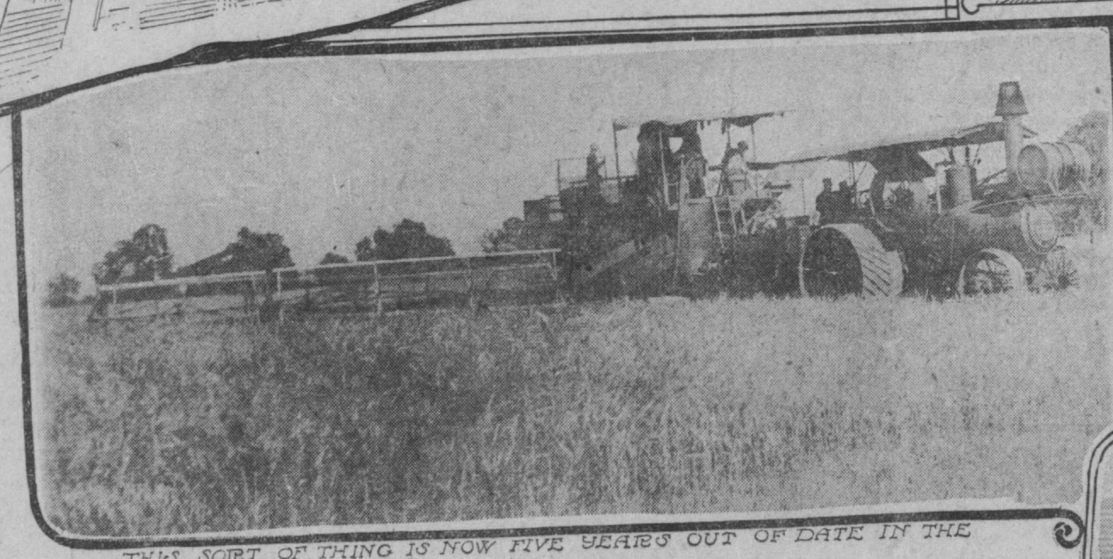
The New Breed of Farmer Up-State

He Still Puzzles the Old Farmer, Whose Big Rancho Now Makes Room for a Whole Tribe, and He Does Pretty Nearly Everything in Working His Revolution---Except to Fail

