

## *The Remington Berry: Steamboat's First Boom*

Between the years of 1900 and 1916 the strawberry business flourished in Steamboat. The berry that started it all was the Remington Strawberry. This berry was believed to be a cross between a domestic variety and the strawberries that grow wild on Colorado slopes. Found by Lester Remington growing on the land he bought when he came to Steamboat, this unique berry was given his name when he made a business of selling them.

Remington Berries were commonly eight inches in circumference, and the average quart box held only 15 berries. It was said that no other berry could compare to the Remington in flavor, quality and shipping life. Because of this, it was unlike any other strawberry in the world and quickly made a name for itself. Now, however, there are none to be found.

Strawberry Park, which was once covered with the Remington plants, now only grows grass, trees and houses. In some fields though, the strawberry hummocks can still be seen. Unfortunately, except for remnants of information written during the boom, no trace of this remarkable berry is to be found. Like so many other booms, it has dwindled to nothing.

## *- A Pioneer in the Industry*

L. J. Remington had been a farmer in Phillipsburg, Kansas, before he came to Steamboat. He arrived on July 28, 1900. His daughter, Mrs. Grace Luekens said, "He had been a farmer and raised corn and had a failure due to weather for two or three years. He was a real pioneer and talk of the country further west sounded good to him."

In 1900, he and a friend, Mr. Williams, made their way to Steamboat by taking a train to Denver and a stage coach to Steamboat Springs. Grace, who has lived in Steamboat for seventy-five years, remember how impressed her father was with the valley: the soil, trees and water. He returned to Kansas to fetch his family.

"My father came back on the train to Phillipsburg, Kansas, and then made a trip to Columbus, Ohio, where his people were. That was the last time he saw his family. When he came back we were all packed." The family took the train to Denver.

Mr. Williams and one of his friends met the Remingtons in Denver with two wagons, one for the family, one for the possessions. Grace was seven then, her brother was five, and her younger sister was eight months old as they made this wagon trip to Steamboat.

"Children enjoy such escapades as that, I guess," Grace recalls. On the way they stopped at various ranches and farms to buy milk for the children and vegetables, as well as other produce. Later in his life, Mr. Remington would look at the bridge that now spans the Yampa River and remark that when he had come he had to cross the Yampa without a bridge.

Once in Steamboat, Mr. Remington bought a log house on a one hundred and sixty acre plot and started work farming. A man named Mr. Parkinson, who had owned this land before the Remingtons, had apparently been raising strawberries on the land before he moved, for Mr. Remington found a few rows of berries in the back part of the lot.

The berries on these plants were unusually big. The plants stood 10 to 12 inches off the ground and had white blossoms with dark green leaves. Because of the unusual size of the berry, many would not fit in an ordinary water glass.

Along with their unusual size, Remington berries also proved to have an unusually long shipping life. They could survive the five day trip to Denver in an unrefrigerated railroad car.

Grace recalls how her family enjoyed eating the strawberries that her father brought home. "That quaker soil was just what they needed," she said, referring to the land where the quaking Aspens grew. This land was perfect for strawberries, it was not too rich, with a good amount of loam and a slight amount of sand.

Mr. Remington made frequent visits to the strawberry patch. Grace remembers one day when her father return from the patch and said to her mother, "I think I shall pick some of those berries and take them downtown. I'm sure I can sell some." That was how the big business began.

Mr. Remington had a photograph he used to show people of one of his Remington berries next to a silver dollar. Many people would comment that you had to look closely to tell it wasn't just a quarter, it was so small compared to the berry.



