forces were acting to force changes in the status enjoyed by the Germans in Russia, the age of nationalism and the imperative to free slaves and serfs. Czars Nicholas I, Alexander II and Alexander III, ruling in sequence from 1825 to 1894, worked actively to "Russianize" their subjects. Step by step, the German settlers' special privileges were cancelled. This was accelerated after the 1861 Emancipation Act which freed twenty-five million serfs from their feudal masters. The resulting economic, social and political changes were sweeping, and in 1871 all foreign settlers were placed under the direct administration of the government. Most offensive of all, to many German settlers, were edicts that required military service even of them. And so some stayed and submitted, some moved to Siberia, and many sought new homes in the New World and elsewhere.

Propitiously, in the United States, the end of the Civil War in 1865 had unleashed tremendous energies which were being channeled into growth, including frontier expansion under the stimulus of the Homestead Act. Wonderful farmland could be had free! American railroads offered transportation almost free! And huge numbers of immigrants flooded in, especially from northern Europe -- including German-Russians. Because the latter were conspicuous and somewhat

alienated by language (archaic German) and attire (Russian), they settled in their own enclaves, especially in the Dakotas, Nebraska and Kansas.

The early years on the prairie were hard. Many men came alone, to work and save and send for their families later. Indus-trious and frugal, and handicapped by language, they often accepted the most menial labor. Men worked for the railroads or in any other type of typically back-breaking work; women did scrub work and washboard washing. Those who went out to homesteading immediately, or later, found it to be a primitive struggle that taxed their energy, intelligence, stamina and other qualities to the utmost.

Heinrich Wormsbecher, for instance, went to Dakota Territory with nothing except his bed, which he promptly placed on the property he homesteaded. With the open sky for a roof, he and his family lived until he could buy a horse and plow to begin the necessary cultivation of the land that would ensure subsistence. A sod house could not be built by the time winter came so they built a "dugout" shelter. This was constructed by digging out the side of a hill and covering the space with sticks and straw to keep out the elements. In the spring, they waited for the sod to mature to the right stage for it to be cut into rectangles, the building blocks for sod house construction.[1]

And so the "dirty Roussians," as they were sometimes called, prevailed and, in time, many of them prospered. The Dakota prairie resembled their Russian homeland in many ways, and they applied familiar wheat-raising practices with excellent results. The maxim for daily life was, "Work is fun." Any child, boy or girl, was sent to work in the fields as soon as the child was strong enough to wield a hoe. Fathers hired their sons out for wages and pooled their earnings in order to increase the family holdings -- the pattern being to work for the communal good until marriage. Higher education was honored and supported to some degree but, if a child were inclined to go to work, that was even more pleasing to the father.

Thus the German-Russians have been called, compared to other groups, "the most effective developers of the great American West by working their way to prosperity."[2] They also had another characteristic in their natures, one that lent itself to continued search for profit and adventure -- a willingness to migrate. This came to the fore in the 1890s, as the first American-born generation began to come of age.

Although their new homes were flourishing, there were some undesirable circumstances that led the more restless German-Americans to wonder about an even better "valley beyond." Dakota winters were very harsh, accompanied too often by epidemics of diptheria, typhoid fever, scarlet fever and small pox. Children aged three to five were especially hard hit and, to an ethnic group in which a large family meant survival, their losses were heartbreaking. They suffered some wheat failures also, encouraging thoughts of a soil and climate that could produce a variety of crops.

Thus it was that a group of "scouts" arrived in Stockton, California, in the spring of 1896: Wilhelm Hieb, Gottlieb Hieb, Ludwig Derheim and Jacob Mettler. They represented several well-to-do, estab-lished families from Menno, South Dakota, attracted by reports of available prime agricultural land in the San Joaquin Valley. By prearrangement, they were met at the railroad station by Otto Grunsky, a German-speaking real estate agent with ties to a bank holding foreclosed properties in the Lodi area. Their reports were justified by what they found: excellent land, ideal climatic conditions, and reasonable costs, to provide a basis for diversified farming. Wilhelm Hieb and Ludwig Derheim bought parcels immediately and the former came to be known as "Columbus" Heib because he was the first to bring his family and settle at Lodi, in 1897. Derheim unfortunately died before returning to South Dakota, but, as good reports spread among other German-Russian families in the midwest, a significant movement was started. In addition to the families already named, other arrivals between 1897 and 1915 included the Handels, Schmiedts, Schnaidts, Preszlers, Bechtolds, Benders, Nies, Baumbachs, Reimches, Kirschen-manns, Finks and Lachenmaiers.[3]

Their arrival impressed local resi-dents, adding to local pride in the area as a fine place to live.[4] The new settlers moved in quite different style from those who had arrived -- not long before, really -- directly from Russia. This was not a move based on despair and desperation. These people had means, could buy substantial acreages immediately, and move directly into pre-existing buildings. They enjoyed a comfortable train ride, families usually travelling all together, from the Dakotas to Lodi.

