

Commentary to  
Rocklin Historical Society's 2008 Version

## "Reminiscences Of A Sportsman"

Author: Joel Parker Whitney (1906)

Commentary by Ken Morrow (July 2008)

Joel Parker Whitney (JP) finished this book seven years before his death in 1913. We hope that this commentary, and re-publication of his book will increase your appreciation of Joel Parker Whitney's adventures and his contributions to Rocklin and to California, Colorado, New Mexico and to the United States. Although addressed to sportsmen, it is autobiographical in content.

Gary Day, of the Rocklin Historical Society, and I decided to make this book more assessable to others as well as to facilitate research about the impact that JP had upon the area surrounding Rocklin with his 29 square mile "Spring Valley Ranch." Gary has been researching and writing about Rocklin and the Whitney family for many years. [www.rocklinhistory.org/history\\_series.asp](http://www.rocklinhistory.org/history_series.asp).

I became interested in JP and the Whitney Ranch while writing a brief history of the area for a Trail Guide (Co-authored by Earl Brabb) for the Whitney Oaks Community Association. Whitney Oaks is a residential community of 1063 acres within the city of Rocklin, California. The Trail Guide can be found at [www.whitneyoaks.net](http://www.whitneyoaks.net).

A free download of Google's photographic copy of Whitney's book can be found at:  
[http://books.google.com/books?hl=en&id=wVUyYhwkUeIC&dq='reminiscences+of+a+sportsman'&printsec=frontcover&source=web&ots=O7i8P5JXr&sig=cfGrfLYvGTTxt1fFbxETA\\_Fm3Y](http://books.google.com/books?hl=en&id=wVUyYhwkUeIC&dq='reminiscences+of+a+sportsman'&printsec=frontcover&source=web&ots=O7i8P5JXr&sig=cfGrfLYvGTTxt1fFbxETA_Fm3Y)

The Society's version is easier to read and has been re-formatted to 159 pages; the original is 467.

JP, his father and brothers collaborated in acquiring a large amount of land that they named the "Spring Valley Ranch." Their acquisition of at least 140 separate parcels of land from the government, from the railroad and from individual homesteaders, beginning in 1857, took 31 years and finally totaled 18,400 acres (29 square miles). Today, the most prized portions of that ranch are split between the cities of Rocklin and Lincoln. The 1063 acres mentioned above was at the center of the Ranch's operation, and JP and other family members, are interned in a pyramidal structure situated on an acre of land that will forever remain in the Whitney family. The site of the family's mansion (The Oaks), which no longer exists, is only several blocks outside the Whitney Oaks development.

In the last paragraph of this book, JP implies that he was seriously thinking about writing another book that chronicled his business experiences. It is a shame that he never got around to writing that book, although a number of his business ventures are documented here. I'm sure that one dedicated strictly to his businesses would have been fascinating.

NOTE: I have embedded, within this document, the page number of the original book in brackets as follows [XX]. This facilitates rapid access to the actual text. These pages can be located by use of the MS Word program "Find" command by requesting that "[XX]" be "found." In what follows, I have provided references to the original page numbers of sections of the book that relate more to history than to JP's adventures as a Sportsman.

I must issue a word of warning about this book. For those who are avid fishermen, you will love it! For others, you will have to accept the fact that JP loved fishing, and if you are good at speed-reading, here is your chance for some practice. There are a minimum of 548 mentions of fish (269 trout, and 279 salmon, you can count the whales by yourself. Hint: 53). JP even says [92], "But I must not go on with trout, or I will never end. I will give you later on, perhaps, more of trout than you will care to read." Amen, I say! I personally find it intriguing that JP could have become a multi-millionaire considering all the time he spent doing anything but attending to business.

What is surprising about this book is the fact that, even though it purports to be a book about JP's life as a sportsman, it actually contains first hand accounts of his travels across the United States at a time when the West was truly wild, and I do mean "WILD." JP actually apologizes for his digression in talking about things that are not related to sports at page [61]. It is precisely because he did not stick to his task that this book is as good as it is.

[11] JP explains the turkey gizzard and reveals why acorns from Oak trees disappear so rapidly.

[18] JP takes a swipe at the tramps and vagabonds that infest California and who rely on "liberal handouts. He labels it an increasing evil with no apparent remedy and considers it to be just one of the "many social evils by which humanity is retarded." Some Californians, I think, are still OK!

[28] JP says, "The oak groves about me now (my residence in California) were once the habitat of many Digger Indians. No monuments have they left, and all that tells of their existence are the thousands of mortar holes in the flat rocks, many of which still contain the pestles of rude form with which they crushed the acorns for bread-making. On many flat rocks there are a dozen or more of mortar holes, large and small, and some of them worn down to a foot in depth, and many hundreds of such mortar holes are to be seen within a radius of a mile from where I am now writing." JP wrote this book at the Whitney Mansion (The Oaks) and explains what you can see at the Pleasant Valley Creek Park located near the intersection of Whitney Oaks Drive and Whitney Ranch Pkwy. Unfortunately, all of the pestles disappeared a long time ago.

[34] JP crossed the great plains from Missouri to the Rocky Mountains 4 times from 1865 to 1867.

