

# Tree Fruits, Ground Crops, Vines and Agro-industries

## The First Orchards

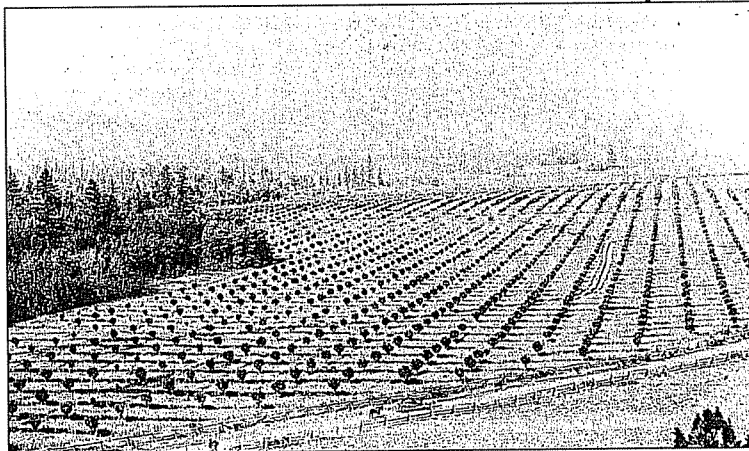
In the autumn of 1886 Charles Ora Card, a son-in-law of Mormon leader Brigham Young, spent several weeks travelling through the Boundary Country and the Okanagan. He and his two companions were looking for land on which a community of Mormons might settle. Card was disappointed to find that almost all the arable land was owned by the great "cattle kings," with the result that the young men turned their attention to southern Alberta where land was available and where Cardston became the centre of a Mormon settlement.

However, the portion of Card's journal relating to the Okanagan Valley, a copy of which was presented to the *Osoyoos Times* by Brigham Y. Card, a grandson of Charles Ora Card, tells us something of the Valley in the mid-1880s. For example on October 2 the party reached Osoyoos where, in the absence of J.C. Haynes, they were attended to by the deputy customs officer. Card says, "Here we ate delicious peaches."

Near Okanagan Falls on October 5 Card writes, "Mr. Keagan made us a present of some very nice peaches and 3 apples raised on his farm." Two days later the young men were at the Mission where Card writes, "We saw apple trees laden with fruit here and most excellent land, but monopolized by but few which is the general complaint with British Columbia."

Where had these fruit trees come from? The first fruit trees planted in the Okanagan appear to have been those planted by Hiram F. "Okanogan" Smith in 1857 on his tract of land beside Osoyoos Lake about one mile south of the International Boundary.<sup>1</sup> Smith, who had been a packer for the Hudson's Bay Company, carried his first trees into the Valley from Hope. It seems likely that the trees originated in the Hudson's Bay Company nursery which operated from the

*Young orchards in  
Coldstream, 1890s.  
Vernon Museum 5029*



1840s at Fort Langley. (The first apple trees in the Northwest were grown on the Hudson's Bay Company farm at Fort Vancouver from seeds brought from England by Captain Aemelius Simpson in 1826.) Smith found a ready market for his apples among the gold miners and cattlemen pushing north, especially as he was able to offer his customers dried fruit.

In 1862 the Oblate fathers planted apples at their Mission near present-day Kelowna. Some authorities say their seedling trees came from St. Mary's Mission in the Fraser Valley. D.V. Fisher of the Dominion Research Station at Summerland, in his article "History of Fruit Growing in the B.C. Interior,"<sup>2</sup> describes apple trees on the Indian Reserve at Inkameep which in 1978 he believed to be about one hundred years old and probably the oldest fruit trees in the Okanagan north of the 49th Parallel.

In the Similkameen Francis X. Richter planted three orchards, the first about 1880 consisting of one acre of apple trees on the "R" Ranch. The young trees came from Wm. Clarkson's Nursery at New Westminster. In 1886 Richter planted two acres, which included a planting of Italian prunes, at his Lower Ranch. This second orchard was irrigated. The prunes were dried and sold well. The third orchard was planted in 1897 at Inglewood Ranch and consisted of thirty-five acres. Layritz Nursery in Victoria supplied the trees. In 1906 Richter won twenty-three prizes at the annual Provincial Exhibition in New Westminster for his apples, pears, peaches and plums.<sup>3</sup> About 1869 Tom Ellis planted apple trees on his Penticton ranch. In the late 1880s John Thomson had a "well-kept orchard" in Pleasant Valley near Armstrong.

