

## An Alpine History Mystery:

### Pioneer Fruit Trees Still Growing in Alpine

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It only takes a little bit of research on our [alpinehistory.org](http://alpinehistory.org) website to discover that the early settlers in this wonderful little foothills community we call Alpine were heavily involved in agriculture. For example, in 1847 Cockney Bill Williams bought 17,000 acres of land in the Valle de las Viejas where he built a home, planted seeds and worked the land until the valley became the largest producer of grain in San Diego County.

In the 1870's, John Harbison became the world's largest honey producer with his extensive bee keeping operations here and throughout the state. The Fosses and Beatys also kept bees, but needed more diverse crops to feed their families, so they added all kinds of fruit trees and vegetables as well as some livestock. In the 1880's Nikolas Peutz established his ranch in the now familiar Peutz Valley, where he raised turkeys, pigs, cows and chickens, and his charming wife made butter and cheese and canned fruits and vegetables from their garden. About this same time, Nick Overmier planted 20 acres of Zinfandel grapes and started a wine-making operation. But the largest vineyard, some 320 acres, was planted by Captain George Brabazon and the vines continued producing for 90 or so years until they were dug up to build the Alpine Village Apartments.

Many of the early settlers also planted orchards of fruit trees, producing peaches, plums, prunes, apricots, apples, and pears. It is reported that in 1883 Edward Foss shipped 72 pears to market in St. Louis. The pears were so large and juicy that they weighed nearly a pound each. Fruits of all kinds from Alpine became very popular, and folks would come up from San Diego for the fresh peaches and other fruits sold at the stand under the big oak trees on the ranch of Tom and Flora Hill.

You may have noticed that most of the orchards, vineyards and gardens are now gone, except for the occasional fruit tree or the small home garden that you or your neighbors may cultivate. But around town you will still find evidence of an early pioneer crop planted in groves by many of the early settlers in Alpine. This particular type of tree originates in the Mediterranean region, and often lives to be over 200 years old. The fruit can be picked either green or ripe, but it is extremely bitter unless it is properly cured. Even when properly cured this fruit is not sweet but is more often described as salty or pungent with a grass-like flavor. The ripe cured fruit tends to be softer and more mellow than the green cured fruit.



You can find some original trees planted by Alpine pioneers near the big bend in South Grade Road, and some are still standing along Ballentine Drive, in Alpine Heights, and in the Rancho Del Sycuan area. These gnarly old trees are well over a hundred years old. Our mystery question this month is: What kind of fruit was produced by these long-lived pioneer trees planted over a century ago.