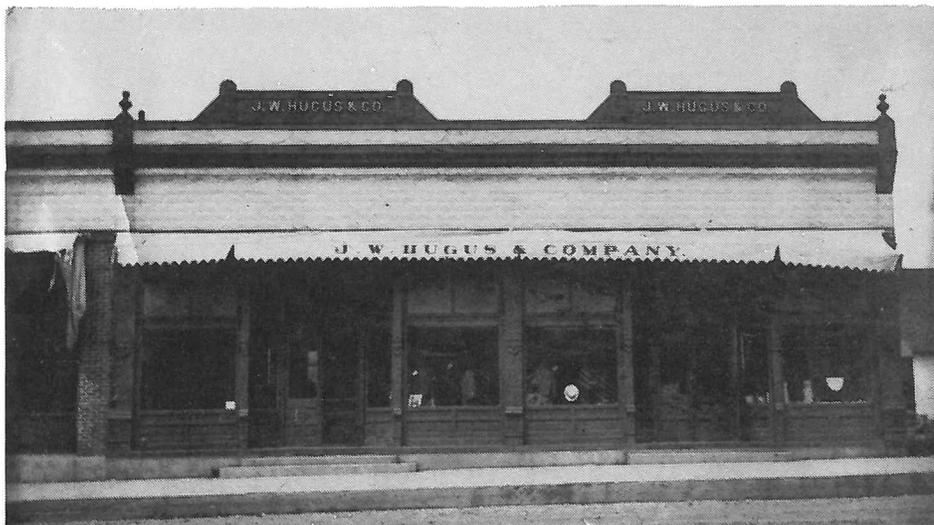
Remembering that most Remingtons could not fit in a water glass, Grace estimates the berries' circumference as ten inches.

After we took the above picture, Grace showed us her camera from the 1920's.





The general stores, among them HUGUS Merchantile Store, bought Mr. Remington's berries and sold them, along with the other grower's produce. The fruit soon became very popular in town. "Everybody bought the strawberries," Dorothy Wither another long-time resident, recalls.



## - Steamboat Strawberry

For a good while the volume sold in town supported the patch, which Mr. Remington tended carefully and expanded by transplanting the berries to other parts of his land. Gradually, Mr. Remington's livelihood shifted entirely to these berries. Without the train, however, the trip to Denver was too long to boost sales.

Part of the reason for the success of the berry was the Steamboat growing conditions. They were unique in many ways and ideal for strawberries.

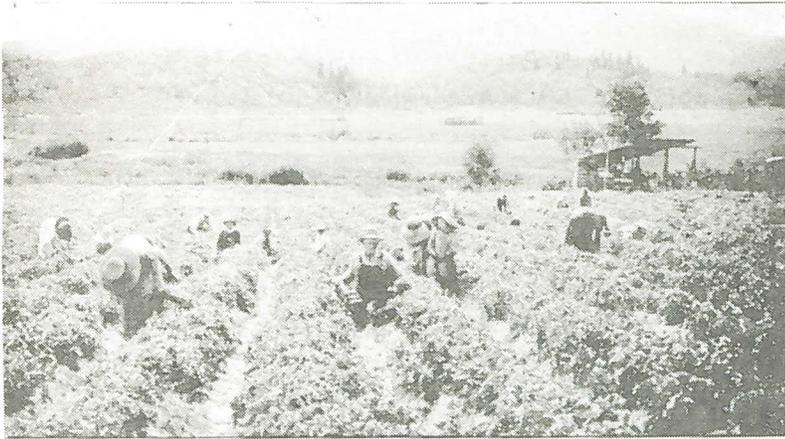
Lloyd Williams whose father grew Remington berries thinks, "it's a combination of good soil, altitude, and the right type of rain."

