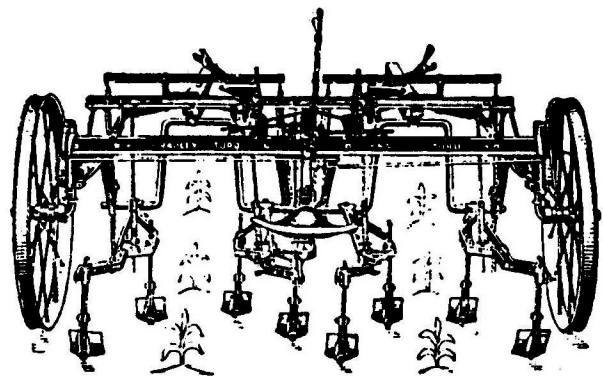


PART TWO

FAIR OAKS FARMING AND RANCHING



The Small Farm in Fair Oaks

The following is the story of 41 acres in Fair Oaks that the Vincent family farmed from 1906 to 1974. We Lovingly called our farm "Rancho Confusion".

"Farm, Field and FiresideFair Oaks". That was the beck and call of the flyers that were coming out of the Midwest to move to California.

My grandparents, Frank Wilson and Elizabeth Mary Vincent were just some of the young people who left home and family to come and settle in Fair Oaks in 1906. It would seem, for having started the promotion of the land in Fair Oaks in 1895, many had come and perhaps returned to the east or moved on to more promising endeavors.

Farming is not the most promising thing a person can choose to do as a livelihood. When Frank came to Fair Oaks there were still nice pieces of land available and several fine homes to choose from. Much of Fair Oaks is laid under with a layer of hardpan that makes much more than wheat farming very difficult. My grandfather had the knowledge of government maps that were available that showed the geology of the land and was able to choose three pieces of land that had deep rich soil.

First, he bought ten acres on the northeast corner of Chicago and Sunset. Then he bought a home and six and one half acres for \$6,500 on Sunset Avenue. Last he purchased twenty acres on Kenneth Avenue across from the Earl Leggett School. Considering he had left a piece of land in Kansas that is still a windswept plain, dependent entirely upon the weather for a crop, the sweet water and the deep soil of Fair Oaks must have been a land of promise.

Some of the land had been planted, but the major part was untilled land. Frank hired help to put in water lines and then set about planting orchards of every kind of fruit and nut tree. This, I believe, is what made the Vincent lands survivors long past those who produced only one crop that went to the huge packing houses. My parents farmed the land until about 1974 when the last twenty acre piece fell to the subdivider.

Still standing in many a yard are the beautiful old trees that worked so hard for so many years to produce the fruit that provided for our family our only source of income. It was a good income and a steady one with crops planned to produce in a constant pattern year round. Basically there were ten acres of almonds, ten acres of oranges, ten acres of pasture and field land, and about six acres were given to walnuts, persimmons, grapes, and the area around the house consisted of barns and packing sheds. I think it would be interesting to note that there was a large grove of Eucalyptus planted to provide for wood to heat and cook through the years. Eucalyptus is a wood that can be cut and the

stump will grow back to full size in three years. The basic orchards were interspersed with every variety of peach, plum, nectarine, cherry and apricot tree. Many of the newer trees and the unusual trees were given to us by Fair Oaks Botanist, Heim or came from the test lots at Oki Nursery or the University of Davis, California.

I suppose these newer varieties of trees were given to our family to plant since my father took such very good care of his land and orchards. If there was any chance that a new variety of some crop would excel, it would be in Walter Vincent's orchard. The land was not just planted and then plundered of its fertility, and cast aside to move on. Yearly, nitrogen producing cover crop was planted and then worked into the soil in the spring. Working it in meant first plowing then discing, finally harrowing until by fruit picking time the land was as smooth as a baseball field. Every tree was kept pruned, hoed around, given regular inspections for disease and insect pests. Working with the Orchard Supply in Sacramento, the correct balance of fertilizer and minerals was of ultimate importance. As also was the watering. The orchards were covered once every two weeks with long lines of rain bird sprinklers. Some trees were watered with ditches.

