

# WHEN ORANGES WERE GOLD

## — Floral Park's Rich Citrus Heritage —



When Orange County was incorporated in 1898, it got its name not from the many orange groves that dotted the land, but in an attempt to attract investors from the East Coast to purchase real estate here based on the perceived romantic vision of sunny citrus orchards. The real crop in Orange County was corn and grapes, but “Corn County” lacks the appeal that comes with fragrant orange blossoms and picking your own fruit in the dead of winter. However, perception soon became reality after a blight wiped out the grape industry.

Soon after, the railroads expanded through the area and the orange became the king of cash crops. California citrus growers began organizing themselves into cooperatives, with the goal of increasing profits by pooling their risk and increasing their collective bargaining power. Thus was born the many citrus associations. The Orange County Fruit Exchange was incorporated in 1893. The economic depression that began that same year worsened farmers’ situations, and intensified their desire to self-organize to their own benefit.

Orange groves were everywhere, but especially in Riverside and Orange counties. In 1907, the California Fruit Growers Exchange approved the first-ever large-scale advertising campaign aimed at advertising a perishable food. The campaign, which marketed oranges





as “healthy” and “summery,” resulted in a 50% increase of orange sales in the target state of Iowa and launched the Sunkist brand. The ad agency originally proposed using the adjective “sun-kissed” to describe the oranges, but the word eventually was shortened to Sunkist which made it easier to defend as a trademark brand.

In an effort to distinguish Sunkist oranges from others, the California Fruit Growers Exchange wrapped its oranges in paper stamped with “Sunkist.” But in 1909, after they learned that merchants were selling non-Sunkist oranges as their brand, it began to offer consumers a free branded spoon in exchange for mailing in twelve Sunkist wrappers. One million spoons were claimed in the first year of the promotion, solidifying the brand presence and giving merchants a reason to want to display Sunkist oranges in their original wrappers. By 1910, the promotion had resulted in Sunkist becoming the world’s largest purchaser of cutlery and by 1914, Americans were consuming about forty oranges per person every year, up 80% from 1885.

With the success of the growing local citrus business, the Orange County Fruit Exchange built its headquarters on Glassell off the Orange Circle in 1922 at a cost of \$20,000. While most local growers sold their produce through local

associations like the Santa Ana-Tustin Mutual Citrus Association, grower Gowen & White, (formerly Gowen & Willard) was doing a booming business in walnuts and oranges at their own packing house at 4th Street and the Santa Fe railroad tracks.

E. D. Burge was one of Santa Ana’s most prominent orange growers. His packing house on Lyon Street became



Santa Ana’s first association packing house when it was leased by the Mutual Orange Distributors in 1922. Burge made quite a splash in the society columns with his palatial 110-foot steam yacht, the “Louise.”

In 1927, on the way back from Catalina Island, his uninsured yacht was destroyed in an accident off the Newport breakers. He immediately began work on a new floating palace, the Valencia (named after his orange groves). Its opening night was attended by Charlie Chaplin, John Barrymore, Mr. & Mrs. Douglas Fairbanks, Tom Mix and over 200 prominent Santa Ana and Orange County residents. Shortly afterward, however, his marriage also hit the rocks with rumors of liquor trafficking, using the Valencia as a floating casino, and failure to take his wife on a promised ocean voyage. He, in turn, accused his wife Dorothy Bell Burge of being a gold digger, stealing jewelry and oriental rugs and having an “intimate relationship with another man.” Their marriage ended in a scandalous divorce in 1929 and by 1931, his ventures in cattle, oil and boat-building cost him his fortune and his property on East First street was sold at foreclosure.

Henry S. Greenwald was a pioneer of Orange County, arriving here with his parents, Mr. & Mrs. Peter Greenwald from Wisconsin, in 1882. As the eldest son, he assumed the responsibility of developing a tract of land on Seventeenth Street at an early age, turning it into a prosperous ranch. He planted and tended orange and walnut groves and lived at the family home at 1810 Greenleaf until he married Miss Etta Heil and established a second home on First Street. After the death of his wife, he married Mrs. Hattie Crawford in 1910.

Henry was a successful orchardist, maintaining groves in both Orange and Santa Ana. He was a member





*Selling oranges at a Santa Ana Fruit Stand*



*Orange County Fruit Exchange*

of the Citrus Fruit Association and was president of Mutual Orange Distributors. He planted an orchard at this First Street home, but later divided the tract into a subdivision called Greenwald Park.

In 1920, 40 orchardists gathered for an orchard cover crop tour held under the auspices of the West Orange Farm Center. Highlights included the Santa Ana walnut grove of Frank Greenwald (he grew alfalfa between his trees) and the orange grove of Dr. J. L. Stephenson on West Santa Clara (who grew velvet beans between the trees). In 1923, the public was invited to a special citrus tree pruning demonstration at the Petz ranch at 541 Santa Clara. In addition to apricots and oranges, the Petz brothers also grew beans at a separate ranch in the Fernando Valley. When Clifford Petz was caught speeding at 56 miles per hour on Newport road in 1926, he temporarily avoided jail time by saying that incarceration would hurt his and his brother's bean crop.