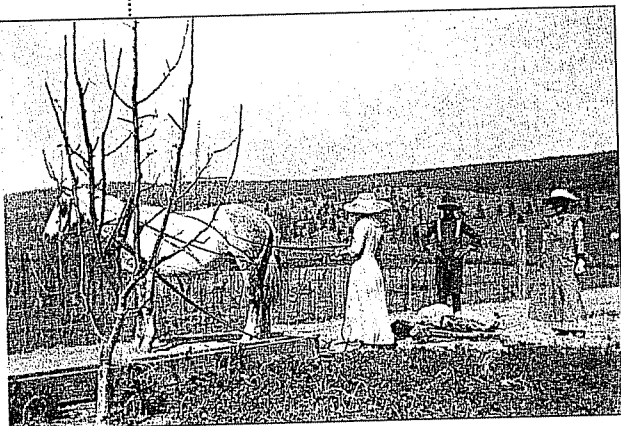
### Early orchardists in the Okanagan (from the list of Dr. D.V. Fisher)

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| <p>1875-76: Kelowna (George Whelan and Alfred Postill).<br/>                 1890: Salmon Arm (P.M. Parsons).<br/>                 1890: Vernon (Luc Girouard).<br/>                 1892: Kelowna (George C. Rose, 40 acres).<br/>                 1892: Summerland (Mr. Gartrell and Messrs. Barkley, Garnett and Dunston in the Garnett Valley).<br/>                 1892: Coldstream Ranch, Vernon (Lord Aberdeen, 200 acres).<br/>                 1892: Kelowna, Guisachan Ranch (Lord Aberdeen).<br/>                 1900: Armstrong and Enderby.<br/>                 1900: Okanagan Falls.<br/>                 1901: Peachland (J.M. Robinson).<br/>                 1901: Kelowna (Bankhead) (T.W. Stirling and Pridham Orchards).</p> | <p>1902: Rutland Flats.<br/>                 1902: Kamloops (Canadian Real Properties).<br/>                 1903: Westbank (D.E. Gellatly).<br/>                 1904: Oyama (Mr. Irvine).<br/>                 1905: Naramata (J.M. Robinson).<br/>                 1905: Penticton (J.H. Latimer).<br/>                 1905: Osoyoos (Leslie Hill).<br/>                 1908: Walhachin (C.P. Barnes).<br/>                 1909: Winfield and Okanagan Centre (Okanagan Land Company, Rainbow Ranch Company, and Duck Lake Fruitlands Company).<br/>                 1910: Kaleden (Kaleden Estates Company Ltd.).<br/>                 1913: Belgo [Kelowna].</p> |
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### from History of Fruit Growing in the B.C. Interior<sup>4</sup>

by D.V. Fisher, Ph.D, P. Ag., F.A.S.H.S.

The late 1890s and early 1900s were boom days in the fruit belt of the Southern Interior. Some of the promotional efforts in selling orchard land to overseas buyers were highly questionable and the cause of great distress to many improperly informed, inexperienced purchasers encouraged by pie-in-the-sky prospectuses of land agents. Nevertheless there also were substantial, dedicated and well-financed enterprises which tended to put the industry initially on a sound footing. Thus Lord Aberdeen (Coldstream Ranch, Vernon and Guisachan Ranch, Kelowna), T.W. Stirling and Mr. Pridham in Kelowna and the Okanagan Land Co., Rainbow Ranch Co. and Duck Lake Fruitlands Co. in Winfield-Okanagan Centre, to name a few, were important pioneers in laying the basis of the present fruit industry.