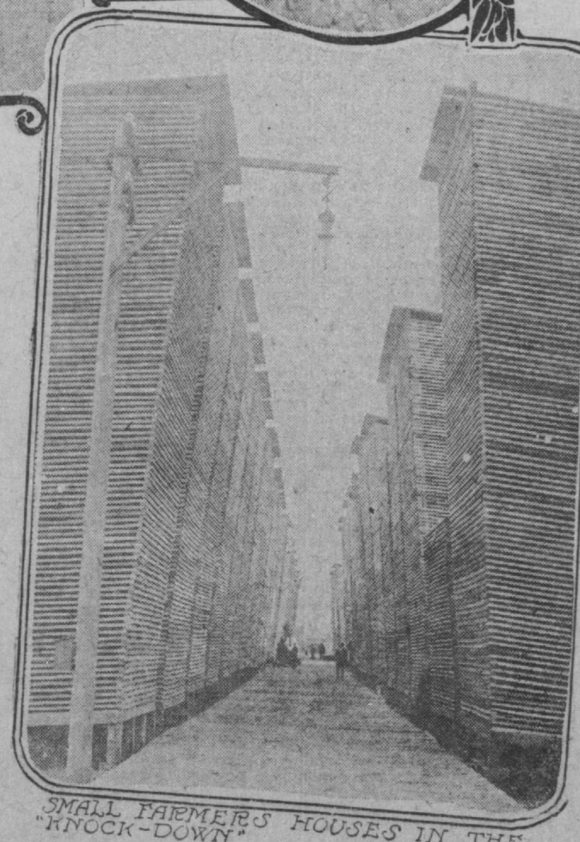
"UNION" VEGETABLES RAISED BY THE INTENSIVE FARMER ON THE CUT UP WHEAT RANCHES

THIS BEATS ANY KIND OF GRAIN ALL HOLLOW AND "TREE BUGS" CAUSE NO ALARM TO MEN WHO KNOW WHAT TO DO

EVEN THE INDIAN HAS BUILT A CHURCH WHERE FORMERLY STOOD HIS SWEATHOUSE



THIS SORT OF THING IS NOW FIVE YEARS OUT OF DATE IN THE SACRAMENTO VALLEY



SMALL FARMERS HOUSES IN THE "KNOCK-DOWN"

By John Seymour

JUST as in those days after the gringo came so now is the man from the middle west causing vast changes in the great and rich domain of northern California.

Once the haunt of the red man, then the spoil of the argonaut, later the country of the grain king and the cattle baron, it is now undergoing a rapid change, a phase in its development made possible only by the influx of the conservative and intensive agriculturist who has succeeded mainly because he fought the fight with a stubborn soil, and now bringing his methods to a more productive ground, finds his efforts increased a hundred fold.

The days of the big ranchos, of vast acreages, of limitless possessions, are over in northern California, and with those days are passing wasteful agricultural methods, lavish expenditures and the wanton waste of natural resources.

One by one the big ranchos are disappearing. Fields of 1,000 acres are being crisscrossed by a hundred wire fences. Where one house stood on a section of land before, 30 are found now. The 100 farm hands who tilled the soil of the rancho 10 years ago, either own a bit of land themselves or they have gone to the factories or into the woods to cut and prepare the lumber for the homes which are springing up by hundreds over the rich valley of the Sacramento.

The economic value of the breaking up of the big ranchos of the Sacramento valley can not be overestimated. Not only does it mean that more people, more producers are coming to the soil, but that all of the soil will be productive to the highest measure. This means that the specialization of grain raising will be done away with and that the people will produce directly from the soil a large number of those commodities which heretofore under the old regime they have imported.

In the beginnings of the epoch of grain and stock raising in the Sacramento valley but little effort was required of the rancher to place himself in opulence. His lands were given him by Spanish grant because he promised to do certain things in the way of improvement or because he had cut a pretty figure in the eyes of the governor by banishing from the territory the desired enemies of the government, generally imaginary. This epoch was before the discovery of gold, before California was a state and while just a few of the lusty pioneers had conceived an idea that Uncle Sam should own the territory. Boundaries at that time were indefinite and maps were few and inaccurate. The grants generally called for so many thousand acres north or south of a certain river or creek. Tradition rather than the sextant marked off one man's land from another.

With a grant of many thousands of acres of land on his hands the rancher of the early "forties" found that to amass wealth was as easy as falling off the proverbial log. First came cattle. They raised themselves in valleys during the winter months and in the summer browsed along the gentle slopes of the coast range and Sierra Nevadas, which ran riot with the manzanita.

The ships of the argonauts which came around the Horn drew on the valley for their supply of beef. As the state grew the market was enlarged by some consumption. Then came cattle from Arizona and New Mexico invading the home market. Cattle raising grew less profitable and the rancher asked "What next?" The answer was "Wheat."

And wheat it was. The limitless expanse of pasture land was turned over for the first time. The crops which grew upon the virgin soil almost passes belief. The demand was brisk and the price was high—sometimes 2 cents a pound was paid. The Sacramento river became dotted with a thousand barges; warehouses were built along its banks. Wheat was the cry, and every energy, every acre of land was brought to bear to answer that cry.

The transition from stock raising to wheat culture was sudden and the situation which faced the rancher was a difficult one. How was he to cope with a problem which called for the tilling and harvesting of such an enormous acreage under climatic conditions which differed from any other place in the world? Old methods would not do. No man nor body of men could sow a half million acres of grain in the primitive fashion of the man with the sack over his shoulder and who walked between furrows casting to the right and the left. A machine was demanded which would do the work of a hundred such men and do it in a day. William Henry Selsby, a Chico blacksmith, perfected a broadcast seeder, a simple thing, which cast the grain 60 feet on either side as fast as two horses walk.

