

**Dr. P.F. Barton**  
**1910 and 1912**

*When Dr. Barton retired from medical practice in mid-life, he had the luxury of selecting his new home wherever it best suited he and his family. It appears he saw his future in farming, and he made a methodical search of all practical possibilities. In 1910 he traveled west to California, Texas and Oklahoma in his quest for a new home.*

*The 1910 letter to his family – a report, actually – is interesting for at least two reasons: his impression of the California communities he visited and his discovery of the miracle of irrigated farming. His fascination with irrigation is obvious in both letters and surely was the major factor in his final decision. He is meticulous in his research, always including production, income, and land costs for every single crop he investigated. (Much of this has been edited for space considerations). You can't help but see a little of the Wizard of Oz in his comments, i.e., "I don't think we are in Kansas anymore, Toto." He is truly amazed at California irrigated crop production.*

*The 1912 letter is actually a news column, apparently prepared on request. It is big, requiring more than a full page of newsprint. His attention to detail is again remarkable, and his observations acute. It is much like the 1910 letter in giving crop detail endlessly. Early in this letter you will find the perfect description of what was happening to our grain industry in 1912 and why Stockton's flour mills were soon to disappear. Read on and enjoy...*

*Excerpts abridged, emphasis added*

Searcy, Arkansas, June 30, 1910

Dear Folks:

The wayfaring man has returned at last. I went through Oklahoma and Texas, and **did not find anything until I got to California, and there found the garden spot of the world.** The following are some of the places visited.

I stopped first at **Bakersfield**, an oil town, with all kinds of vice wide open, and got away as soon as possible. Stopped next in **Porterville**, the northern headquarters of the orange growing industry. Saw there thousands of acres of oranges. The largest I saw was one of 115 acres. Last year's crop sold for \$60,000, and a neighbor has an orchard for which she has refused \$2,000 an acre. It is paying 12 1/2% on a valuation of \$2,000 at this time. Notwithstanding these big figures, I found that these were the exception, rather than the rule, and that owing to the great expense of growing them, and the uncertainty, (they are like apples in this respect, as one orchard will do fine, while another orchard in the same vicinity, and on apparently the same

soil, will be unprofitable), I decided I did not want to engage in that business.

I then went on to **Merced**, found there the first and only good field of corn that I found in the state. Last year it yielded 70 bushels of shelled corn to the acre. Just across the creek from it 2 3/4 acres of alfalfa yielded 22.7 T, 3/4 acre of blackberries produced 260 crates which sold for \$1 a crate. The town is a right good one, excellent schools, but lots of saloons.

Stopped at **Fresno** also. Not much there except grapes and peaches, and raisins, which are selling at \$2.40 a hundred pounds – less than it costs the growers to produce them. I did not stay here long.

I went on to **Modesto**, and found a good town, with all kinds of fruit growing and doing well, and land out of sight. Near there are 2 1/2 acres of figs, which produced last year 15,000 lbs. I then went on to **Oakdale**. They have the largest canning factory in the world, canning English peas. They planted this year 600 acres, which they cut with a mower, hauled to the factory, thrashed with a thrashing machine, run through graders and other machinery and almost without

touching them by hand, turned them out the finished product. The soil is a fine sandy loam, easily worked, and will grow anything profitably nearly, except Irish potatoes. It is California headquarters for strawberry growing. By keeping your strawberries properly cultivated and irrigated, you can have strawberries every day out of your own patch, for from nine to eleven months out of the year. All kinds of fruit trees grow very rapidly and bear very young, apricots, apples, peach and plum trees bending over with their loads of fruit. Olives are largely grown, and very profitable. Vegetables of all kinds do well planted in an orchard under the trees.

There is a man out there has six acres of ground. He gave us a list of what he had on it to a land agent, and when the agent counted up his crops he had (the equivalent of) twelve acres of fruits.

Next I went to **Farmington** and dropped off at a little (store) but found that there was no prospect of irrigation, no society and nothing to recommend it except the rich soil. Went on to **San Francisco** on the next train, passed by Goat Island in the bay, saw Seal Rock and lots of ruins of the Great Earthquake, and spent one day in Ocean Park, naturally a beautiful region, for which Art has done her best. **And let me say just here that no one who has never seen it can realize the rank growth of all kinds of plants of which California is capable.** Geraniums, nasturtiums, and fuchsias up to the second story windows. Calla lilies in proportion to these.

From here I went south to **Los Angeles** without stopping, although I saw many things beautiful; hundreds of acres of flowers grown for seed. I went down below Los Angeles and looked at the sub irrigated belt. In this land, worth the speculative price of \$400 per acre, **one can find water anywhere by digging down about three or four feet.** (*How deep is that water table today? ed.*)

I came on up to **Ontario**, where I found quite a colony of Pleasant Hill (Illinois) people. Ontario is the most beautiful city I ever saw, not excepting Miami, Fla. Grand Avenue, which passes through the city has a world wide fame. It is 100 feet from curb to curb. Along each side is a row of Palm Trees. Through the center of the streets a trolley line, on each side of which there are bicycle tracks. Between each bicycle track and the trolley line is a row of pepper trees. Business buildings and residences are well kept. Most of the residences have lawns, palms, and various ornamental shrubs. The country around produces

almost everything in fruits and vegetables. The climate is almost ideal, no extremes of hot or cold. There are several large factories and packing plants in town which give employment to those who want it. The mountains are seven miles away and the street cars run to the mouth of the canyon, where ice cold springs and cooling breezes may be enjoyed at any time. Land here is of course very high. Full bearing orange groves from \$2,000 an acre. Six room bungalows on a city lot \$2,500 to \$3,000 according to location. Unimproved land near the city \$500 an acre. Soils are most too sandy, but seems very productive.