In 1906, fruit sold in Colorado high country, such as melons, peaches and strawberries, commanded a higher price in the middle west than locally grown produce. The following environmental factors were advantageous to the strawberry boom:

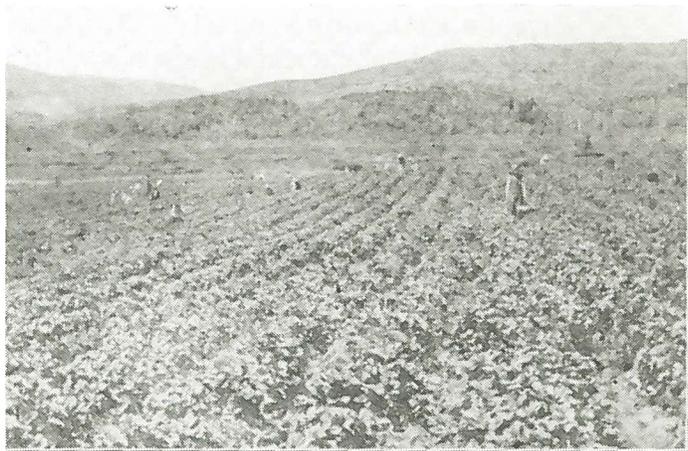
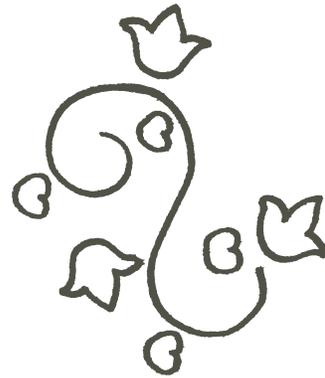
1. No mulching is necessary. The nutrients, especially nitrogen, which the plant takes from the soil, are replenished yearly by the winter snow. "The soil was rich and hadn't been used. Soil wears out as you use it. That quaker soil is so fertile we didn't need to mulch," Grace states. Also Lloyd Williams remarks, "Snow has quite a lot of food value. It rebuilds the soil quite a bit here."
2. There were no natural pests. Many other fruit growers in America had crops that suffered from this, thus spent a great deal of money on pest control. This problem did not exist in Strawberry Park.
3. There was no need to spray. This area is practically free from plant disease.
4. No fertilizing was necessary, because the soil was naturally rich with the right mixtures of components.
5. There was a good amount of sunshine, especially during the maturing period.
6. The water was very pure, and irrigation brought it directly to the roots of the plant without loss of sunshine, as with rain. "Strawberries do not do well in a hot and dry climate, they need coolness, not cold, but cool," said Grace.
7. The altitude (6994 feet) improves the flavor of the fruit. It is a readily accepted opinion that produce grown in the mountains has more flavor than produce grown in the low lands. Lloyd Williams has attested to this fact as a potato farmer, and Dorothy Wither notes the difference in the vegetables.

## - Pickers

In late July when it was time for picking, a large pool of workers was required. Many times children from town would come and pick all day for two to two and one-half cents per quart, depending on the crop. A child working steadily all day could earn about a dollar or two a day. "That was big money then," says Grace.



IN THE REMINGTON STRAWBERRY PATCH



GATHERING STRAWBERRIES FOR THE MARKET

At the beginning of the day each worker was given a card. When they had picked their carrier full (six quarts) of berries they would go to the 'Strawberry Shed' where they would be given credit on their card for that many quarts. Then they would empty their carriers into a shipping crate and start work again. At the end of the day they were paid according to the credits on their card.

Workers ranged from young men who were working their way through college on this pay, to children who came mostly to be with their friends. Dorothy Wither, who worked at the Homer's patch was one of these. She claims some days she only made a nickel. She also recalls Mr. Homer driving his truck into town to get kids to come and pick strawberries. "Almost all of the kids worked in a patch at some time." Dorothy wishes that there was "something like that in Steamboat now to help keep the kids off the streets".

Lloyd Williams recalled that the money he made picking on his father's patch during the summer was what he saved to use in school the next year.

The Remington plant was high off the ground, compared with some varieties which are nearly flat. This way, the dirt had less chance of touching the leaves or berries. Grace says, "You can't get dirt into the heart of the plant because it will always spoil it and sometimes kill it."

The Remington land was not difficult to cultivate, but Chester Homer, another of the many growers, found that his land was very rocky. He took the rocks he found when tilling and made a stone fence on the edge of his land, traces of which can still be seen. Dorothy Wither claims that the heat and light reflected by the stones helped the berries.