[46] JP would not now kill moose (youth is eager and thoughtless and without reason)

[50] JP Says that when camping out in the snow one hardly needs blankets. As he puts it, "sleeping on a thick layer of hemlock boughs, where with feet to the fire and fully clothed, with sleeping-cap and ear-pads and thick woolen gloves, I have passed many comfortable nights, and my memory now often vividly reverts to the overflowing happiness I experienced upon those excursions as the most enjoyable of my life."

[87] I would like to see a show of hands of all of you that would aspire to trying to pry a horse out of a hole in the ice through which it had just disappeared. JP gives the instructions on how to do just that and what's more he calls it fun. He even declares that falling in a hole in the ice when skating is a "small matter."

[90] [93] Californians may marvel at JP's explanations of lake ice cracking and expanding with huge effect.

[102] "banting food" See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/A34087980>

[129] - [133] Colorado lawlessness. The "double-pistol brigade."

[161] [170] JP made at least 8 trips back and forth across the western United States before the transcontinental railroad existed (1869). He did it by stagecoaches that (in some cases) traveled both day and night for as long as 6 to 7 days. And his accounts of these trips are where this book just shines. Can you believe that travel through the west was impeded for periods of days because of herds of buffalo were so dense that they could not be penetrated as they migrated from north to south or vice-versa? Even the early trains were stopped until they became the vehicle for the slaughter of the entire herd! JP estimates that the bones of 30,000,000 buffalo were sent to various factories to extract their carbon.

[167] JP comments about the advances that have occurred in his lifetime and expresses great optimism about the future of the country that will arise from the "diffusion of information and electricity" throughout the world that he thought would be coming (little did he know - remember, he wrote this in 1906).

[180] - [183] JP's description of the Paris ceremony at which he received a Gold Medal from Emperor Napoleon III on July 1, 1867. He says that Paris was denuded of flowers to grace the event.

[184] - [185] JP recounts his interview with the Emperor which reveals that he spoke English, appreciated humor and was obviously pleased with JP presenting him with a beautifully bound book giving an account of Colorado and the United States (it's possible that one could find this original book in one of Paris' Libraries even today).

[189] - [191] JP convinces his friend Colonel Heine to try to imitate Brigham Young just for laughs (and delivers a back-handed slap to "elderly matrons.") For an explanation of Danite see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Danite>. A little further along he admits to taking credit for things that he knew nothing about!

[203] JP is appalled that his display of gold nuggets on a saucer are picked up and offered to all diner guests by a "stupid" waiter. He let the nuggets go rather than try to retrieve them.

[211] JP explains the unique difficulties that some English guilds have in disposing of the money that their investments generate even though they throw lavish parties with expensive food and gifts.

[220] The first sentence on this page is possessed of an error that begins "Snr hasothe has a new cravat pin" which I believe can be corrected by substituting "Sothern has a new cravat pin."

[223] JP refers to Jane having "the spirit of the warrior who sought the bubble reputation at the cannon's mouth." This is from Shakespeare's "As You Like It." According to dictionary.net, "Shakespeare seems to be referring to a soldier's desire for renown based on his efforts in battle, even to the extent that he would sacrifice his life, but that this effort is empty because the war he is fighting is not noble or even necessary."

[223] JP could be vicious in his disdain for those he thought of little worth as in this quote, ". . . Ashberry, whom I knew, and who had lately retired from business with a large fortune after a wasted life at business, during which I doubt if he ever caught a trout."

[282] A description of the weather and of the wildlife visiting the "Spring Valley Ranch."

[357] New Mexico was extremely lawless. JP says that, "Readers may be incredulous at some unpleasant incidents."

[401] JP describes the type of men found in mining camps as "Many of the adventurers are ready to take advantage of the public in any manner and by any dishonesty they can bring to bear, while other adventurers, with a blind confidence arising from ill-regulated and inexperienced conditions, although sensible otherwise, will, lead on men far superior to themselves in acuteness, and involve them in the following of an "*ignis fatuus*" {A phosphorescent light that hovers or flits over swampy ground at night, possibly caused by spontaneous combustion of gases emitted by rotting organic matter} phantom which leads to mire and loss. This class is perhaps more dangerous than the first. But the worst of all is the plausible rogue who has confidence in his ignorance."

[410] From the middle of November the ice generally makes about the shores, making it difficult to get boats in or out, and very seldom does the ice hold after its first freezing over, although it may get an inch or two thick, and sometimes it breaks up when it is three inches thick from the sea made by a high wind on open places. The open places will grow larger, and sometimes will break up the entire lake surface; at other times it will open in three or four or more parts, while the parts left closed will accumulate ice to the thickness of seven or eight inches, and at such times one must haul a boat over the frozen portions and row through the open ones.

[443] JP explains how to catch trout by hand.

## For the Record

Listed here are a few errors in spelling and their locations. Another 21 words that may have been acceptable 100 years ago are noted. The text of the book itself has not been corrected for any of these errors.

Page [195] burroughs → boroughs  
Page [220] Snr hasothe → Sothern  
Page [238] wno → who  
Page [238] thsee → three  
Page [359] expediton → expedition

## Other Misspellings?

articulatory, criticise, defence, despatched, dingos, embryotic, equalled, equalling, fulness, impellment, meagre, plentifulness, proposers, querist, sceptic, shovellers, skilfully, sulphuret, tongueless, travelled, travelling