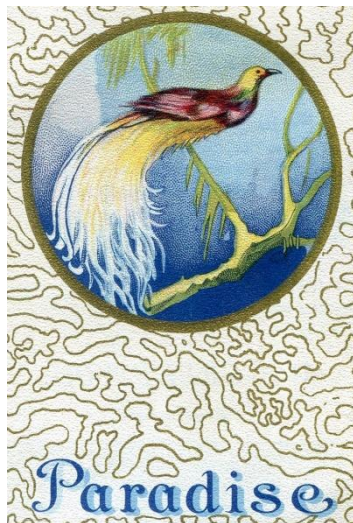


CHATSWORTH PAST & PRESENT

By Ann Vincent

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Docia A. Conley Corporation was one of Chatsworth's successful icons from 1915 -1979, located at 21032 Devonshire. Known to most of us as The Paradise Gift Shop, it started as a Tea Room. It has been said that The Paradise Tea Room was always a favorite destination to "motor"



out to for a Sunday drive. The family owned business, started by Docia and George Conley, combined a tea room garden setting surrounded by a variety of plants, trees and exotic birds. The early beginnings of the Docia Conley story were captured in the following excerpt from a 1930 LA Times Article as follows:

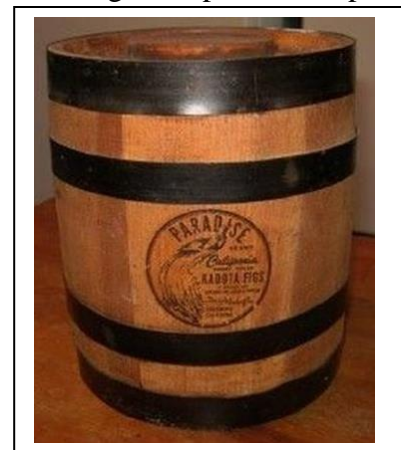
"In 1908 Mr. and Mrs. Conley (ages 34 and 32) were spending a summer on a ranch up in Bouquet Canyon. Mrs. Conley observed the qualities of fruits on the ranch as well as the gooseberries, manzanita berries and elderberries of the mountains that were going to waste. Now Mrs. Conley had been taught all her life that food should not be allowed to go to waste, so she began to preserve fruit. After filling all the available jars, there was still fruit going to waste, so she offered to preserve for the neighbors if they would furnish the jars and the sugar. At the end of the summer everyone was happy and the fruit had been saved.

The Conleys returned to Los Angeles with more fruit than they could possibly use and decided to sell some of the preserves. This led to requests for more and they returned the following summer to preserve fruits on the mountain ranch. In a short time they were supplying preserves to tourist hotels where something "different" was in demand. In the meantime Mrs. Conley was experimenting with the fruit to find the best methods to retain flavor, color

and freshness and acquiring knowledge about the fruits.

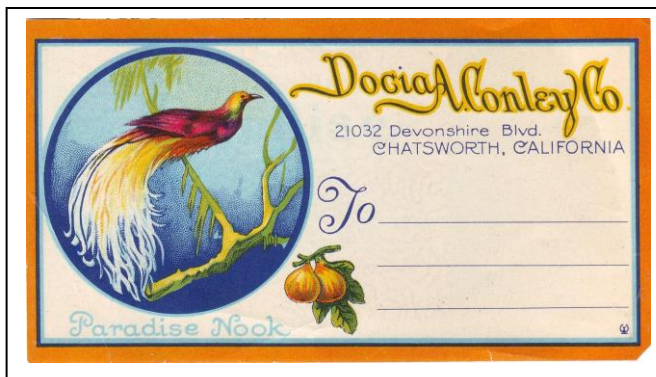
She became interested in the Kadota fig and learned that its starch content does not turn to sugar until the last days of ripening and that it must be taken for preserving purposes only when fully ripe. Another discovery of interest was that the fig gained measurably in weight during the last three days of ripening. In order to test her theories Mrs. Conley bought a two-acre demonstration plot from a subdivider in Chatsworth. This place had a four-room bungalow and a community hall, which later Mrs. Conley converted into a preserving plant. During the first year in the new plant Mrs. Conley put up over twenty tons of figs.

