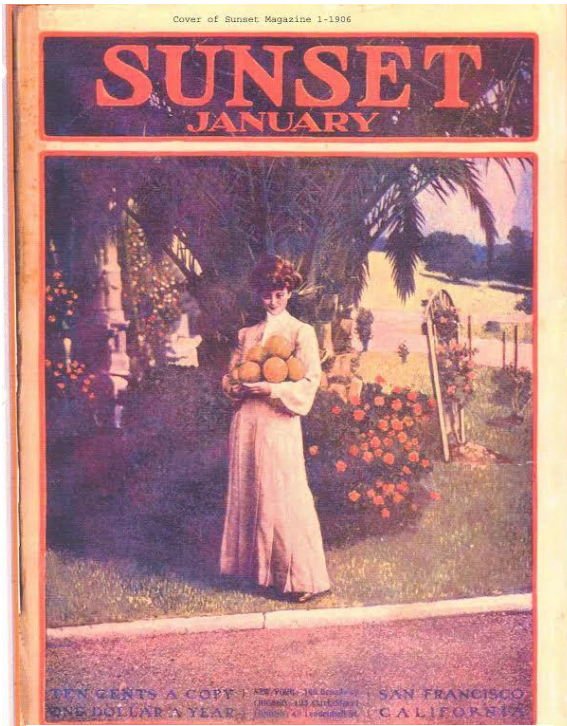


## The Vineyard

Gary Day



**Joel Parker Whitney's daughter Beryl appeared twice in Sunset Magazine promoting Citrus Colony fruit. This is her at 22 on the cover of the January 1906 issue.**

The southward-sloping southeast corner of Lincoln covers about 150 acres of J. Parker Whitney's 20,000-acre Spring Valley Ranch, a showplace of opulence and proof of the significance of South Placer County agriculture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Old timers call this area of the ranch the Vineyard, even though its prominent features are the citrus grove terraces on the north and west slopes

J. Parker's father, George Whitney, started the Ranch with the purchase of 320 acres near Rocklin in 1857. George and J. Parker's brothers operated the property as a sheep ranch and expanded it to 18,000 acres by the early 1870s. J. Parker fought for the Union in the Civil War during this period, and after the war he became wealthy from his investments in Colorado mines and real estate.

When George retired in the early 1870s J. Parker took control of the ranch and hired Chinese laborers to build reservoirs and extend gold miners ditches to bring water from the Bear River watershed to the Vineyard where he planted grapes for raisins. Although J. Parker raised grapes in other parts of the ranch in this period the Vineyard's grapes were probably his first. They were closest to his source of water, the ditches and reservoirs to the north.

In 1877, J. Parker's Vineyard produced the first carload of California raisins to be shipped to eastern markets.

It was probably at this time when Chinese laborers established a permanent Chinese community on the ranch. Jobs for South Placer County's euro-Americans were scarce during the price recession of the mid 1870s and there was animosity toward the Chinese because they were willing to work hard for low wages. When the Placer County Sheriff accused a Chinese

cook of murdering three people at the Old Ryan Ranch near Loomis in September 1877, euro-Americans expelled Chinese people from population centers throughout South Placer County, and in some places burned down their homes. It is probable that many Chinese escaped to the Whitney Ranch during this period, swelling the ranks of J. Parker's laborers.

Recently deceased Catherine Whitney of Santa Cruz, the wife of Vincent Whitney, one of J. Parker's grandsons, remembered seeing a deserted temple and other remnants of a Chinese community when she visited the ranch with her husband in 1936.

By 1883 J. Parker realized that his raisin prices were unable to compete with prices of lower cost European producers. He also had noticed that citrus, especially oranges, ripened early in the year because of the thermals rising along the ridges of the ranch's valleys. It was about this time that Chinese laborers removed his grape vines, terraced the Vineyard's slopes, and planted navel orange orchards. A few grape vines continued to grow wild in the lower elevations of the Vineyard as late as the early 2000s.

By 1887 J. Parker was beating southern California oranges to eastern markets and getting premium prices.

J. Parker often traveled to Europe and he was enamored of English society. He married English native Lucy Chadwick in 1882 and in the mid 1880s converted 40 acres of the ranch into an English themed baronial estate for the couple and their three small children. The estate included his mansion, named the Oaks, with servants' quarters, tennis courts, a surrounding golf course and other accoutrements of an English gentleman.

In 1888 J. Parker formed the Placer Citrus Colony to attract English families to purchase ten acre plots on the eastern side of the ranch and in Penryn and Newcastle. The project was successful in its early years but faltered

with the nationwide economic depression of the mid 1890s. Also, many families were scared off by malaria. J. Parker's water projects had brought mosquitoes to the area just prior to widespread knowledge of the need to abate them.

The colony was largely defunct by 1905 and there is no evidence of citrus production at the Vineyard after J. Parker's death in 1913.

Remnants of J. Parker's Vineyard orange orchard still exist on the hillside terraces. The navels are gone but a few root stock trees are bearing sour fruit.

Most of the Vineyard is owned by Western Placer Education Foundation. According to foundation President Bob Romness plans for the area are to add parking and interpretive trails to the site at a time far in the future.