As soon as the snow melted, weeding began. "Sometimes it seemed that a dandelion was growing out of every plant," said Grace. The runners the plant puts out into the middle of the row had to be cut, so that the plant's strength would be directed solely toward producing fruit. Often, several quarts of berries could be gathered from a single plant. The first berries would be ripe about the Fourth of July. Picking, however, was accomplished mostly in August. The plants bore only one crop per season. They were not ever-bearing like many domestic varieties of today.

## *- How Grown*

All the patches in Strawberry Park were irrigated. Summer rainfall, in fact, was dreaded by strawberry growers as it would make the fruit soft and create a tendency to mold.

In the late summer months during the harvests, Grace remembers how her father would watch the thermometer to see if the temperature would be below freezing that night. The coldest time of day would be about four in the morning. In order to predict how cold it would be, Mr. Remington would note how many degrees the temperature had dropped in one hour, for instance between eleven and twelve o'clock at night. He would then multiply that number by four and subtract it from the temperature at midnight. If that sum was below thirty-two degrees, the strawberry crop was in danger of freezing. Mr. Remington would then take the wagon, sometimes bring Grace and her younger brother along, and travel along Soda Creek to where the headgate was located. Before one could use the headgate to direct water to their property, Grace says, "You had to obtain a water right for that land." Mr. Remington would open the gate and allow the water to flow down to the patch along the irrigation ditches, and in between the rows.

The patch was watered about once a week. The coolness of the water would allow the plant to thaw (when frosted) gradually, so that when the sun hit it, the plant wouldn't wilt. However, if the frost came very early, in June or July, for instance, before the plants had really begun to produce, the crop was in serious trouble. In most cases, a plant which is frosted before it has begun to berry, will not bear fruit that season.

Irrigation was used to water the strawberry plants in the absence of rain and later in the season when it seldom rained. The patch was watered about once a week

Other growers irrigated in a similar manner, the advantages of bringing water directly to the roots were clear. To start a patch, a farmer would make rows from three and one half to four feet apart and place the plants from one to two feet apart in the row. Within a year, the row would be from one and a half to two feet wide. Strawberry land needed to be well tilled, but after the first year, there was no need to cultivate again.

## *- Railroad*

It was one of Steamboat's big events when the railroad came. Grace remembers it this way, "The first train to run into Steamboat Springs, that carried passengers, was in December, 1909. There was a group of us school children who hired a man with a sled and team to take us to Sidney, which is eight or nine miles up the river here. We met the train there so we could say that we rode into Steamboat on the first train, even though it was only that short distance. As we would look back through the car, the track was so unstable that the cars rocked back and forth. The tracks hadn't settled yet. It was a little while before they really got settled."

Even though the main function of the train was to help the cattle business, it was a great boon to the strawberry industry. Until the railroad came to provide a market, only enough berries were grown to supply the home demand. However, after its arrival, the unrefrigerated railroad cars made shipments not only to Denver, but to Omaha, Chicago, New York and other points. "When we started to ship them, they formed the Strawberry Association. These men were promoters of the business and made it sound big," said Grace.

Mr. Remington transported his berries to the Steamboat depot by truck, as did most of the other growers. The crates of berries were loaded on the train and took the five hour trip to Denver. From Denver, some would make their way to local markets, and the remaining berries would be sent on to Chicago and other Eastern cities. It was not possible for any other berry to make this long trip. The exceptional Remington berry made the distant trips and were still in remarkably good shape after reaching their destination.



Bob Swinehart lived near the Remington patch and used to steal berries occasionally. His wife also worked on the patch as a child and was removed from the patch to the Strawberry Shed because she was eating too much of the produce. Mr. Remington ran this ad in ad in a 1907 Steamboat Pilot, "Strawberries - Come and pick your own berries at \$2 per crate. Delivered in town, \$3. Signed L. J. Remington.