The evolution from a number of single plows chained together to the gang plow, the Stockton plow and lastly the steam plow, was rapid. The latter turns over 22 furrows at a time. The harvest presented the hardest problem. The reaper just then coming into use in the east was too slow. The ranches wanted action. A Stockton genius took the Case header, a Chicago invention, and converted it into the California header. It would cut a swath 16 feet wide. "Too small," said the farmer, and each year he added a few feet more. There are plenty of them in the valley today that cut a swath 100 feet wide. Thrashing the grain was still another process and involved much labor and expense. Daniel Best evolved the idea of combining the two processes and the outcome was the combined harvester which cuts, thrashes and puts in the sack the product of 100 acres of grain a day. It remains for some inventor to attach a flour mill to the combination.

Scarcely had the rancher reached what he considered to be perfection in the handling of his crops with all the perplexing problems solved so that he could rest assured that no increased acreage was too large for him to master than along came the man from the middle west who wanted 10 or 20 acres so badly that he was willing to pay cash, and about five times what the rancher thought his land was worth.

And in a day the combined harvesters are being thrown into the junk pile. The traction engines are being sold to street paving concerns, the broadcast seeder is a nesting place for Plymouth rocks and leghorns and the man with the sack thrown over his shoulder is abroad in the fields again.

Nor have the passing of some of the big ranchos been without their tragedies. Made careless by the ease with which money was taken from the productive soil men grew reckless and counted little on the future, thinking that top notch markets would always prevail irrespective of the law of supply and demand. Then came Australia, Brazil and the Argentine. Two cent wheat went a glimmering and the crash followed, leaving many ranchers with a string of debts and race horses.

Not far from Chico is the old D. M. Reavis rancho, now owned by James D. Phelan of San Francisco. Reavis made more money than any other rancher in the upper Sacramento valley, and he spent it for many things, including a private race track with a grandstand and a bandstand. The famous Blackbird was bred by him, and many other notable kings and queens of the turf. Once when Blackbird returned to Chico after a triumphant tour of the eastern tracks the horse was met at the railroad station by a torchlight procession and prominent citizens in carriages. The polished bones of Blackbird are now a part of the display in the Chico state normal school. It is said that the mute exhibit represents $2,014,000, which is the sum Reavis owed when he went into bankruptcy. Two sons of Reavis are now members of the San Francisco police force.

And the man from the middle west has brought other new things with him—ideas which are ever a constant source of surprise to the old time rancher and his wheat raising ways. One thing which surprised him greatly was the easterners' way of dealing with the fruit tree pests, for the rancher, although he had his specialty, seeing that the few trees which he set out about the home place, for ornamental purposes principally, grew and bore marvelous fruit, ventured somewhat into horticulture. Wheat is raised by the laws of sow and reap, but the rancher soon found that fruit trees were entirely a different matter. He discovered that there were the red spider and the pear blight to contend with; the black fly which ate holes in the leaves of the prune trees, and the moth which sapped the pollen from the fig. When he went up against the parasites he was out of his class. His orchards failed. Enter the man from beyond the Rockies and enter also with him some little vials which he carried in his vest pocket. The vials contained colonies of little bugs. He had learned of them in the agricultural colleges. The bugs are the kind that fatten on those that ruin fruit trees. The newcomer turned his bugs loose and the orchards were saved.

Now this intensive farming, this rotation of crops, the preparation of the soil by phosphates, this return to old methods, the elimination of waste and, above all, this bug thing, have put a decided kink in the mental processes of the old time rancher, who planted and just let things grow. "We're becomin' too derned civilized," say some, while others maintain that if they have to "fuss with medicine for the soil and bugs to catch bugs to save the trees, it is time that self-respectin' ranchers retire before these easterners get to goin' too far."

