

Golden Apples in the Great Northwest

Boom Has Struck Fruit-Growing Country, Indians and Ranchers Are Investing Sudden Profits in Motor Cars, and Some Trolley Lines Are Going Out of Business

By WOOD M. VANCE.

MUCH has recently been written about the oil boom in Texas; of millionaires made overnight.

Out in the Pacific Northwest there is an apple boom which promises to rival the Texas oil fields, for while it is only here and there that a man in Texas finds oil on his place, every owner of 100 acres of orchard land is a potential millionaire.

Men who yesterday were housing their families under the white walls of a tent are today residing in luxurious bungalows, riding about in high-power automobiles, and awaiting delivery of airplanes.

This apple industry is as old as the Garden of Eden. It was not discovered, either. No one found himself sitting on apples, and then got up and told the world about it. No, it just grew and grew and grew. It has been a process of development in which the United States Government has taken a leading part. By the expenditure of millions of dollars the Government has made it possible to grow apples on arid, sagebrush ground. Now the tempting fruit, held high by the grower, has turned a conservative business into frenzied finance.

When the North American Indians came down early this Summer from the mountains, where they had been picking berries, and doubled the price of their product on the logical and scientific ground of a "heap big war in Europe," they started the apple grower to thinking. And the more he thought and the more he paid for berries the more he was satisfied that the Indian was right, and that apples ought to be worth more. Hence every horticulturalist in the great fruit-raising country of the Northwest, which includes the panhandle of Idaho, the Yakima and Wenatchee Valleys of Washington, and the Hood River country of Oregon, began refusing normal prices for the Fall crop.

When buyers for the large commission houses in New York and Chicago came into the country they were astounded at the attitude taken by the apple men. Heretofore it had been no effort at all to contract for thousands of boxes of the different varieties grown at reasonable prices. Now the ranchers not only refused to sign any contracts, but would not place any figure on their crop. Reports to this effect were sent East by the buyers, with a request for advice. Then it was the real boom started.

Out of the East came men bearing gunnysacks full of money. They were the agents of a big million-dollar corporation organized east of the Mississippi River. Their object was to purchase extensive acres of orchard land, thereby controlling the fruit industry. They visited the real estate agents in the various towns and cities, explained their mission, and asked to see the fruit lands for sale.

No prairie fire ever swept a country more rapidly than the news that Eastern money was to be had simply for the asking. Ranchers hitched up their Dobbins and made for town as fast as the animal's could travel. Thoughts of opulence and luxury filled the mind of every land owner. Sell? Certainly he would sell everything, including household furniture, dogs and cats, provided he could get the "right price." Money was what he was after.

With every sale of a ranch or farm there has come an increased demand for city property. And while the rancher seeks the bright lights and paved streets, the city man and the merchant look wistfully toward the farm with a view to speculation. In this way property is turning over and over, as the real estate men say, and with each turn come added profits. The race for quick money, with Eastern capitalists setting the pace,



Picking Apples in the Northwest to Sell at Boom Prices.

is faster than in the early boom days of the West, and the end will come only when fruit is out of the hands of speculators.

Orchards which a few years ago could be purchased for \$200 and \$300 an acre are today bringing \$2,000 to \$2,500 an acre. Boxes of apples which the grower considered profitable if sold at 75 cents and \$1 per box, a good profit, are today selling at \$3 and \$5. There are indications that by Winter a higher price will be paid.

This sudden wealth has not only fallen upon the hardworking and toiling rancher, but the indolent Indian. There are numerous tribes in the Northwest, most of them on reservations. While allotments which the Government has made to them cannot be sold except through the Indian Agency, and to the highest bidder under sealed bids, there are numbers of large tracts of land which the Indians own in fee simple.

To the average Indian money means nothing but the means of gratifying some immediate desire. If an Indian wants a pair of automobile goggles, he will pay \$150 as readily as \$1.50. It's the goggles he wants. But if a white man tries to buy the goggles from the Indian, the latter will, in all likelihood, ask \$200, and throw them away rather than come down in price.

As with the berries, the Indian has also raised his price for land. He's for the boom until it bursts. It is related that one recently sold a forty-acre tract for \$48,000. Refusing to sign a deed until he had seen the color of the money, he was taken to a bank and permitted to fumble over \$48,000 in bills and silver. Then he signed, at the same time putting the money on deposit.