Apricots were a major crop in early Orange County and in 1919 Santa Ana alone was churning out about \$200,000 a year in apricot sales. Often, farmers planted both apricots and walnuts (another locally popular tree crop of the day) on the same ranch since apricots are picked in late spring and early summer, while walnuts are harvested in the fall.



*The historic Victorian Greenwald ranch home on Greenleaf.*

The Gustlins at 2033 Greenleaf were among those who grew apricots along with walnuts and Saturama plums in the 1910s and '20s. Walter Fine, another local rancher, also grew apricots on the family orchard in north Santa Ana. He and his brother Horace also owned business property on Broadway & Fifth Street across from what later became the Yost Theater. In 1920, he removed the apricots to plant Valencia oranges and planned to replace the barn and family home with a new 1.5 story 8-room house on the corner of Santa Clara and Broadway. Horace, a long time Santa Ana resident and veteran journalist for the Santa Ana Register, wrote in 1922 that "investors have come to recognize the possibility of this city development into one of the largest communities in Southern California and they are evidencing their faith in the future by bringing their money here and investing." They sold their

ranch to developers the following year, purchasing the home of Elma Leonard at 114 West Santa Clara and moving his family there.

Santa Ana's orchard land continued to become housing as development began on an exclusive development named North Broadway Park. The subdivision was built on 17 acres of ranch property said to be worth over \$200,000. It included Walter Fine's 10 acres along with 12 acres from N. E. Wray, 6 acres from Dr. J. L. Stephenson, 9 acres from Chris Petz and 10 acres from T. M. Robertson. They were purchased by the Southern California Investment Company, headed by C. H. Chaterson who specialized in subdivisions and city planning, having built West Adams in Los Angeles and Walnut Manor in Fullerton. Promotional materials boasted that almost every lot came with either Valencia orange or full bearing walnut trees "of the finest quality." It also claimed that the soil was considered to be "the most



*The Gustlin Home on Santa Clara*





*Smudge pots at 1916 N. Greenleaf*



*Orchard irrigation well at Victoria & Santa Clara*



*Floral Park home of C. C. Hillis, manager of the Orange County Fruit Exchange*

productive in the world,” making it perfect for gardening and landscaping.

Frank Greenleaf grew apricots and walnuts on his 33.5 acre property surrounding his home at 2010 Greenleaf. He also sold eggs from his award-winning Rhode Island Reds, was chairman of the poultry exhibit at the Orange County Fair in 1915 and served as Santa Ana’s official weatherman from 1918 to 1920. Fruit growers could receive the frost report by calling Frank after 9:00 pm. at which time it was sent out from San Francisco and forwarded to Santa Ana. By 1926, he and his wife had moved into to the family



home at 2124 Greenleaf, built in 1882, and replaced it with a new home in 1928.

In 1927, 100 orange and walnut trees were removed from property belonging to Greenleaf and Greenwald to build a “highway” through the groves extending Flower Street between 17th and Santa Clara. The city council didn’t plan to gravel or grade the new 80-foot wide road, unless traffic justified the improvement in the future.

Upon Henry Greenwald’s death in 1927 after a 7-month illness, his brothers Herbert and Oscar took over the properties which had been in

their family for 45 years. (Norman Greenwald acquired Oscar’s portion) and soon sold the orchard on 17th Street to Harry H. Ball for the purpose of building another new housing development called Floral Park. It would run from Greenleaf to the east to Flower on the west, from 17th Street on the South and would eventually connect to North Broadway Park on the north. His vision included a bridal path down the middle of Flower, ornamental lighting and ample trees.

Ten homes had already been built on Greenleaf Street at the time that the Floral Park development was announced, including a home at 1912 for Francis W. Bush, superintendent of construction for the southern division of the Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Co., and at 2004 for Henry’s widow, Hattie Greenwald.

The Floral Park development began in 1929 and by 1930 the first model home was designed and built in the trendy Spanish Revival style by Allison Honor at 1816 N. Heliotrope.



*The Petz Home on Greenleaf*





When C. C. Hillis was offered the job of managing the Orange County Fruit Exchange in 1930 he started looking to move his family from Long Beach to be closer to work at the Fruit Exchange Building on Glassell in Orange. In 1931, the Orange County Fruit Exchange under his management had their best year yet, handling three quarters of the citrus out of Orange County. That same year, secure in his new position, he purchased and moved into the model home at 19th and Heliotrope.

Herbert and Norman Greenwald had numerous projects with Ball & Honor on land they owned, including the construction of an elaborate garage building that the Greenwalds leased to an automobile firm at First and Sycamore (now the home of Original Mike's).

In 1948, a vast forest of five-million Valencia orange trees grew on 67,000 acres in Orange County.

But the price of land in Santa Ana was skyrocketing and with the return of soldiers from World War II, the demand for housing had pushed out the last of the orchards.

But remnants still remain of Floral Park's historic orange groves. If you put in a pool, you're likely to dig up a vintage clay orchard irrigation pipe. The capped irrigation well at the corner of Victoria and Santa Clara still remains. Original farm houses stand proudly on Greenleaf and Santa Clara Streets. