

Manley Hot Springs Agriculture

By RYNNIEVA WESCOTT

In 1902, J.F. Karshner staked a mining claim on Hot Springs Slough. Two years later, Karshner, a farmer at heart, staked out a 320-acre homestead which included the hot springs. He concentrated on raising crops by using the warm springs water for irrigation.

Karshner's greenhouse produced celery, sweet corn, watermelon and tomatoes. He became the major supplier of produce to the mining camps in the district.

In 1906, a miner who had struck it rich on Cleary Creek in the Fairbanks area bought Karshner's homestead. Frank Manley was working several claims in the hot springs area. Being raised on a cattle ranch in Texas, Manley was impressed by Karshner's operations and saw the agricultural and ranching potential of the hot springs district.

Karshner had just harvested 19 tons of potatoes from three acres and 20 tons of rutabaga from one acre plot.

With the capital Manley had from his Cleary Creek venture, he built a \$100,000, four story log hotel complete with an indoor, heated swimming pool. The

Manley Hot Springs Resort had 45 guest rooms, hot baths, steam heat, electric lights, a barber shop, a billiard room, and telephone service to the creeks.

Manley expanded the farm operations by adding a dairy herd, pigs, chickens and rabbits. Fresh milk, eggs, meat and vegetable were served to hotel guests year-round.

By the end of 1907, Hot Springs was in its heyday with a town population of 350 and the population of the surrounding area over one thousand. The town was fully equipped with a sawmill, a stable, a trading post, a restaurant, a bakery, a saloon, a barber shop, jeweler's repair shop, an electric light and heating plant, and the town newspaper, Hot Springs Echo.

In 1908, Manley imported from the east, 10 Jersey Cows and a bull, some pigs, 2,000 Wyandotte hens, 100 roosters, 24 ducks, 24 geese and 24 guinea fowl.

The population of Hot Springs began to diminish by June 1910, when the gold stampede was shifting to the Iditarod District. Manley's brother-in-law Matt Reis, became the manager of the hotel in the spring of 1911. As gold mines were worked out,

business at the hotel began to decrease until the resort was losing money.

Reis began to concentrate his efforts on Manley's mining operations and on farming. He put in a crop of potatoes. Late that summer, Reis shipped five tons of potatoes to Fairbanks.

By the winter of 1911, lack of activity in Hot Springs for the Manley Hot Springs Resort to close its doors. On April 23, 1913, the hotel was destroyed by a fire. Manley, who had already left Hot Springs to work mining claims in the Iditarod District, did not rebuild the resort.

Charles W. Dart, the present owner of the Karshner-Manley Hot Springs spread continues the farming tradition of settlers on the Karshner homestead. Dart and his family raise tomatoes and cucumbers as well as many other green vegetables or various kinds in large commercial size greenhouses.

Residents of Manley Hot Springs raise a large portion of their family's vegetables need in garden plots that require a lot of attention and hard work. But those who do grow a garden in Manley think the task.

Growing garden gives

people like Walter Woods of Manley a sense of accomplishment and pleasure. During a discussion of village gardening at the annual

board meeting of Tanana Chiefs in March, Walter said that he gardened because he enjoyed it and because with a large family like he has, the garden makes eating a lot cheaper of a habit.



Produce Exhibit from Fairbanks shown at the Tanana Valley Fair, probably prior to 1920.

University of Alaska Archives
Luther Hess Collection