Along the historical vein it would be interesting to note two things. The first is that before a chemical fertilizer could be bought by my grandfather, he ordered a whole box car of sheep manure from Wyoming. When it came, having laid on that high dry plain, it was so hard that it took three years to dissolve. That must have been the origin of slow release fertilizer! Beside the immediate availability of nitrogen it came with an unexpected bonus - burr clover. Clover adds nitrogen to the ground. The other interesting thing is that my grandfather worked for the irrigation company for some time while waiting for his trees to begin producing. He helped put in a long oak water line that goes from somewhere near the curve in Fair Oaks Boulevard to Hazel Avenue. The workers were pulled through the pipe on a flat wagon as they worked.

When my grandfather died, he left the land to his four sons. My father bought the land two of his brothers owned because they were employed elsewhere. My father and my mother farmed this land with the help of four daughters. No woebegone to the farmer who had no sons. My sisters and I packed fruit and picked flowers. We went to the farmers market in Sacramento and helped wait on customers. My older sisters spent many a night up keeping small coal fires going and then later huge Salamander smudge pots to protect crops from frost. The orchards only froze twice that I know of and each time our Japanese neighbor, Mr. Arase was able to prune the trees in such a way to bring them back to life.

In the fall and summer we raised several acres of cut flowers for sale in Sacramento. We sold zinnias for 25 cents a dozen, huge dahlia flowers for 25 cents each. I can remember going down to the old railroad station across the river and picking up huge cardboard boxes of chrysanthemum slips that were

rooted and planted in spring. In the fall we had chrysanthemums that were of every color, cut and bunched. Also various types of cockscomb and celesoia.

The almond crop went to the Almond Growers Exchange in Sacramento. For several years we shipped fruit from the packing sheds in Loomis. After many times that fruit was lost due to some delay in shipping or sale, and we were charged for the shipping, we did not ship fruit out anymore. It was all sold at the Farmers Free Market in Sacramento. The original Market was opened in the early 1900's and the one I am more familiar with was organized in 1937. All of my aunts and uncles and both sets of grandparents bought shares of this market at five dollars a share. This market was in business until a few years ago when the entire city block at Alhambra and S Streets was sold.

The market was always the fun part of the week. On Tuesday and Friday night the truck was loaded. I would call it a small truck farm. It was incredible what my dad could get into that small truck with arrangements of sideboards and shelves. Most loads would have included oranges or small lugs of summer fruit, buckets of cut flowers, perhaps some boxes of cracked walnuts, a barrel or so of pickled olives, the sweet cream and butter that was black marketed out from under the counter to well known customers, all were loaded to go to market.

The market was a highlight in the week for all the children. We would walk from stand to stand to visit our friends and be given some dried fruit, or a pickle and some sauerkraut, maybe a crisp apple from Camino, and then a donut or danish before we ate the sweet potato mother had baked on the kerosene stove. Needless to say, having had a good day of eating goodies and work packing baskets and carrying boxes for people, by five o'clock we were not far out the old Folsom Boulevard heading home, hitting the dividers in the cement pavement, ker-chuck ker-chunk, we were soon asleep.

The land and the market are now sold and buildings standing in their place. All may be lost in the name of progress, but all is not gone. The call to the land is still amongst us and we can find all of it at the Farmer's Market at Sunrise Mall on Saturday mornings. The same wonderful California produce, the same happy friendly farmer, the same fervent customers; just new faces.

. . . Or, you can take a ride up Sunset Avenue and stop for oranges at the Arase's and then go across to Bob Massey's farm store. In the fall you can go to Bob's, or to the big pumpkin patch on Kenneth, walk through the grass, kick the soft soil and have a nice talk with Irving Gum and his wife while the children play under the huge spreading oaks. No, Fair Oaks is not just history, we will never let it be just history.



DADDY

What kind of man would devote his entire life to farming in Fair Oaks? The following is a portrait of a Fair Oaks farmer, my Father, Walter Vincent.

Walter was born in Jamestown, Kansas in 1902. He came to Fair Oaks with his parents and older brother, Earnest in 1906. He started school in Fair Oaks and graduated from San Juan Union High School. He attended Sacramento City College and then went on to the University of California at Berkeley. He was in the process of earning his degree in Civil Engineering and had a nomination to the Military Academy at West Point when he had to return to Fair Oaks.