Upon leaving here, I went back to Los Angeles, and from there to **Escondido**, whose praises I had heard, but was very much disappointed in the place and got away from there as soon as possible.

**I then came home as fast as steam would carry me, and was mighty glad to get here. We have not decided whether to go to Merced, Oakdale, or Ontario. Come and go with us. It will do you good.**

Yours ever,

P.F. Barton

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*Excerpts from "Letter From California," Published February 22, 1912 Pittsfield, Illinois (abridged, with emphasis added)*

The ranches here are quite large – from 1,000 to 20,000 acres – and the tendency is for them to become larger; the little fellows being crowded out because they cannot buy the expensive teams and machinery required to grow these crops most cheaply. The land is plowed and the grains sown at one operation, one man driving a team of ten or twelve horses usually. The grain is almost all harvested with a combined harvester and thresher, which costs \$ 1,800, and requires thirty-two horses or mules to draw it over the field, cutting a swath 20 feet wide. The grain is sewn up in sacks and dumped off on the ground where it will lie for a month before being hauled to market. No fear of rain to injure it. The animals that draw the machine are usually worth an average of \$ 350 a span, which makes the whole harvesting unit worth about \$7,400. Of course, no man on a small farm can afford to own an outfit like

this. He must therefore hire his wealthier neighbor to harvest his crop, and his wealthier neighbor does not work for accommodation only.

Again, the land has been farmed to grain for so long that it is nearly exhausted, and there is but a small profit on each acre and it is only by farming a large area that a balance can be placed on the right side of the ledger at the end of the year. **People are all agreed that the outlook for the grain farmer is by no means rosy-hued.**

When we turn to the level land in the central part of the valleys, however, we find a very different state of affairs. True there are many large grain ranches which pay no better than elsewhere. But they are rapidly being bought up by wealthy individuals or realty companies, subdivided and resold in twenty or forty acre tracts to people – largely from the east – are leveling it with plow and scraper and bringing it under irrigation, either from a company ditch or private pumping plant. And here is where we find the most interesting developments in this new-old country. **Here we see intensive cultivation brought to a high degree of perfection. The same soil that would no longer produce a profitable crop of grain, when irrigated and planted to fruit trees or alfalfa will yield astonishing returns.**

Almost anything can be grown on any of these farms that grows anywhere in the temperate zone, which makes the list so long that I cannot attempt to do more than make a beginning.

All fruit trees bear earlier here than in the East and the yields are so large that I can hardly blame you if you refuse to believe me when I tell you of them.

Vegetables are of fine quality and are produced in such variety that instead of making a list I will ask you to look through your seed catalog. Everything listed there will grow to perfection here, and yield immense crops.

Hundreds of carloads of watermelons, cantaloupes and casaba are shipped from this county each year. About ten tons of watermelons to the acre is the average yield up to Sept. 15 at which time the regular shipping season ends. I have seen after that date eight or ten tons left on the ground. It was no trouble to step from one to another all over the field.

Poultry raising is a large and rapidly growing industry here. Both soil and climate are very favorable. **No running out in a thunder storm to pick up the half drowned chicks here. No cold,**

**rainy spells here, either. Just feed the little fellows properly and keep them free from vermin and they will grow in a way to delight your eyes.**

Of all the various branches of agriculture, perhaps none has had such a rapid growth as dairying. This county has advanced in four years from tenth place to first in the amount of butter produced. Thousands of acres of alfalfa are being sown each year and (*by far*) the most profitable way to dispose of the product is feed it to cows. A reasonably good cow will produce \$100 worth of cream in a year. Every dairyman has a cream separator. As soon as the cows are milked the cream is removed and placed in a can at the roadside where it is picked up and hauled off to town. The warm milk is fed to calves, pigs, and poultry.

A very few words will be sufficient to do the climate justice. It is world famous and is probably as good as the world can show. A little frost of mornings in the winter and little too warm for comfort in the afternoons of the summer. **About 300 days of sunshine each year. No blizzards, no cyclones, no thunder storms, no rain when you don't want it. Air is balmy and nights cool always. Good enough for me.**

The people are enterprising and public spirited. All public buildings and public works such as bridges are built without little regard for expense. The roads are better than most of us ever saw elsewhere, and are being constantly improved. The paupers are better cared for here than anywhere I ever saw.

**There is very little complaint about taxes. Although I consider taxes high here, still as we can see, something to show for them. We do not "kick."**

**People as a class are well educated, honest and industrious – care little for dress or polished manners.**

Boys in grammar grades usually wear blue overalls to school. Very few poor people here. The great majority are of the good, solid middle class.

Some of the disadvantages are the high price of land, the scarcity and high price of fuel and the scarcity of work for laboring men during the winter months.

P.F. Barton