

16. Truck Gardening

AS STATED IN section I, the first settlers of Colma went to the hills and established farms and ranches. Potatoes became their chief crop but truck gardening also occupied their attention.

"These farms or ranches," writes Mrs. Teresa Altieri, whose father was a pioneer merchant, "were practically self supporting small communities, raising nearly all food necessities. Most of the farms had small butcher shops and dairies and all farmers' wives raised poultry: chickens, geese, turkeys and ducks. In many instances they had their own forges, leather tools, carpentering tools for constructing and repairing buildings, furnishings and implements. In some instances, saddlers, wagonsmiths, and cabinet makers made regular yearly visits to ranches where, with the materials and tools there, they built equipment such as wagons, sleds, harnesses, furniture, and repaired the year's damage."¹

Describing the life of the first settlers Mattrup Jensen wrote, "There were no real roads, and the cow trails which served in winter were so muddy that sleds had to be used in place of wagons. Oxen were the beasts of burden that the farmers used to haul heavy loads over muddy roads."²

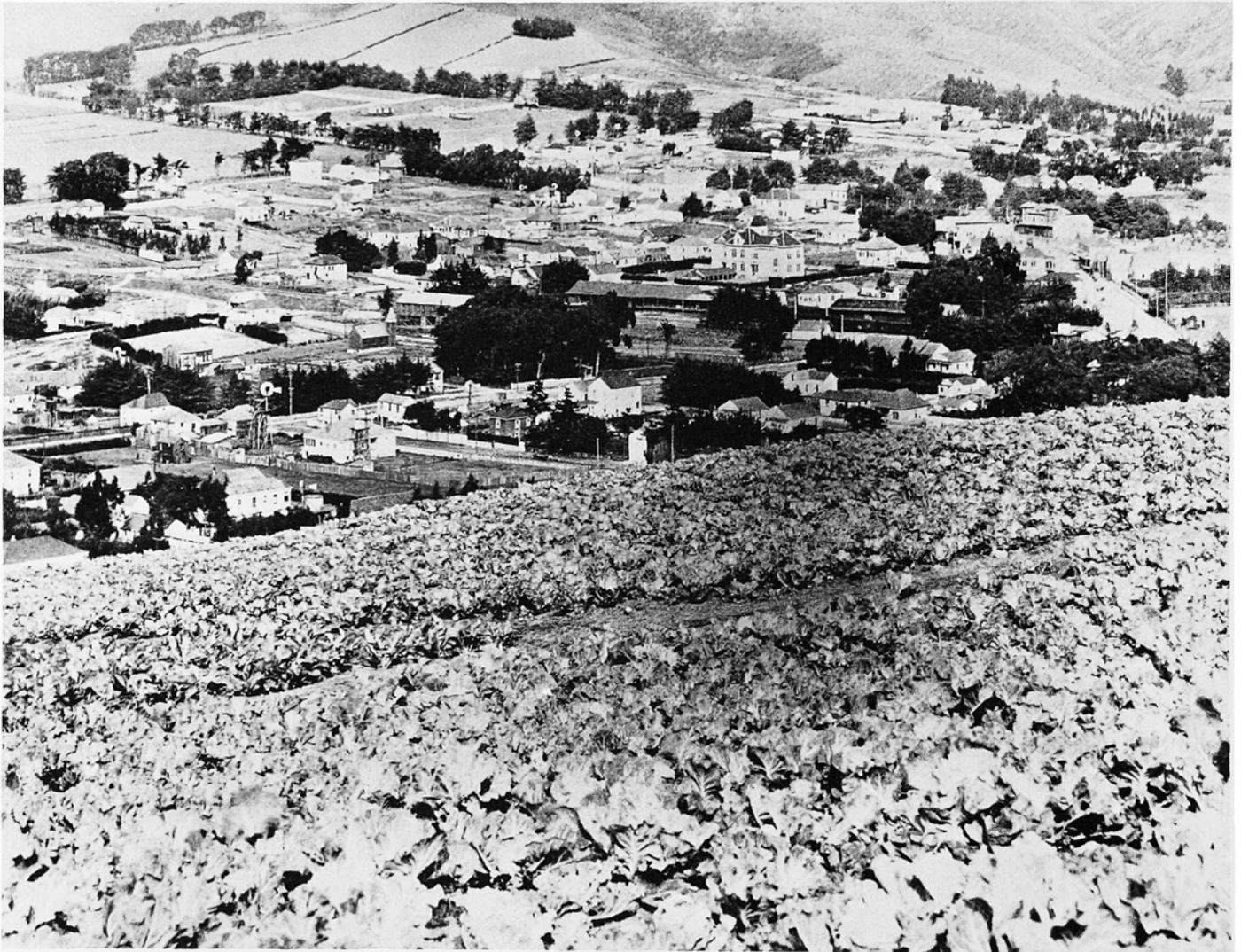
Mr. Jensen and others report that the largest ranches employed Chinese coolies as laborers. "They came and established their own quarters where they lived while they worked in the potato patches or the grain fields. From this contact two Chinese Cemeteries were established in the Colma Hills.

Among the activities that occupied the early settlers, tree planting in the damp and sandy soil was one of the most pleasant. Trees surrounded the garden spots and lined the fences. They grew near the houses providing shade and comfort. Many of the trees, especially the cypress and eucalyptus, were purchased from Mr. Comerford, who grew them from seeds and sold the small trees for prices starting at 15¢ each.

Prompted by heavy fog and blight, a high percentage of the first settlers sold their land to immigrants who planted vegetables and flowers as field crops. In a remarkably short time the Colma Hills were covered with fields of brussel sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, artichokes, turnips, carrots and beets. "All beautifully kept with rich cultivated soil."³

It has been reported that at one time the railroad station in Colma shipped more pounds of cabbage foods than any station in the United States. It also shipped many pounds of potatoes and other truck garden products. Surely the statistics are impressive. It has been reported that as many as eighteen carloads

of potatoes were shipped a day by the Colma Vegetable Growers.⁴ In 1894, 1,742,825 pounds of cabbage were sent from the Colma region.⁵ According to estimates, there were seasons during the years from 1912 to 1945 when the number of acres in the Colma and Daly City area planted with cabbage plants reached 10,000.



CABBAGE PATCH WITH THE CITY OF COLMA IN THE BACKGROUND, PRIOR TO 1948, NOW THE SITE OF THE WESTMOOR HIGH SCHOOL