*Land improving. Moving rocks with a stoneboat. Notice the wooden irrigation flume between the young cherry tree and the horse. There seem to be ground crops in the foreground, perhaps tomatoes. Vernon Museum 3355*

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## *The Orchard City*

The earliest reports of the Okanagan had all emphasized the potential for cattle raising in the area. This, combined with mining activities in other parts of the province, influenced the land use. Cattle were raised and sent off to provide meat to the miners. The cattle and the attendant need for hay crops required large acreages. Rangeland was quickly taken up, and as the number and size of herds increased, the ranchers added to their holdings. This situation curtailed the development of the valley, as it could only sustain a limited number of these huge ranches.

This was the situation when the Earl and Countess of Aberdeen visited. They sized up the situation with great perception and personal optimism. They were convinced that the only way to open up this beautiful valley to its full potential was to encourage more settlement.

But what enticed people to *this* valley over all others? Its assets were its climate, the lake, and its altitude, all of which combined to make a healthy environment for family life. Its major drawback

was the shortage of available land. Land there was, in plenty, but most of the best belonged to, or was leased by, the cattle ranchers.

The Aberdeens had held many responsible government positions. Ireland in particular had reason to bless them. During the time that Lord Aberdeen was lord-lieutenant of Ireland, both he and Lady Aberdeen worked to improve conditions for the poor. Lady Aberdeen had, through tremendous personal effort, created the "Irish Village" at the Chicago World's Fair to promote interest and sales of the Irish lace cottage industry, thus putting at least a meagre income into countless otherwise penniless homes. Later they returned to Ireland to wage a war on tuberculosis, which was occurring in epidemic proportions at the time.

Their commitment and energy was now put to work to develop the Okanagan. This attitude, linked with the observation of produce harvested, led to their decision to purchase a ranch of 480 acres on the shores of Okanagan Lake. This was to be turned into orchards. Writing

Right: Coutts Marjoribanks was Lady Aberdeen's brother. Arriving first in North America to run the Rocking Horse Ranch in Dakota, he was persuaded by his sister to come to British Columbia to oversee the Aberdeen holdings. Courtesy, Kelowna Museum Association

Facing page, top: Early irrigation was accomplished by utilizing the force of gravity to fill the open wooden flumes. Entirely hand built, these flumes had to be carefully graded over the terrain.

Many miles of fluming were constructed to bring precious water down from mountain lakes and creeks. Courtesy, Kelowna Museum Association

Facing page, bottom: Wagonloads of irrigation pipe were installed to bring water to the thousands of new fruit trees being planted in Kelowna. This kind of piping replaced the open flumes. These wagons, which required four-horse teams to haul them, are seen here on Bernard Avenue. Courtesy, Kelowna Museum Association



of the Okanagan in 1891, Lady Aberdeen stated:

*Up to now but little attention has been devoted to fruit growing, as this has been principally a stock raising country, but the possibilities shown by the few orchards already planted, point to its being found to possess exceptional advantages for the pursuit of this industry.*

Lady Aberdeen's brother, Coutts Marjoribanks (pronounced "Marshbanks"), was to manage the ranch while they returned to Scotland. A return visit to Canada was planned, as was further investment. When a very large block of land in the north end of the valley became available for purchase, the Aberdeens bought it, all 13,000 acres. This was to be subdivided into smaller holdings for settlers to take up.

Thus was laid the foundation of the fruit industry. Like all dreams, when translated into reality, it required a lot of hard work and faith. Orchards do not produce overnight. Each year the orchards required pruning, cultivating, irrigating, and spraying just to bring the trees into produc-

tion. One had to be prepared for several lean years before the rewards could be harvested.

Mistakes were made, often from ignorance of the country and from the tendency to plant unsuitable varieties of fruit. The semi-desert Okanagan could only be made to bloom by the application of irrigation. In spite of this, the idea of fruit production was firmly established.

It was fortunate indeed that among those early orchardists were men of both stubbornness and means. Determined Englishmen and Scots, who were putting down personal roots in the Valley, were set on proving that Kelowna would one day surprise the world with its products. The names of these men are repeated again and again in reports of those early years—Pridham, Crozier, Crichton, Pitcairn, Stirling, Cosens, and, of course, the Rose brothers. There were many others, but these more fortunate families were the ones most able to cope with the early financial costs. They hung in there with determination, and by the turn of the century their efforts were beginning to show results.