They continued as in the past, how-ever, to form a close-knit community in their new California setting. Life was centered around farm, school and church, with little time at first for outside activities. Journeys into town were made only for the purchase of staples or to sell

and trade produce. Time was a precious commodity not to be wasted; there were farms to be developed and crops to be raised including new ones which did not always succeed, and this is where their efforts were focused.

Wheat did not do very well in the Lodi area, they soon discovered, because much of the soil was sandy and the wind would blow it out almost as fast as they would plant. They tried peanut farming, but it was not very profitable; the same with watermelons and some other products. The early years were an experimental period, difficult and trying. However, there was a new industry just in its infancy, to which the German-Russians soon adapted with their industrious zeal: commercial wine production.

George West had begun the first commercial wine venture as early as 1858, of course, El Pinal Vineyard. Other producers had followed, but for most the vineyards and wine-making were not dominant concerns, to compare to wheat production and stock raising. Lodi area wine and brandy by 1889 were said to be among the best produced in the United States, even carried to eastern states by the transcontinental railroad, and profiting from contemporary root disease problems of European vineyardists.[5] Thus the new German-Russian settlers were not originators in the wine industry, but came at a perfect time to plunge into it and participate in its explosive growth.

In 1898, on thirty acres south of Lodi, now the corner of Church Street and Kettleman Lane, Wilhelm "Columbus" Hieb planted a vineyard. He confirmed the finds of the California State Board of Horticulture's annual report of 1892, that the sandy loam south of the Mokelumne River was well adapted to the cultivation of vines and fruit trees. He was running his own commercial wine operation by 1906, giving him the distinction of being one of the first to operate a vineyard on that scale in the district. His example caught on like wildfire. Soon nearly all of the newly arrived German-Russians were planting vineyards, as well as alfalfa and fruit orchards.[6]

They located almost exclusively east of Lodi in the Alpine-Victor sectors, Acampo, the Live Oak district, and eventually as far east as Clements. As a result of acquiring large acreages and employing the most modern methods of irrigation, especially in tapping ground-water resources, they brought their crops to high levels of productivity. When George Tinkham published his notable History of San Joaquin County in 1923 some of his examples of successful vineyardists, exemplifying new and admirable techniques, were from this group:

Gottfried Handel -- 40 acres in vines, 18 in alfalfa, near Lodi. His irrigation pumping plant was one of the largest in the country at that time.

Abraham Bechtold -- three farms totaling 36 acres, with pumping plants on each.

C. H. Fink -- his 56-acre ranch used water from the Lodi District pumping plant.

William Preszler -- 37 acres near Victor, using pumps and other modern equipment to increase production.

Peter Heil -- 25-acre vineyard with pumping stations, using a ten-horsepower motor and cement pipes.

Others identified by Tinkham included Jacob G. Handel, Charles J. Bender, John J. Schmiedt, John Bechtold, George Preszler, Theopold Kirshenmann, and Henry G. Mettler. The German-Russians did not merely participate in the expansion of grape growing and wine production, in fact they were a dominant force through their extensive utilization of progressive irrigation techniques and other modern methods. The Woodbridge Vineyard Association and the Community Winery of Lodi were operations to which the Lodi German-Russians contributed notably.[7]

The German-Russian group continued to grow as the years passed and the evidence mounted of good living to be had in the Lodi area. By 1920 there were an identified 845 here, second in size in California only to the concentration in the Fresno-Reedley area.

Grapes grown for wine and table use had become California's leading money - making industry before that time, but the movement for prohibition then came to its climax. The 18th amendment to the United States Constitution took effect in January 1920 and what had been the life and blood of Lodi was threatened to be left to dry on the vine.

Lodi grape-growers had made their position clear, of course: it was an honorable occupation, and wine had a legitimate place on the tables of those choosing to use it. Suffering with all the other growers, many German-Russian growers, believing that the industry would not survive prohibition, lost heart and even moved out of the area. Some wineries weathered the hard times by manufacturing sacramental wine or grape juice. Many growers tore out their vineyards and planted table grapes or other crops. The growers who stuck with wine grapes and survived laid the foundation for the revival of the industry in 1933, in which

German-Russians continued to play a prominent role.

Significantly, while some of the group moved out of the area during prohibition, others who had remained farming in the midwest were attracted to the Lodi area during the period of the 1930s "Dust Bowl." Some continued in one line or another of agriculture but many joined the considerable number of German-Russians who had gone into other lines of work. Among the earliest arrivals, for instance, John W. Hieb was seventeen years of age when he arrived in Lodi in 1897 with his family. He had worked as a carpenter in Menno, South Dakota, and pursued that occupation in Lodi, working for a time also for the Southern Pacific Railroad. Apprenticed for five years to O. Corbin, one of Lodi's pioneer builders, Hieb later went into the contracting business with August Marklein. Together they built the Franklin School and Saint John's Episcopal Church, and practically all of the business section of Victor. Then, partner with his brother Jacob, he built homes in and around Lodi, business buildings, seven Lodi churches, the Congregational Church in Victor, and in Lodi the Farmers & Merchants Bank and a White Front store. By 1923 he had done "more building in Lodi and vicinity than anyone engaged in the building business." [8]