Walter's father had been gored by a bull and was seriously injured. Walter had to leave the plans he had for his life to come home and farm his father's land. Nothing was lost of my father's intelligence or education. He applied himself to the production of fine products and made money at it. Our farms produced until 1974 while most other farmers in Fair Oaks just gave up and went to other means of earning a living. My dad kept his soil producing by the planting of cover crops, the proper balance of fertilizers and careful watering. His orchards were plowed, disced and harrowed every spring. Some fields were dragged to make them as smooth as a baseball field. The trees were kept pruned and sprayed for optimum production. New varieties of trees were added yearly.

My father was a melancholy man. There were times when it seemed he saw the darkest cloud of doom about to drop gloom all over the place. He was a deep thinker and often went about his work in the depth of thought puffing on his old pipe, whether it was lit or not. He always thought out his words before he spoke. And then, other times he would pound his pipe and laugh until the tears ran down his face over some old thing that had happened years ago. His favorite joke was the cheap suit joke. He would begin to laugh as soon as the person began to tell it.

He kept regular hours, which I admire, but still cannot understand. He was up, ate breakfast, and was out to do chores by eight every morning. At noon he promptly arrived at the kitchen door for a lunch of soup and crackers with butter and jelly. He sat on the old deacon's bench outside and took off his dirty boots before coming in to the house. He listened to the news while he ate and then laid down and slept until one.

I think of him most clearly in the summer time. I suppose that is because I was home from school. He would wake up after his nap and go out to the deacon's bench and sit there and put on his thick socks and high rubber boots. I remember him clumping down the driveway in his boots, clad only in a pair of cut off blue jeans. His big healthy body was shiny and dark brown from

the summer sun. He wore a giant pith helmet that he always painted silver. It was an awesome sight to see him going along in that outfit, puffing on his pipe.

Summer days are also memorable because of our community size swimming pool in the middle of the ranch. About the time my father was through moving the long lines of aluminum surface irrigation pipe that watered our orchards folks were driving up the long drive to our pool. Dad would come in from his work and put on his swim trunks. He would then spend the afternoon enjoying watching the children swim and play. He loved best talking to the neighbors and friends who came. My sister remembers on a day like that he could eat a whole half of a watermelon.

Supper at our house was almost always some fried piece of meat, boiled potatoes with gravy made from the meat drippings and canned peas or some sort of equally uninteresting fare. Summer nights desert was always sliced peaches with rich cream and sugar poured over them.

We listened to the radio some and did not have a television until I was grown. My dad was always off to bed early with a glass of red wine and a fine book.

I just called him Daddy.



Walter came to Fair Oaks in a horse drawn wagon. During his lifetime spent in Fair Oaks he saw the coming of running water, paved roads, electricity and natural gas piped in. He saw the coming of all sorts of taxes and the subdivisions. Most memorable must have been the coming of the automobile and the airplane. He saw the coming of radio and television. He built one of the loudest crystal radios when they first came out. I suppose there were telephones, but we did not have one. He could build a kite that would fly high in the air for as long as two weeks tethered in a field. He lived to see commercial airlines that could fly the distance he had come by train from Kansas in just hours. He saw five wars. I am sure had he went to West Point he would have been one of the great generals. He saw man conquer space. He watched as man walked on the moon. Medicine had advanced from the time of his mother's tragic death during childbirth to the changing of body parts about like he repaired his tractor. What a wonderful time to have lived.

Sunny

When my parents were married in 1926 my grandparents gave them a cow for a wedding gift. Sunny was a little Jersey cow with big brown eyes. She was a light soft tan with dustings of dark brown on her beautiful face.

Even though I seem to remember her with long flirty eye lashes, I don't know how she got such a hold on the family. I rather resented her as a youngster because no matter how much fun we were having at the cousins, when it came milking time, we went home.

We had our cow pastures on a piece of land we owned over on Kenneth Avenue. We would drive there in an old Model-T Ford car. Morning and evening my mother would go to milk the cow, come rain or shine. If it rained, the cow and my mother would be under a huge piece of old canvas. Mother milking by hand and the cow enjoying a bucket of wonderful molasses smelling mash. The only light was an old railroad lantern between my mother and total darkness where crept old hermits and drunkards.

There was very often an elderly man who lived nearby who would lurk in the shadows and stare at us. I really hated going to milk the cow because of the darkness and when I did, I stayed in the back seat of the old car. I peered out into the darkness hoping that if I saw him first I would have time to get down on the floor of the car.

Soon Mother would come and all would be safe and smell of dirt and cow manure and warm frothy milk. Veto would disappear over the hill and we would drive out the long road past the grabbing Eucalyptuses.

Driving with one hand, somehow shifting the old car, and holding the bucket of sloshing milk out the window with the other, Mother would weave down Sunset Avenue toward home.

By the time we hit the cool willow scented air of the draw, we would be singing as loud as we could sing, "Oh, she'll be comin' round the mountain when she comes....."

Recently, my sisters and I were reminiscing and we each in turn shared how our imaginations would tie us in knots of terror when we went with Mother to milk the cow. I looked over at my 83 year old mother sitting there with her dark eyes sparkling and a wry little smile. She said, "Well, you know he was only waiting there until we left and then he stole the extra armload of hay I left for him and took it home to his own cow."

Real Bull Tale

Recently, during a reunion with my cousins that grew up during a period of time our Grandfather Kennedy had his ranch in Loomis, we embarked on a story telling session. As children we had spent much of our childhood visiting with our grandparents. Our collection of much repeated and embellished stories never fails to come to the telling of Billy the Bull.

Billy, the bull was Sunny's husband and consort to Grampa's large herd of Jersey dairy cows. Billy was a tiny animal and perfect in form. He weighed less than 1500 pounds. He was a soft fawn color dusted with black until he looked black to most people. He was a good natured tame fellow. My cousin, Wootie remembered when he was five that he and his three year old sister, Mona Rae would play with Billy. They would lead him about by the brass ring in his nose and climb on him as if he was some sort of big dog.

The year all of Loomis was on fire we were trapped on the ranch with our grandparents. We watched as the fire surrounded us and burned over the hills on all sides. It was extinguished when it reached the American River at Horseshoe Bar.

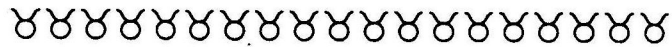
One afternoon the little fire truck, running its siren, came down the paved road beside the ranch. The fire engines in my childhood did not have the electronic sirens they do today and often could only come up with a soulful wail. The little Model-T truck painted red came by and Billy was struck with love. He took up with the fire engine and followed it for days like a lovesick teenager. Finally, one day he came swaggering up the long dirt driveway, exhausted and glad for the welcome home he got.

However, that was not the only encounter with the fire department. One day the Department of Forestry truck came piling dust up the long drive. "Oh, Mr. Kennedy, you have to come quick. Your bull is stopping us from fighting a fire." Grampa and all the kids jumped in the big cattle truck and went with the Ranger. Sure enough when they got there, Billy had all the firemen hiding up in the trees. He was standing in front of the fire engine, snorting and pawing at the dirt. Everyone laughed at the firemen being afraid of such a friendly little bull. My little cousin, Dick, tied a rope onto the brass ring and led him home. My grandfather used to think that was the funniest story ever and would laugh about it for years afterward.

One morning, when Billy was getting well on in years, Mr. Brown from the next ranch came for Grampa. Mr. Brown's huge white face bull had gotten out and was fighting with Billy over on the northwest corner of the ranch. When they arrived they saw old Billy standing in a gap in the fence and the white face standing in the road, both were stamping and bellowing at each other. Old Billy was not about to let this other bull into his territory. Grampa was always

proud of his little bull and this was probably one of the times he was the proudest.

In the end, Billy went off to ever ever land where the pink clover blooms.



THE COW

John Vincent told me that the funniest thing he ever saw in his whole life was an old man riding down Sunset Avenue on the back of a big cow. Several hours later the man would come back up Sunset Avenue with a burlap sack full of groceries slung over his shoulder as he sat astride the lumbering animal.