Most years, however, there were not enough pickers to be found in Steamboat to work the patch. Mr. Remington would drive to Denver to recruit a number of workers to come down to Steamboat for the harvest season.

After the strawberries were picked, they were packaged in quart boxes. These boxes were purchased from a firm in Michigan - ready to assemble. The boxes consisted of thin wooden squares with slits near the sides and a corresponding rectangle of wood with tabs near the edge. The rectangle was folded around the square to form the sides, with tabs fitting into the slits. The boxes were stapled together with a stapling machine, which resembled an old fashioned sewing machine and was operated with a foot pedal.

These boxes were put into crates which were made of heavier wood and were also assembled. Each crate held twenty-four boxes, two rows of twelve. Slats of wood were nailed across the top of the crate, which was then ready for shipping.

## Write Us

We are prepared to furnish official and reliable information in detail with reference to the Strawberry Industry of this section. If you have not secured all the information you desire, write us. Don't be afraid to ask questions. We will answer them cheerfully

### We Make a Specialty of Strawberry Tracts

We have sold more strawberry land than all other agents in this section combined. We know the business. We are agents for all the best land in this vicinity, and we have 5 and 10-acre tracts at

**\$100, \$150, \$200, \$250, \$300  
per acre**

Can make very easy terms

### The Northwestern Loan and Investment Company

STEAMBOAT SPRINGS, COLORADO

## Land Bargains

Whether you desire a Strawberry Tract or a large Ranch we can supply your wants. We know all about the land business in this section and will give you the benefit of our twenty years' experience in Routt county. We have a large number of bargains in

### Strawberry Tracts Farm Lands Irrigated Ranches

We have a large list of 5 and 10-acre Strawberry Tracts at prices ranging from \$100 to \$300 per acre. Can sell on terms to suit purchaser. A 5-acre tract of Strawberry land is the surest and most profitable investment you can make. Good land is always a safe investment. Buy a 5-acre berry tract and become independent. Write us for full particulars

**McWilliams & Houston Bros.**  
Steamboat Springs, Colo.

"Mr. Remington made a lot of money selling to other farmers," states Lloyd Williams. As the business expanded, other growers in the area became interested in starting strawberry patches. Mr. Remington supplied them with the plants, and soon a number of new patches had sprung up. Grace says, "We sold the plants by the thousands; I packed many of them." The Noyces and Homers were the most notable among the other growers. Mr. Noyce kept his patch growing long after the others had failed.

After the railroad came land and investment companies saw what potential the business had and quickly bought Strawberry Park land to sell in five and ten acre lots to Steamboat newcomers. They cited the remarkable profits to be made from just one of these small patches, as compared to cost and labor put in. The new industry seemed a near perfect business venture for these companies to cash in on.

One hundred to three hundred dollar per acre lots sold quickly, more plants were sold and more berries were produced than ever. An association of growers was formed to decide on such things as pricing and what packaging to employ. The readying and transplanting of strawberry plants for sale was soon an important part of Mr. Remington's activities.

# Strawberry Tracts

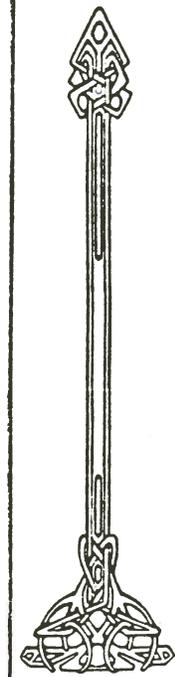
The strawberry industry in the neighborhood of Steamboat Springs offers greater inducements--greater certainty of profit--than any other agricultural or horticultural proposition in the world. Not for long will land suitable for strawberry growing remain at the present low prices. It is certain to advance very rapidly.

I have just secured control of a tract of the finest land in this section. It is laid off into 5-acre and 10-acre tracts. It is above the frost line, all under ditch and less than a mile from the city limits. You can live there and attend to business in town if you desire. It will be sold for less money than any other similar tract, so advantageously located, can be purchased for. Terms can be given that will enable you to pay for the property out of the profits of the business, all but the first payment, and I am in position to help you on that if you are ready to start into the strawberry business this spring. This is the most attractive proposition that has ever been offered you. Let me tell you about it.