The purchaser of the land told the Indian that it would be an advisable thing to use the money in buying a small ranch and a Ford machine, then live comfortably the rest of his days. Sure, the Indian said, that was just what he figured on doing. In a few days the Redskin

was seen riding down the main street of a town in Washington in a \$3,500 car, and in less than three weeks had checked out every dollar in the bank. Now he's in the mountains fishing for a Winter's supply of food.

But the Indian is not the only one running to extravagance. The sale of an orchard tract for \$250,000 by a rancher, who a few years ago borrowed \$600 to take up the land, resulted in an order for an airplane. The desire for such a joy-riding conveyance came through taking several flights in a machine now making daily flights over the Yakima Valley at \$1 a minute per passenger. This farmer has purchased a large touring car and an attractive home in the city.

The acquiring of high-priced cars by ranchers and townfolk has so crippled the trolley car systems that some are on the verge of bankruptcy. As the first means of economy the street car companies installed the one-man cars. Then the fare was raised from 5 to 10 cents. Now in some of the towns and cities lines have been discontinued. There are well-founded reports that in other towns the trolley franchises will be forfeited.

In Central and Southeastern Washington the Harriman system owns and controls the trolley lines. None of the lines has paid in the last year, it was said by a representative of the system. Although cars have been taken off in many sections, it is the further intention of the company to abandon all passenger traffic and extend the tracks into the rural communities for the purpose of conducting a freight system for movement of fruit to shipping terminals. This is the only salvation, it is declared, of the trolley business.

Along with the fruit boom, warehouses for the storage of fruit have sprung up, like toadstools over night, in towns and cities. Millions have been put into this enterprise. The high price received for storage fruit in the past has started the fruit grower to speculate on

the coming season, and the demand for storage room is far in excess of the supply. Unless the bottom drops out of the apple boom before Winter, storage fruit will bring unusually strong prices. A \$10 apple box is anticipated.

The development of the apple industry was brought about by a system of irrigation constructed under Government supervision. Engineers of the United States Reclamation Service were sent into the country when it was inhabited chiefly by Indians, cowboys, and sheep men to see what could be done in the way of reclaiming the arid lands. It was found that by constructing large diversion dams along the principal rivers water could be brought to the farming sections by means of irrigating canals and ditches.

With the grubbing off of sagebrush and the introduction of water the country blossomed like a rose. A perfect apple, such as might tempt any Eve, was the result. The substantial prices then received for the fruit encouraged the planting of millions of fruit trees. It takes five years for the trees to come into bearing, and after that they yield a nice profit.

There used to be a saying that when a man was tempted to take a drink of liquor he should eat an apple. And the drinking man facetiously replied that the idea was good, but he couldn't carry around a barrel of apples every day. However, prohibition has caused a demand for fruit both in eating and in the manufacture of fruit juices for soda fountains. It is held by some Western growers that the present prices are the direct result of national prohibition.

The American people must have their apple pie, and natural thirst for cooling drinks must be quenched by fruit juices, but it is problematical whether they want to consume apples at the rate of \$8 to \$10 a box. Recently a South American firm sent an order to the Northwest growers for twenty cars of apples at \$3.50 a box, but the order was turned down. While the West considers apples a necessity, and more so now that prohibition has come, they have always been regarded as something of a luxury in the East. And the big apple market is in the East.

During the last few months it is estimated that more than a billion dollars has changed hands in the fruit country. To what extent Eastern capital is involved is a matter of guesswork at this time. It has been the important factor in the boom and encouraged high prices. In view of the boosted land and fruit prices, and the wealth that has apparently been made in a day, labor has absorbed the spirit. Big wages are demanded by the fruit pickers and packers. Scores of boys and girls are getting from \$6 to \$10 a day in the orchards and warehouses.

Take no thought of the morrow. That's the motto. Of course tomorrow will come, but what if it finds several millionaires of the Colonel Sellers variety? It's better to have been a millionaire and lost than not to have been a millionaire at all.

And so the apple kings flourish while the sun shines. The throne may be tottering, but what of that! Did not the majority come into the country broke! Did they not work like slaves on their ranches, with nothing but apples to eat during the cold Winter months? Why not enjoy a little holiday now, while the money lasts! As one rancher expressed it:

"This is the first honest-to-goodness money I've made since I worked for wages back East. And you can bet your hat I'm going to have a few of these luxuries while she lasts. I'm not too old to go to work again if I have to."