The despised garden vegetable which the rancher in former years left to the "Chinese gardens" to supply, now, plays a big part in the agricultural cycle of the upper Sacramento valley. As the old type rancher expresses it: "These fellows from the states will stoop to anything to get money out'n the ground."

The intensive farmer's daily delivery of his garden truck to the "union" is no inconsequential item. It means cash at a grocery store and not credit, as under the old system. Twenty-four hours after he leaves a crate of lettuce or strawberries at the "union" the products are upon the table of the San Francisco housewife. Organization has accomplished much for these farmers. They brought it with them.

Meanwhile the rancher of yesterday has sold his fertile fields in small tracts. He has money in the bank and a big house in town. Ma and the girls go to the seashore in the summer. The boys are at college. For diversion pa rides out into the country in his automobile and watches those farmers fr the east stretch their hogtight fences and build their portable chicken houses. It all looks quite small to him—like women's work.

Among the last of these big ranchos to give up to the demands of the small farmer from the middle west, with his altogether unwestern ways, is the John Bidwell ranch at Chico. This rancho is one of the best known of the old California domains and is considered typical of that period between the sixties and the seventies.

But the Bidwell rancho is also passing, and those distinctive features which made the old days hold it as their own are giving way to the encroachments of the modern "rah rah boys" from the agricultural colleges of Iowa, Nebraska and Kansas. The old adobe shack where once the farm hand lived, the rancho blacksmith and machine shop, the dining hall and even the rancheria, where the Indians lived who tilled the soil, are giving way to turbine windmills, corn bins, schoolhouses and meeting halls for the farmers' unions. The Bidwell rancho was a city in itself, having homes for its 200 laborers, bunkhouses, a store, a church and several factories for the utilization of every product and by-product which the ranch of 25,000 acres of unrivaled soil provided.

There was a cannery where the fruit from the 8,000 acres of orchard was prepared for market, a vinegar factory where the unmarketable apples were utilized, a mill where the best of the grain raised on the rancho was made into flour, a sawmill where timber cut on the rancho was made profitable, and so on down the line—every product of the rancho was placed on the market by John Bidwell himself.

But all this is changed now. The flourmill belongs to the milling trust and is idle, the lumber mill could not withstand the competition of the Diamond match company, the cannery was long ago made impossible by a canners' association, and all that remains is the vinegar factory, and this, too, may soon go. The farmers from the middle west don't like the smell.

Where 10 years ago the puncher directed the energies of his 10 mule team, or where the driver swung aloft over the backs of 36 mules as they pulled a combined harvester, now run trolley lines, and the fields are city lots with hundreds of pretty homes upon them. Where the harvester formerly left standing in the field acres of golden grain because the driver was too lazy to turn his team about so as to cut close to the oak trees or in the fence corners is found the "intensive" farmer at work. Every nook and corner of his 20 acre tract is utilized. He has many crops where one grew before, and he raises many things. He knows every growing thing on his 20 acres. One will find upon this farmer's reading table the latest reports of the secretary of agriculture.

The rancheria, where lived in General Bidwell's time some 400 Indians, is gone. Whitewashed cottages take the place of bark huts and tepees. The sweathouse, a hollow mound where the Indians held their wild dances, has been removed and in place stands a neat little church, its spire topping the giant oaks which shelter the village.

The Indian of yesterday, who slept in the open because he had no other place to sleep, is building a sleeping porch on his bungalow. He who ate grasshoppers in the spring and thought they were good, now at his lodge banquet relishes iced shrimps brought from San Francisco. The moccasin has given way to the patent leather boot and the red blanket is supplanted by the hobble skirt.

The Indians are prosperous. Mrs. Bidwell's beneficence has made them so. She has given them land, schools and pretty homes to live in. One of them, Elmer La Fonso, is studying for a career in grand opera. But the farmer from the middle west will soon grow turnips where the Indian cultivates today.