## A. E. CRANNELL

Room 8 Maxwell Block

Residence Phone Mtn. 50



# Strawberry Is King

---

THERE can be no question of the profits made by strawberry growers in this section. One of the most successful growers has been Dr. Kernaghan. His land has been tested--it has produced results. We are now subdividing this splendid ranch of 200 acres. You are taking no chances when you buy these tracts. Some of them have plants in full bearing. Splendid water right, fertile soil, proven land.

Land can be examined now and selection made in a few days, as soon as survey is finished. If you want the best let us show you this land. The price is reasonable considering the profits that have been made here for many years. We are exclusive agents.

---

**McWILLIAMS & HOUSTON BROS.**

**Steamboat Springs, Colorado**

Grace recalls her father sending to Detroit for seeds of many types of strawberry plants in an effort to discover if the Remington was in fact an already established variety of which they were unaware. It proved not to be so. Not only was the Remington unique but also of better quality than any strawberry known. Within a few years the park was entirely covered with farms producing these berries. Mr. Remington's, however, remained the largest.

## *- The Boom*

Soon after the coming of the railroad the real boom began. Cattle was the main industry in Steamboat before strawberries, the cattle business was spread out over most of Northwestern Colorado. Strawberries were strictly localized to the Steamboat area. Local sales of the berries and especially sales in the Denver market were high. The future looked incredibly bright for the business and with each year sales went up. Still the strawberry land was fertile and usable. It seemed the prodigious destiny of Steamboat to become a Strawberry producing center.

Locals were astounded by the high yield of strawberries per acre. And so the industry continued in Strawberry Park for about another six years. With each year the land continued its astonishing yield. The Grower's Association busied itself conducting selling, picking and packaging affairs. The business came to its fullest promise.

## *- The Bust*

But somehow, in spite of its seemingly unshakable establishment in Steamboat, the strawberry venture began to fail in early 1915. All the hopes and preparations for its bright future ended within a few years. Why? There are a number of reasons...

Dorothy Wither believes that it was due to the "Denver Tragedy". Growers would ship their berries to Denver, and once there, the store owners would claim that they were too ripe. Knowing the berries could not make it back to Steamboat, the growers had to take whatever they could get. This usually ran about one cent a quart box.

Bob Swinehart, who was working on the Panama Canal at the time of the berry failure, recalls returning to Strawberry Park and hearing many versions of what happened. The reasons most commonly heard were: the long trip to Denver, the abrupt change in climate and disease. The latter reason seems quite doubtful, however, as the Steamboat area was always very free from crop disease.

Lloyd Williams, speaking of his father's business, feels sure the failure was due to competition from other growers. Growers in and around Denver did not have as high of quality produce, but they could sell their berries for much less since they didn't have to pay shipping costs.

Grace Luekens, for whom the failure was a first hand experience, said it was caused mainly by two factors: the rising expense of paying workers in comparison to the price that could be charged for berries on the market, but mainly several consecutive years of early frosts. These frosts, sometimes as early as June, would stop the plants from producing fruit. The yield in these years was disastrously low. A number of years without a crop "can flatten you out," says Mrs. Luekens.

Whatever the cause, it was a real shame to lose the strawberry industry, it was so beneficial to the community. Perhaps this one industry helped more Steamboat kids in that generation than any other business.

After talking to so many people about the remarkable berry business, it is hard to fathom the fact that there is literally nothing left of it. Even after all the work that Grace Luekens and her family put into the business that failed, we have never heard her speak ill of it. The failure of the berry business was truly a tragic loss. It is very doubtful that another industry could even come close to taking its place. As Grace once told us, "I can see now, those were very good days."

by Rick Tibbetts and Bethany Craighead