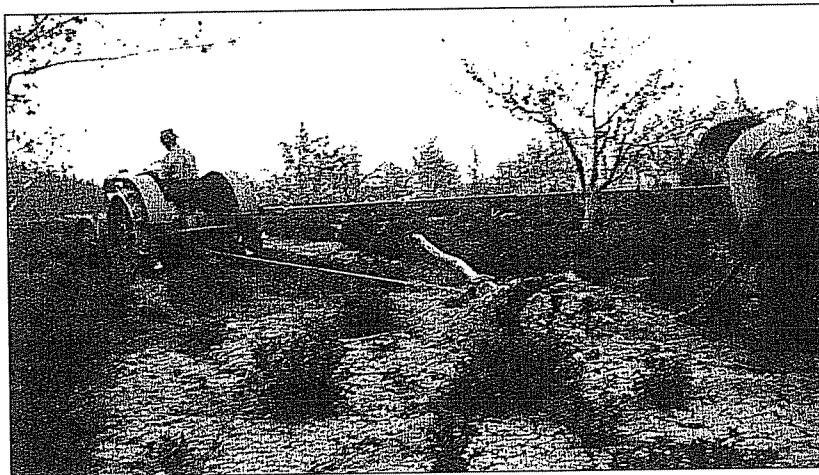
In 1908 the dreams of those early fruit farmers would finally become a reality. A board of trade had been formed in 1906 which had thrown itself wholeheartedly into promoting the Kelowna fruit industry. Top priority had been given to advertising the benefits of both the place and its products. Prospective settlers were provided with a comprehensive outline of Kelowna with all its benefits, while potential markets were presented with examples of the fine products of the orchards.

By 1907 the board of trade was advertising throughout the Prairie Provinces. This stirred sufficient interest to have space allocated to the Kelowna fruit industry at the 1908 Calgary Exhibition. F.R.E. DeHart and J. Gibb were sent to Calgary to over-

## PIONEERS' VISION OF ORCHARDS AND VINEYARDS

by Paul Harvey

Paul Harvey was one of the winners of the annual essay-writing contest for elementary and secondary school students that is sponsored by the Kelowna Branch of the Okanagan Historical Society.



*W.R. Hicks pulling stumps.  
c. 1920's.  
(Courtesy Kaye Benzer)*

The Okanagan has always been one of the main suppliers of fruit in Canada, the biggest region for apple production in the country and the second for grapes and soft fruit. It leads in grape production, tree fruits and other small fruits in British Columbia.

The climate is perfect for growing fruit. The summers are hot and dry and the winters perfectly complement the trees. The valley has perfect sites for orchards because of the good soil and drainage.

Agriculture started in the Okanagan when Father Pandosy planted apples at the Oblate Mission. Since the 1880's, the fruit business has grown steadily and it is interesting to see how it has developed over the years.

*"The earliest recorded date of grapes being grown in the Okanagan was in 1905....at the Canada Department of Agriculture Research Station, Summerland,"* the Okanagan Historical Society says in its 45<sup>th</sup> Report.

In 1907, W.J. Wilcox of Salmon Arm planted three-quarters of an acre of a variety of grapes. *"These grapes were not irrigated; they were cultivated with a harrow and hand hoed. Manure was used as a source of fertilizer,"* the Report states. Eventually, Wilcox expanded to two acres or more and sold his grapes to hotels in Salmon Arm. Though Wilcox was somewhat successful, the grape industry slowed down for the next fifteen years. People grew grapes in their yards, but only for personal use.

Machinery was first introduced to the fruit industry in 1921. A machine developed for packinghouses was used in the apple industry. It was a grading machine that dumped apples on a sorting table, where the workers sat. They placed the fruit on belts, which moved down the grader. The belts then dropped the apples into bins. Other machines were also made to simplify the process of packing apples.

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Originally appeared as "Pioneers' vision of orchards bore fruit" on October 18, 1998, in The Kelowna Daily Courier.



*Bench packing apples in packinghouse.  
Notice that all the workers are men!  
(Courtesy Kelowna Museum)*

Orchards used trucks for shipping their apples. There were five warehouses used for storage. *“One was a common storage warehouse and another was a combination grader room and large area, three floors, for loose fruit. The three others were cold storage buildings with three floors each,”* stated the 48<sup>th</sup> Report.