Indians in Fair Oaks

When Frank Vincent came to Fair Oaks in 1906 he bought several pieces of land. One parcel he bought was on Kenneth Avenue. The twenty acre piece ran from Kenneth across from the present day Earl Leggett School almost to Illinois Avenue. At the back of the ranch was the property of Dr. Ralph S. Graham. The Graham's lived on the top of a hill that was studded with a thick woods of ancient oaks. I often walked through that woods to go up the hill to visit my friend, Janie. There was always a feeling of mystic. As a child I had the sense of needing to be quiet and to walk softly. I don't know if my feelings were from the stories my father told me or if I felt I was walking on sacred ground.

When my father came to Fair Oaks he was only six years old. I suppose as a child he would run and play as his father and others put in irrigation lines and prepared the land to plant. There was already an almond orchard started, so they put in oranges. As they were digging to plant trees or put in water pipe they found round Indian grinding stones.

My father told us about the sacred hill. As a child he would run and play there. He saw remains of steam houses along a little spring fed creek that ran through the back of the ranch. This story would seem likely as there was the huge hill of oaks and the little stream on the sunset side, with enough water that it kept a minnow pond for Guy Camden. There by the minnow pond was a beautiful draw of willows and wonderful fat wild blackberries.

He also remembered that as they planted the persimmon orchard down on Sunset Avenue near Forrestal they discovered a well worn trail where they found Indian artifacts, probably of later tribes because they found mule shoes and harness pieces. He thought it may have been a tribe that came down from the foothills to trade in Sacramento.

The only Indians we ever knew personally were Jack Dave and his father. Jack was one of my best friends when he drove the school bus. My dad always liked to tell the story of the chickens that ran loose around town. They kept getting in Jack's father's garden. He was perhaps 90 years old. He finally got tired of it. So one day, Old Man Dave, (that is what my dad always called him) got himself a bunch of minnow hooks and baited them with corn. He then tied little strings on them with notes that said, "KEEP YOUR CHICKENS AT HOME."

I wonder as I stop downtown in the morning and see chickens running all over and crowing if time does moves slowly in Fair Oaks.

POULTRY

For a good many years the poultry industry provided an income of sorts for the farmers in Fair Oaks.

When I was a child the countryside was still dotted with long low white washed buildings which housed chickens and turkeys. Our climate was very warm for poultry and the buildings were open and covered with chicken wire. Often the tops were layered with palm fronds in order to keep the fowl cool. Chickens suffer terribly with the heat and lose their feathers and quit laying.

The cold weather in the winter was also devastating to the poultry industry. My mother has always told the story of how she had hundreds of baby chicks in the brooder. We had an area wide power outage that lasted for quite some length of time. The tiny chicks were in brooders which were heated by electricity. She has never forgotten how PG&E came and brought auxiliary power and kept her baby chicks alive for all those days.

About all I can say nice about chickens is that I liked to eat the fat sunflower seeds that came in their feed bags. I had some nice school clothes and quilts made from the flowered patterned feed sacks.

But, chickens, they are icky, messy things, especially to a child who did not wear shoes in the summer time. I got in the most trouble over them, because I was to pick fresh grass for them. I found I could fluff the grass in the buckets to get done sooner and got in bad trouble. All of us girls got in trouble at one time or another for carrying an empty water bucket or an empty feed bucket down to the chicken house and pretending to feed them. Going through all the motions took as much time as if we really did it. I suppose it was some sort of statement to them.

Mother raised chickens and turkeys to sell at the Farmer's Free Market in Sacramento. I often worked for a stand next to ours and sold dressed out chickens for a wage of \$5.00 per day.

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## Dairy Farming

Most Fair Oaks settlers had their own family milk cow. My grandfather bought one for my mother for a wedding present. I grew up with Sunny. It was such a proud day when she had a calf which they named Ann on my birthday. I learned a lot about life on a farm. It is still interesting to ponder the "Bull Man" who would pull up at the driveway and honk his horn. Behind his little Ford truck was a small trailer with a big bull in it. My mom would hop in and off they would go up Sunset Avenue.

There were dairies of a larger scale in Fair Oaks. My folks seemed to know everyone in town, so often we would go and visit some of these dairymen. I remember visiting the Wildbergers who had a dairy on Winding Way just a little ways west of the Fair Oaks Post Office. The San Juan Dairy on Fair Oaks Boulevard sold processed milk. I remember George Parnell and Mike Howard who had large dairies on the corner of Fair Oaks Boulevard and Greenback.

