

THANKS FOR THE MEMORIES

Oranges and the Garden of Eden – B.B. Barney in Palm Springs

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In 1889, the San Bernardino Times-Index queried whether cultivating oranges in Southern California would pay. "A few facts relative to the income from orange orchards may not be uninteresting at the present time. A few facts and figures are given herewith. ..."

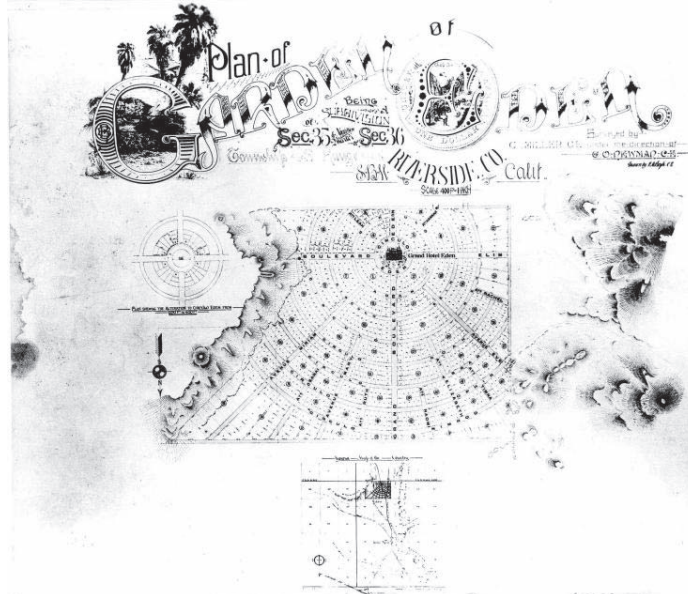
Several examples were cited, including "B.B. Barney of Riverside owns a twenty-acre orchard which is planted mostly to the Riverside Washington navel and the trees are the oldest of any large orchard in the county. A portion of this tract is planted to young trees, and yet the returns this year will net Mr. Barney 10 per cent interest on \$60,000 or \$3,000 an acre."

Barney was widely known as having not only the finest orange groves in Riverside and San Bernardino, but the oldest, having started with the first budded navel tree in California. He was touted in the Los Angeles Herald newspaper as the owner of the original "Washington navel sent from Bahia" to Riverside and as "deriving quite a revenue from the sale of buds from the parent stem. Recently he has sold several thousands of the buds in Los Angeles County and he has orders for about all he will be able to supply."

The Los Angeles Herald reported in March of 1889 that same year: "A small consignment of California oranges was received at the auction rooms of R.M. Montgomery & Co., the tea auctioneers, yesterday. The consignment was not sent to be sold on this market but was intended to demonstrate the practicability of 'preparing' oranges and other fruit of perishable nature for transportation in such a way that they will not decay."

"The oranges are branded as 'Sunnyside' and are entirely seedless. They were shipped by B.B. Barney of Riverside, San Bernardino County, California, to Chicago in the course of a regular shipment to that market and were then forwarded to New York by express. When the boxes were opened the oranges were found to be in perfect condition right through the boxes, not a single sign of decay being visible."

Cultivating oranges did indeed pay. The industry boomed and Barney had made a fortune selling and shipping boxes of his prize-winning fruit. With that fortune he proceeded to buy Section 35 in the City of Palm Springs, 600 acres of land near Palm Canyon from Judge John



Map of B.B. Barney's Garden of Eden COURTESY PALM SPRINGS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Guthrie McCallum for development doubtless expecting the success he had already enjoyed. He created a gorgeously engraved stock certificate and proceeded to offer lots for sale in the desert paradise he aptly named "The Garden of Eden."

The streets were laid out in a wheel surrounding a site for the proposed Grand Hotel Eden and were named after male biblical characters: Adam, Ophir, Abraham, Noah and Nimrod. The spokes of the wheel were called Eve, Miriam, Sarah, Mary, Ruth, Naomi, Rachel, Timma, Hannah and Leah. Water for the project was delivered via flume from Andreas Canyon, depriving the Indians at Rincon and setting off a dispute that would last for years. (Barney further expanded into Arizona, buying thousands of acres and starting the Citrus Water Company with partners, including one Peter Kehl.)

Interest in The Garden of Eden and nearby Palmdale (now the site of Smoke Tree Ranch), where the streets were named for fruiting trees, was keen. McCallum, Barney and others were selling land to wealthy visitors from San Francisco and Los Angeles until 1890 when a downpour of biblical proportions lasting 21 days flooded irrigation canals, ruined orchards and swept away cabins. Then came a punishing drought slowly

desiccating Barney's idyllic dreams.

He offered rooms for rent in October 1895 in the Los Angeles Times, "To Let—'The Garden of Eden' Situated at the head of Palm Valley, Riverside county, Cal. Has 2 cabins to rent for the season. This fogless nook, sheltered by the mountains from the sandstorms of the desert, with less than 3 inches annual rainfall with water under pressure, in quality equaling the Waukesha of Wisconsin, with the famous picturesque palm-grove canyons, in the immediate outings is the nearest to climactic perfection of any spot on the planet for healing diseased throat and lungs. Inquire of B.B. Barney, Riverside."

By 1897, as the situation became more desperate and the drought continued his advertisements were further embellished, "The Garden of Eden (is) the best place on Earth for consumptives to winter in. This delectable spot, sheltered in by the San Jacinto Mountain Spurs from the sandstorms of the Great Colorado Desert, is situated 3 miles south of Palm Springs at the head of Palm Valley, which takes its name from the indigenous beautiful palm groves in the immediate outings of the Garden of Eden, which are worth a transcontinental trip to behold. Here are three hundred- and fifty-days

average sunshine per annum to bask in. The desiccated air of the desert without its desolation, an outlook to gladden the heart,... Inquire of B.B. Barney, Riverside."

But visitors were scarce. Land sales dried up with the drought, which lasted even longer than the years-long litigation over water rights. The Federal government finally bought out the white settlers of The Garden of Eden, returning the land of Section 35 to the Indians, adding it, the only odd-numbered section, to all the even-numbered sections of the reservation. Barney, the "serpent in the Garden of Eden," had finally been expelled. Eden was abandoned.

Barney's financial troubles deepened. In January 1899 the San Bernardino County Sun reported "A Busy Day for Recorder's Court in Disposing of Little Matters of Law Breaking. The attaches of the Superior Court had a respite yesterday as neither department was open for business, the only legal matters coming up being confined to the office of the Clerk, where a complaint was filed by Peter Kehl against B.B. Barney of Riverside, for collection on a note for \$1100, given by the defendant to the plaintiff January 17, 1892, with interest at 8 per cent. On this there has been but two years interest paid and none of the principal, although the note was made payable in three years, and the plaintiff asks that the court orders the full amount of the face of the note paid together with interest since January 17, 1894 and costs of suit. Mr. Barney is one of the most wealthy orange growers of Riverside and owner and founder of 'The Garden of Eden' back in the hills from Palm Springs, the stock of which was an elegant piece of work from a lithographic point of view, being supposed to be a facsimile of the original Garden of Eden, as inhabited before the fall."

Los Angeles Times in April 1898 printed a small item, "Pacific Bank has been granted a decree of foreclosure in the sum of \$3534.95 against B. B. Barney."

Ironically, printed just below that notice was the tally of the local orange shipments to date for the season amounting in round numbers to just under a million boxes. The cultivation of oranges in Southern California was no longer in question.

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