Lot Lachenmaier arrived in Lodi in 1910 with his family after achieving eminent success in farming and livestock in South Dakota. He began the town of Victor, building the first general store and two residences. He initiated the petitions which led to the erection of the Victor School and the nearby bridge on the Mokelumne River. He was also actively engaged in building the Evangelical Church in Lodi, of which he was a member and trustee. Lachenmaier is probably most noted for having been the Vice President of the Farmers & Merchants Bank of Lodi, which he helped organize in 1916 together with Gottlieb Doering, John A. Mettler, William Heil and E. B. Doering, among others.

Conrad O. Baumbach left South Dakota for Hillsboro, California, and worked there as a brick layer and stone-mason. Moving to Lodi in 1906, he bought a ten-acre vineyard but also continued to work profitably in the local construction business.

William Heil came to Lodi in 1914 from North Dakota with a very successful background as a land developer. He established the Heil Land Company in Lodi and operated on an extensive scale, buying and selling ranch properties. It was partly through the application of his talents that land prices in the Lodi area began to escalate. In 1919 he sold the Fink brothers a 55-acre ranch at $1,250 per acre, the first vineyard sale at so high a price in the county. In 1920 the same property sold again, for $2,000 per acre. He bought the Trimberger place for $7,000 and in three years sold it for $27,500. In 1919 the John K. Bender vineyard of twenty acres went for $16,000 -- two years later it re-sold for $46,000.

Edmund C. Snaidt arrived in Lodi with his family in 1901. After attending school in Lodi he enlisted in the U.S. Navy, where he served as an on-board ship pharmacist. Returning home upon his discharge, he worked with Mr. Weihe in his drugstore and then went to the University of California, graduating in 1922 as a pharmacist. Back in Lodi, he acquired the Robert L. Graham drugstore and continued operating the pharmacy. [9]

With these examples and others too numerous to describe here, it is plain that the German-Russians, though not the earliest to arrive in the Lodi area, have contributed and continue to contribute very significantly to its rich culture and prosperity.

NOTES

1. Interview with Lillian Bechtold Palmer, Stockton, CA., Apr. 23, 1982.
2. Interview with Arthur Flegel, Menlo Park, CA., Mar. 29, 1982.
3. Flegel interview and, especially, Otto H. Hieb, "The Third Migration: A History of the Germans from Russia in Lodi, California," American Historical Society of Germans from Russia, 1974, p. 22.
4. See Lodi News Sentinel, e.g., Aug. 27, 1901, Mar. 6, 1902.
5. Frances Welch, "Grape and Wine Industry in San Joaquin County" (unpublished report), San Joaquin County Historical Museum, 1978.
6. George H. Tinkham, A History of San Joaquin County, Los Angeles: Historic Record Society, 1923, p. 313; Warren B. Hicks, "A History of Lodi, California, from Early Times to 1906" (unpublished seminar paper), University of the Pacific Library, June 1954; Flegel interview; and "Zion Reformed Church," dedication pamphlet, Lodi, CA., February, 1951.
7. Tinkham, History, pp. 648 - 1624, passim.
8. Tinkham, History, p. 836.
9. Tinkham, History, pp. 313, 836, 1008, 1248.

The following sources were also very useful for this article: Hattie Plum Williams, The Czar's Germans, Lincoln, NB: American Historical Society of Germans from Russia, 1972; Karl Stumpp, The German-Russians, Bonn-Brussels-New York: Atlantic-Forum, 1967; Richard Sallet, Russian-German Settlements in the United States, Fargo, ND: N. Dakota Institute for Regional Studies, 1974; Carol J. Harless, "Schgmiedt and Fode Family History" (unpublished; for centennial reunion, Lodi, CA., Aug. 20, 1978); C.E. Fisher, "Lodi, California, Home of the Flame Tokay Grape," The Lodi Country, Lodi, CA: Lodi Merchants Assoc., 1913; and interviews with Dr. Alexander Duper (Lodi, Mar. 24, 1982), Katie Michaelson (Lodi, Mar. 27, 1982), and Mr. and Mrs. Carl Mettler (Lodi, Mar. 26, 1982.

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EDITOR'S CORNER

On behalf of the San Joaquin County Historical Society, we wish to express our sincere gratitude to THE AMERICAN SAVINGS AND LOAN ASSOCIATION for their contribution of printing services, making possible this issue of The San Joaquin Historian.

In a forthcoming issue we hope to make a contribution to the recorded history of Manteca, the Society's featured community for the present year. We urge the submission of articles, documents, reminiscences, etc., relating to any area or period of San Joaquin County history, however. Phone or write the Editor (Stockton, 951-7448) or the Museum anytime.

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