

“The Apples of Julian”

Mr. James Madison, of Julian, reports abundant success in his efforts to raise apples at his ranch. He has just taken six hundred pounds of large and juicy bellflowers from a single tree. We have no doubt, indeed, it is a positive fact that apples may be grown in that vicinity equal in quality to the best Ohio or New York fruit, and in quantity to supply all of Southern California.

--San Diego Union, January 11, 1880.

The town of Julian in the Cuyamaca foothills began life as a gold mining camp in 1870. The gold boom would last less than a decade but Julian continued to thrive, boosted by growing agriculture, and particularly, the apple.

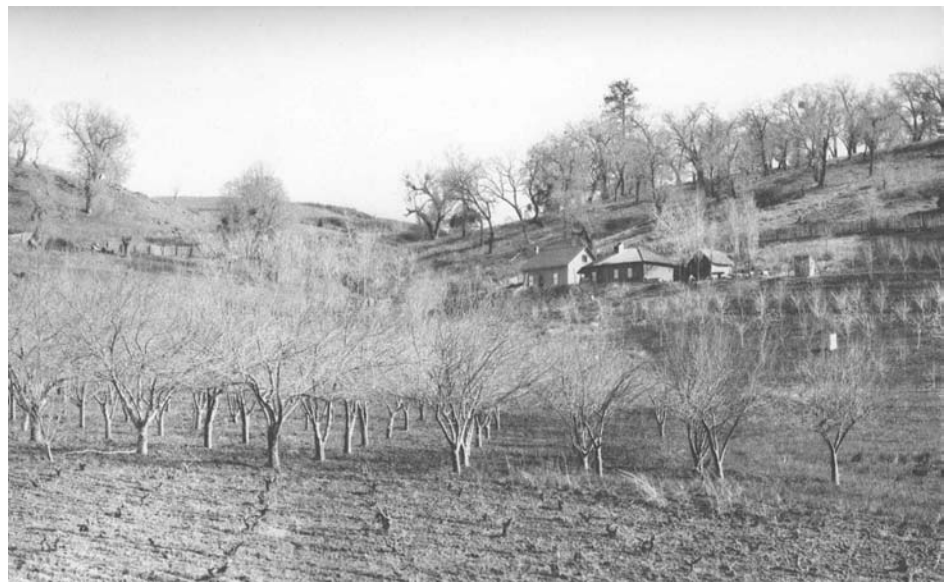
A rancher named James T. Madison is usually given credit for introducing apple trees to Julian. Lula Juch, who grew up in the region, recalled in an interview late in her life that Madison and Thomas Brady “went to San Bernardino in a four-horse wagon and brought back a load of apple trees.” This would probably have been in the early 1870s since in September 1875, the *Union* would report: “Mr. Brady has recently put out an orchard near Julian . . . and most persons have no doubt heard seen the orchard of Mr. James Madison, whose blackberries, peaches, apples, grapes and almond trees are a marvel.”

Madison, born in New York but raised in New Orleans, had come to San Diego by way of Nevada in 1867. A widower in his mid-forties, Madison was “in search of a ranch on which to raise fine horses,” according to Myrtle Botts’ 1969 *History of Julian*. He found what he was looking for in the mountains, where he purchased a large tract of land near town and began breeding race horses. Botts credited Madison with introducing the famed “Shiloh” breed of fast quarter horses in Southern California.

A “stock raiser” according to the 1870 U.S. census, Madison also bred big Durham cattle. He dabbled in gold mining, owning a half-share of the Hubbard Mine for a time. On about two hundred acres of land he grew wheat. In 1883 he sent a sample of a “new kind of wheat” grown from Nevada seed to the San Diego merchant

firm Klauber and Levi, which declared the grain would produce “an excellent quality of flour” and thought “it should be raised by our farmers.” The Klaubers also sampled wine made from Madison’s grapes.

“According our epicurean taste,” the *Union* reported, “it is a fine beverage, and only lacks age to become perfect.”



The orchard and home of James Madison (Gunn, *Picturesque San Diego*).

But it was Madison's success with apples that drew attention. Many San Diegans had urged the planting of apple trees for years. A *Union* writer complained in 1869 that apples were being overlooked as a cash crop for San Diego. "Orange, lemon, etc. are finely suited to our climate; but that wise look and doubtful shake of the head frequently appear against the apple. I protest against this hasty and poorly supported conclusion . . . My advice is: put out apple trees plentifully this season."

At least one farmer was listening. Hiram Higgins planted pippins in his orchard in the Sweetwater Valley near National City. His fall crop in the early 1874 produced apples claimed by a newspaper reporter to be "13 ¾ inches in circumference every way; they are solid and sound—as fine looking fruit as we have ever seen." To irrigate his orchard, Higgins drew water from several wells—pumping out the water with the "largest windmill in San Diego County." On August 17, 1880, the *Union* reported a shipment of Higgins' apples to San Francisco, the first apples ever "exported" from San Diego. "No better apples can be raised anywhere in the world than on the mesa lands of San Diego county," thought the newspaper.

But farmers learned quickly enough that the water and chilling requirements of most apple trees could not be met on the low-lying coastal or mesa lands of San Diego County. In the higher elevation Milquatay Valley near Campo, Joseph Tasker cultivated a "splendid piece of ground" and planted apple and other fruit trees which gave "promise of yielding large quantities of fruit."

Tasker's orchard was producing apples by 1872--perhaps preceding the plantings of James Madison. But Madison's success in Julian had been quickly followed up by other farmers in the mountain region. "L. N. Bailey and Chester Gunn of Julian yesterday shipped two boxes of their superb apples to New York City by express," reported the *Union* in November 1885. Gunn, one of the most successful Julian apple growers, credited the region's cold winter weather for his success. After a storm in January 1888 dumped fifteen inches of snow, Gunn commented in a letter to the newspaper: "These snowstorms are what makes our fruit what it is. Over 20,000 trees, mostly apple, will be planted this year at Julian . . . We never irrigate here; that is all done for us every winter."

By the 1890s San Diegans would proclaim the Julian region the "greatest apple belt in the world." Blue ribbons at county fairs were expected but Julian growers also shipped apples throughout the country and earned a national following. Lula Juch would boast: "Apples were displayed and took blue ribbons and first prizes at the World's Fair in Chicago in 1893, the St. Louis Fair [1904] . . . and the San Francisco World's Fair of 1915."

On a windy autumn day in 1909, Julian fêted its success with an "Apple Day" celebration. The event would not be repeated for forty years, but since 1949 Apple Days has been an annual event drawing thousands of tourists to the local mountains. Today, with apple production relatively small from perhaps 15,000 trees, the apple remains the icon of the Julian region.

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