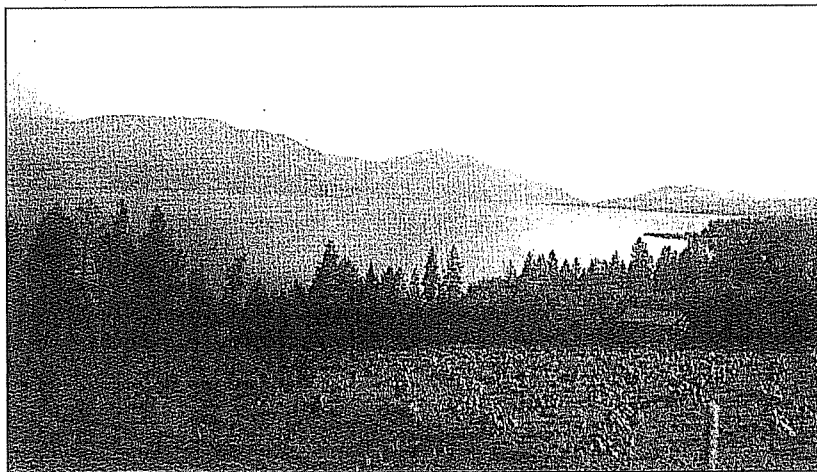
The growers brought their fruit to these buildings and each load was given a ticket. *“After being packed, the details of the cullage and number and grade of packages were marked on the ticket. On this basis the grower was paid for his fruit.”*

After packing, the shipping took place. In the 1930's, it was all done by train. Three types of cars were used. One type of load was the straight load – this was just a load of apples and other fruit that filled the car. A mixed load, on the other hand, was a mixture of various fruits and vegetables. Thus, these cars were difficult to load.

A revolutionary agriculturist, J.W. Hughes, got the grape business going again in 1928. He thought that the Kelowna area was a perfect place to grow grapes. He bought forty-five acres of land, using fifteen acres for grapes. He called this first vineyard Pioneer Vineyards. Two years later, Hughes bought fifteen more acres to expand and planted another twenty acres. He packed and sold his own crops from 1926. Not all of his ideas bore fruit, though. He planted twenty acres on Black Mountain, but the grapes did not ripen so the idea was abandoned.

Soon the word spread of the success of grape growing and more people started in the industry. Charlie Casorso planted a vineyard in the Ellison area, but soon he sold it to Hughes and Leopold Hayes. The two made Casorso's vineyard into a sixty-acre patch and called it the Great West Vineyard.

By this time, Eugene Rittich was staking his claim in grape growing. He arrived in Kelowna from Hungary where he had studied agriculture, viticulture and wine chemistry. Rittich had travelled around Europe and was experienced in the vineyard and wine industry. He tried a different test on Black Mountain, using forty varieties. Only eleven survived his experiment because the temperatures were extremely low.



*Young vineyards owned by Mallam family, looking towards Okanagan Lake. Site of present-day Summerhill Wines. August 1963.*

*(Courtesy Kelowna Museum)*

Rittich continued his planting in Oliver. From there, it spread to become the Okanagan's most important white grape industry.

Hughes was still on top of the business. He was still growing grapes, but he wanted a change. Instead of shipping through a packinghouse, he wanted to ship the grapes on his own. He followed the advice of Dick Palmer of the Summerland Experimental Station and sold his own grapes, shipping in small loads. Hughes later decided

instead to send carloads to the Prairies. The large shipping quantity worked.

Hughes had strict growing methods. He grew 495 vines per acre and spaced the rows eleven feet apart. The vines were separated eight feet from each other. During the season, they were irrigated four times. He pruned after one year of growth, leaving fifty buds on a vine. This was similar to the Kniffen system, used in Ontario.

Finally, Hughes sold his vineyards to the men who worked for him, and by 1949 all he had left was a lower portion of Lakeside Vineyards.

In 1961, the previously unorganized grape growers formed the Association of British Columbia Grape Growers.



*Men with boxed grapes at Mission Vineyards. c. 1950's.*

*(Courtesy Kelowna Museum)*