

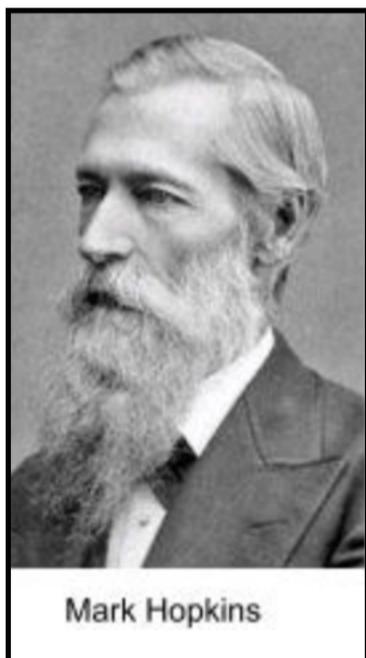
Amber Waves of Grain

by Carmel Barry-Schweyer, retired County Curator and Archivist

Even before the Gold Rush grain crops waved with the breeze and were harvested in western Placer County. In 1845 Theodore Sicard planted and harvested the first wheat grown in the county on his ranch located south of the Bear River. Eventually the streets of Lincoln and Sheridan would be choked with wagons hauling their grain to the mills.

The Coon Creek, Doty's Ravine and Yankee Slough areas of western Placer County became the center for grain crops. By 1854 the Coon Creek Ranch, owned by J.P. Dameron, produced 2,000 bushels of barley, 1,500 of wheat, and 40 tons of hay. Three years later Placer County produced 73,000 bushels of wheat, 82,850 bushels of barley, and more than fifty acres of corn.

As early as 1858 ranchers used labor saving machines like the McCormick Reaper and the Haines Heading Machine to make harvesting easier, however they still had to haul the grain to Sacramento for milling. Wagons hauled the grain by six or eight mule teams to Sacramento to be milled. It was a long and rough journey. Frank Dowd recalled that he left his father's ranch in western Placer County at 2 a.m. and arrived at the mill in Sacramento at 3p.m.



Mark Hopkins

Mark Hopkins (one of the "Big Four" of the Central Pacific Railroad and owner of the hotel in San Francisco) and his brother Mose owned a 1,000 acre ranch east of Sheridan. Mark Hopkins constructed a flour mill in Sheridan in 1870 and by 1875 the mill was operating 24 hours a day under the management of Dan Click, who later became the owner of the mill. Ranchers from the surrounding area hauled their wheat, barley and oats to the mill.

In 1869 the Chamberlin Ranch along Coon Creek won the medal for the best 500-acre grain ranch in California at the California State Fair.

By 1881 thirty ranchers owned approximately 20, 480 acres of excellent wheat lands in western Placer County. The price at this time was \$12 per ton and in this area twelve bushels per acres was standard.

The Buckeye Mill Company in Lincoln shipped 5,000 barrels of flour, 600 tons of bran, 600 tons of rolled barley, and large quantities of corn and other grains in 1888. The company was headquartered in Marysville with the Lincoln operation run by John T. Howard, assisted by young Walter Jansen. Their warehouses were near the depot next to the 40x80 foot warehouse owned by George Aldrich along G Street in Lincoln. In 1890 Howard and Jansen

purchased the mill in Lincoln and operated it jointly until 1894 when Jansen bought out Howard. Jansen then acquired all of the land along G Street between Fourth and Fifth Streets. In 1915 Jansen's son, Walter Kay, joined the company and the name was changed to Walter Jansen & Son.

Other areas of the county also produced grain and had mills. Roseville ranches produced 50,000 sacks of grain and 600 tons of hay in 1888. The Auburn Steam Flouring Mill advertised in the Placer Herald that they expanded and their 6 horsepower steam engine was for sale in 1858. They also solicited farmers to bring their grain to the mill for processing. The Auburn City Mill was again enlarged in 1865 by the new owners Mallette and Steiner. They were open for grinding wheat, corn and barley.

Wheat, barley, and corn eventually gave way to rice as the major grain crop in the western part of the county as the foothills area became the center of the fruit industry.