

An Alpine History Mystery – Solved!

Pioneer Fruit Trees Still Growing in Alpine

May 2015

The History Mystery for May focused on some gnarly old trees planted by pioneers over a century ago that are still seen around Alpine, and the fruit that the trees produced. Well, to find the solution to this mystery, we are going to refer to a brochure titled *Alpine, Its Resorts and Resources*, written in 1898 by F.B Walker who founded the famous Willows Resort. This is an excerpt from that brochure:

Owing to the fact that Alpine is peculiarly adapted to the cultivation of the olive, we feel safe in calling especial attention to that particular industry as being the line of horticulture which will prove exceedingly profitable to those engaging in its culture here.

California is the only state in the Union in which the olive can be successfully grown upon a commercial basis, and when we consider all the European countries producing olives are of less area than one-half of the State of California, and that the value of the olive production of Italy alone is greater than the value of the wheat export of the United States we form some idea of the great value olive production may be to our State.

So, if you guessed that the fruit from those gnarly old trees planted in Alpine by some of our early pioneers is the Olive, you have solved this mystery!

Here's another great story, told by George Stephenson who was born in Alpine in 1895, that tells us a little about life in Alpine over a century ago, and how Olives sometimes helped people make ends meet. This story takes place when George was about eleven or twelve, and here's how he tells it:

Well, we didn't always have too much to eat altogether. We had our own garden and all that, but my dad had cured a lot of olives and I hitched up the mule to the buggy and we put in a barrel of olives. I took this barrel of olives – I had a splasher in it so's the brine wouldn't slop out and a screened dipper, of course, and I started out towards San Diego and I got well down there and I started stopping at houses – there was only an occasional house then – it's all built up now – and I'd give them a sample to try. 'No" they'd say 'they didn't think they wanted any, but they'd taste one. Then they'd taste another. Hum, they tasted pretty good. And they'd end up buying a quart or two quarts. Fifteen cents a quart I think it was, maybe not that much. Well it went on that way and when I got through, I ended up I still had about half a barrel left so I went on down to a store and I stopped in there and I guess I was fortunate to show them first to one of the big shots and he got interested and he stopped everything and had all the clerks and everybody come taste the olives and they got shoe boxes to put them in. I told them they'd dry up, the olives would; they ought to be in fruit jars, but they didn't care, they went ahead and took them and I ended up selling the whole thing. I didn't have an olive left.



William & Ida Stephenson with daughter Lena (11), sons Hugh (9) and George (5).

George recalls that it was a long slow trip back with the mule, the buggy, and the empty olive barrel, but he was happy with the nice bit of cash for his parents. Although he was a long way from Alpine, the old mule knew the way home so young George curled up and slept all the way back.