

Hillcrest Orchard

3285 Hillcrest Road, Medford, Oregon 97504

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One of Southern Oregon's oldest orchards, Hillcrest Orchard has been directed by members of the Parsons family since 1908. The land was settled first by Samuel Bowen in 1853. He sold the acreage in 1868 to Jesse Richardson who developed an extensive farm. William Renkin purchased the property in January 1889, and after his death the farm was acquired by William H. Stewart for \$1,500.

William H. Stewart's father, Missouri nurseryman Joseph J. Stewart, arrived in the Rogue Valley in February 1885. He began the local commercial fruit industry by planting a large orchard south of Medford. William H. Stewart probably transported some of these young trees to the land now known as Hillcrest Orchard. In 1903, as the apple and pear trees were coming into bearing, Stewart sold the orchard to Julian Wells Perkins, a Portland businessman. Mr. Perkins named the orchard, Hillcrest and built a new residence on Hillcrest Road.

In 1908 J.W. Perkins sold the orchard to the Hillcrest Orchard Company. Within two years, company president Reginald Hascall Parsons of Seattle, Washington, took controlling interest and became owner and manager of Hillcrest. He soon made it one of the finest orchard complexes in southern Oregon.

Mr. Parsons, financier and philanthropist, contributed to the development of the Pacific Northwest throughout his life. Appointed as the Seattle representative to plan development of the Columbia River Basin Project in 1922, he also served as president of the Seattle Chamber of Commerce, as a member of the Whitman College Board of trustees, and as president of the Seattle Symphony Orchestra. His wife, Maude Bemis Parsons, daughter of the founder of Bemis Bros. Bag Company, was an organizer of Children's Orthopedic Hospital in Seattle, and a co-founder, with her husband, of the Art Institute of Seattle.

Within a few years at Hillcrest Orchard, the Parsons family hired architect Frank C. Clark to design a large new residence that was completed in 1917. Mr. Clark worked from Mrs. Parsons' sketches to accommodate her ideas for the dwelling. The residence and other orchard buildings by Clark, the Office, Recreation House, Guest House, and Packing House, reflect the Period Colonial Style.

Clark designed structures in southern Oregon between 1903 and 1957. Born in New York in 1872, Clark attended the Cooper Union, and worked for various architects including the firm of McKim, Mead and White. After eight years in Ashland, he moved to Medford in 1911, where he based his practice for another forty years. (Among buildings for which Clark is known are the former Christian Science Church in Ashland, the Ashland and Medford Elks Buildings, the former Medford Senior High School, and the Fluhner Building.)

Hillcrest Orchard is included in the National Register of Historic Places. Buildings & construction dates are:

Open to the public during annual open house

1.	Main Residence	1917
2.	Office	1918
3.	Guest House	1926
4.	Recreation Hall	1919
5.	Garage	1912
6.	Electric Car Garage	1911

Other buildings

7.	Barn	c. 1900
8.	Cow Barn	c. 1910
9.	Wash Rack	c. 1923
10.	Wagon Shed	c. 1912
11.	Packing House	c. 1906 (rebuilt, 1926)

In 1908 the orchard was approximately 185 acres in size, divided equally between pears and apples. Individual trees were watered from a horse-drawn tank wagon. Irrigation district water became available in the 1920's. By 1938, all the apple trees had been removed and replanted with pears. As the older pear trees declined in production, new ones were introduced. Some of the trees planted in 1897, however, continue to produce a century later. New plantings are at a higher density in order to increase production per acre.

During the difficult years of the Depression, the Parsons family retained employees and kept the trees in healthy condition. Following the Parsons' deaths in 1955, their four children continued to oversee the orchard. In 1997, only one of the Parsons children, Anne Parsons Frame, remained living. Judson Parsons, a grandson of Reginald and Maude Parsons, managed the orchard for many years. He and other grandchildren continue to participate in the orchard operation.

Currently Hillcrest Orchard is over 200 acres in size. Pears now produced include Bartlett, Red Bartlett, D'Anjou, Bosc, and Comice, as well as a few other varieties. Most of the pears are consigned to local packing houses for fresh fruit sales and many of the Comice pears are used locally for Christmas gift boxes. Some Bartlett pears are sold to canneries. Peaches and apples are also grown on small acreages. Wine grapes are being planted on a few acres for use by southern Oregon wineries.

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The nomination to the National Register of Historic Places was prepared by Kay Atwood and Gail E.H. Evans in 1983.