George Parnell was the one we would call if we had an animal that was ill. The local dairymen were the nearest thing to a vet that we had available in the early days. What he could not handle, Mike Howard would help with.

Pat Howard lived over on Hazel Avenue. He had a cattle auction yard near Phoenix Field on Sunset Avenue. One day I ran to tell him my in-laws cow was in trouble calving. He came and we delivered the little fellow safely. Pat did not do well with the cattle auction yard, so he turned it into the Okie Boogie Beer Parlor.

Along with the milk cows most folks raised feeder calves which were raised for butchering. Most folks raised their own beef and some extra to sell.

There were several large herds of beef cattle and I still see some in our area. The one I remember most was on the land owned by some folks named White. Their land was the piece owned on Chicago by the San Juan Union School District. I can remember as a small child walking along this fence with my cousins. They loved to tease and scare me. They told me that if the bulls saw even one spot of red on you, even a sore, they would charge. So, I used to pull my lips inside my teeth and bite down and hold them there until we were past. Just in case they were a little too pink! I did once see about twenty bulls line up in a straight line. I was sure they were about to charge. Now, I think they just wanted a better look at about six giggling gawky girls going along the fence trying not to be noticed.

A man named John Vincent had a dairy out on the Bald Spot. John Vincent was one of the first settlers in Fair Oaks having come in about 1874. For a period of time some of our family owned this land but sold it back to John Vincent in a dispute over the water rights. Seems it was all right if the cows

walked in the water supply but he did not like the McKenny boys swimming in it!

Dairy farming is a rather pastoral occupation and does not produce too many interesting stories.



### You've Come a Long Way Baby

My Great Grandfather Hewitt was a Methodist Missionary to Roseville in the 1800's. His wife Rose was probably the power behind his message. She was just a little mite of a thing not much more than four feet tall. She was a midwife. She fed the hobos who came to her door. She was a lady who taught Sunday School and served at tea parties.

One day my great grandmother and I were looking out of a high window above our back driveway. The ladies in the family were not allowed to smoke cigarettes in those days. What had got our attention was a large touring car parked just below the window in the driveway. Under it we could see shapely ankles of ladies who were sitting along the running board. What my great grandmother saw was the billows of smoke that were rising from that far side of the car. I well remember with what glee she called the ladies from the kitchen, saying as she went down the stairs to the car, "Come with me if you want to have some fun!"

## Burp!

In the early days of Fair Oaks we did not have, as near as a telephone, a veterinary who could help when an animal became ill; especially the farm animals.

There were several dairies in our small community. The dairymen would help each other and come when help was needed with a family cow or horse. The most usual person we would call was George Parnell who owned a small dairy at the corner of Fair Oaks Boulevard and Greenback Lane. If George could not handle it then his neighboring dairyman, Mike Howard usually could.

George could come and give our cow a shot, bringing her back from near death. With his assistance would always come a sermonizing. He would give you the Good Word and admonish you to be Saved every time you saw him. Sometimes it took and sometimes it didn't. Everyone loved George Parnell.

I remember one time the big steer got into something and ate too much. He got very sick. George Parnell could not come so he gave my mother and sister the instructions on what to do.

I was just a little kid up in an almond tree, but I remember ever so well watching this scene. The huge beast must have weighed several hundred pounds. It was heaving all over and bawling. His eyes were rolled back and he was frothing at the mouth. His tail was up in the most threatening manner. My little tiny mother and my older sister were to tie his head up into a tree and put a garden hose down his throat. They got his head tied up in the tree and started to put the hose down into his stomach and he bit the hose in half. Laura was up the tree in a flash. It was the most awesome funny sight I have ever seen, my beautiful sister with her Tangee Red Lipstick, rolled up blue jeans, loafer shoes, her dark hair in braids on top of her head, up in that tree. She had her legs wound about a huge tree limb like a crueler and her arm shot down that beast's throat faster than my mother could scream "NO!" Out came the hose and luckily Laura still had her arm.

The animal recovered nicely.