She next converted part of the plant into a demonstration room and next to this room she planned a garden. Here a winding path of red brick leads through the lawn of the garden past a clump of native willows; cottonwoods and sycamores that shade a tiny pool filled with water lilies. Along the garden edges there are plantings of roses and on one side a grape arbor



forms a background for a planting of scarlet sage. Fruit trees, including kumquats, apricots, avocados, tangerines and loquats, are placed in the background. At the back of the garden there is a large pen, well shaded, containing a number of golden pheasants. A cage of love birds, a parrot, a peacock and two roller canaries add color and interest to this charming little spot. There is also a little lath house filled with various flowering plants and shrubs in pots. These potted plants are moved to the garden when they are in blossom, to be replaced in turn by others. This makes possible a variety of color schemes for the garden throughout the year."

Their corporate seal shows that the business was officially incorporated March 20, 1915.

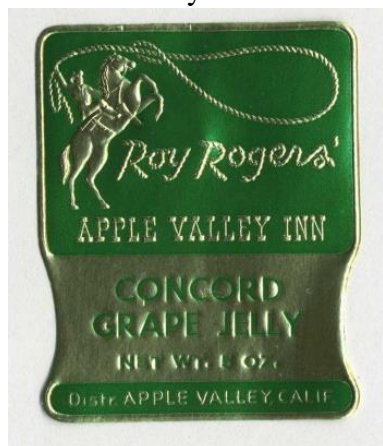


In 1928 The Van Nuys News advertises the Paradise Tea Room Dinner for \$1.00. This includes a menu of Paradise Salad, Stuffed Celery, Fried Chicken – Country Style, Fried New Zealand Rabbit, New Potatoes in Browned Parsley, Hot Biscuits, and Docia A. Conley’s Sweet Spiced Figs. Desserts include Fig Soufflé, cake and pies. Note: Special luncheons are available on week days for 35 cents.

In 1932, as Los Angeles hosted the Olympic Games, buses were provided by the hosting committee to transport visitors to the San Fernando Valley. The first stop was the San Fernando Mission, and following this, an early California luncheon was served on the patio of the Docia A. Conley Tearoom in Chatsworth. This was followed by a large reception and entertainment program at Rancho Sombra del Roble, estate of Mr. and Mrs. W.W. Orcutt near Chatsworth Lake.

The Conleys never had children. In 1941, Robert and Pheobe Chenard moved to Chatsworth. Robert had worked at a Fruit Preserving Plant in downtown Los Angeles. The Conleys considered the Chenards family, and the business was turned over to the Chenards in 1948. Docia passed away in 1949 and her husband George in 1952.

Robert did all the cooking, and Phoebe decorated, packaged and shipped. Phoebe continued to run the business by herself after



Robert’s death in 1952. In 1968, the Chatsworth Business and Professional Women’s Club (CBPWC) honored Phoebe Chenard. She had been the owner for over 20 years and they celebrated the 50th year of Docia A. Conley Co.

Phoebe’s son Leonard Chenard managed the company starting in 1964. The luncheons and teas were no longer served after Docia passed away, however the shop continued to ship its well known jellies, jams, figs and watermelon preserves all over the world. Community Service was always a large part of the Chenard family legacy. Phoebe and Leonard Chenard allowed the CBPWC to hold the monthly canteen days for the Community Cares project at their shop on Devonshire St. Beginning in 1967, packing day for the boxes to be sent to the local servicemen and women were held at the shop. Mrs. Chenard also helped pack items in the boxes, collected and donated items and generally supported the project diligently. Leonard also generously packed and shipped hundreds of books to be sent overseas by the Rotary Club.

In 1979 the Paradise Gift shop closed and the land was developed. Over the years, the Gift Shop provided a selection of items that could be shipped all over the world. Roy Rogers had his own selection of jellies and jams produced by the Docia A Conley brand. Interviews with long time Chatsworth residents include stories of seasonal jobs hauling large 50 lb. bags of sugar and stirring the large pots of jams and jellies. Lila Shepler mentioned that there were always jobs gift wrapping and packaging items to be shipped. There has been mention of the annual watermelon events, where according to the Summers family you could eat all the watermelon you wanted, after the rinds were cut off to be pickled.

