

## History of the Whitney Ranch Part Three of Three parts The Decline of an Empire

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Joel Parker Whitney's Citrus Colony Clubhouse  
is now a stone residence on Delmar Ave.

During the 1860's and 1870's Joel Parker Whitney, called Parker then, expanded his Spring Valley Ranch from 320 acres to 18,000 acres. Silted water from the Bear River watershed limited agriculture at the ranch until California outlawed hydraulic gold mining in the mid 1880s. In 1887 Parker joined with neighboring ranchers to extend ditches and bring water to 5000 acres along the Loomis/Penryn corridor. The project filed for incorporation as the "Placer County Citrus Colony" in 1888. The Colony sold small ranches to Europeans, mainly

English noblemen, promising them good profits from early citrus ripening and being able to beat Southern California citrus fruits to eastern markets.

By 1891 about 50 Colony ranches were producing mainly deciduous fruit because most citrus trees did not thrive in South Placer County's shallow soil. Fruit sales slowed significantly with the depression of the mid-1890's and Colony ranchers started to abandon their investments.

According to the *Foundations of Placer County Horticulture* by Samuel Gittings The Colony's death knell came by 1899 when malaria struck dozens of families and scared away all but a very few. The water that had brought a promising future for South Placer County agriculture had also brought mosquitoes that doomed the Colony. The granite Citrus Colony clubhouse is now a residence on Del Mar Avenue. Today the Colony area is often called "English Colony"

The failure of the Placer County Citrus Colony marked the end of halcyon years for the Whitney Ranch.

At about the turn of the century, Parker contracted Bright's disease, a debilitating kidney ailment. Although he remained somewhat active in his businesses until at least 1910, he began to disconnect from ranch operations. W. J. Downing, his long time accountant; friend and partner in his mining businesses managed the ranch's financial affairs from Boston. Parker's oldest son, also called Parker, took over as ranch manager. From correspondence between Downing and the younger Parker between 1902 and 1908 it is apparent that Downing thought that the younger Parker was doing a poor job. One memo from Downing to the younger Parker chastises him for misreporting the proceeds of a wool sale and questions the justification for his large tabs at Porters Saloon in Rocklin.

Catherine Whitney of Santa Cruz, the wife of one of Parker's grandsons, said that the younger Parker's bad behavior caused friction in the family and caused other family members to neglect ranch affairs. Downing put the ranch up for sale for \$1 Million in

1909. But it didn't sell.

Joel Parker Whitney died at Del Monte, California in January 1913.

The younger Parker died young at the ranch in 1924, two months after marrying for the third time. His sister Helen Beryl, apparently never involved in the ranch's operations or financial affairs, was living at the Oaks when she died in 1935 after the death of her third husband. Brother Vincent, estranged from his siblings throughout his later life and running a successful insurance firm in San Francisco, controlled the ranch through the Whitney Estate Trust. The Trust sold off large tracts of land throughout the 1930's 40's and 50's. Vincent died in 1965.

The Horseshoe Cattle Company purchased a large part of the ranch in the early 1950's and razed the Oaks to save county taxes. The center of the Oaks complex was located on today's Knoll Court in the Mansion Oaks neighborhood of Rocklin. A resident there has placed a plaque near the site of the mansion.

In 1960 Sunset International Petroleum Corporation entered the land development business when it bought the ranch's southern 12,000 acres. Sunset vice president and visionary land developer Carlos Travares conceived an upscale and self-contained city with 32,000 residences, medical facilities, shopping malls, schools and light industry. A regional airport was planned for a site near today's Thunder Valley Casino.

Travares named his project "Sunset City." The first phase was today's Sunset Whitney neighborhood. It included a championship sports complex called Sunset Oaks (now Sunset Whitney) Country Club on Midas Avenue and Rocklin's first shopping center at the corner of Pacific and Sunset. By 1967, residential lot sales significantly lagged expectations so Sunset abandoned the Sunset City plan, sold the country club and transferred project ownership to other developers.

Rocklin's population boom started in the mid 1970's. Travares' Sunset City was the catalyst that moved Rocklin north and west with most of Rocklin's residents now occupying the southern half of Joel Parker Whitney's Spring Valley Ranch.

Even though Parker was a meticulous diarist and prolific writer, there is a dearth of records covering long periods of ranch history, including the 3-year period leading up to Parker's death and the transition of ranch control to his heirs. The probable reason for this is that Soda Springs ski resort owner Oscar Jones leased the Oaks and 40 surrounding acres for a dude ranch in 1936. A May Sacramento Union article quoted Jones as proudly announcing that he had discovered several trunks full of Spring Valley records in the Oaks and destroyed "several loads of the stuff".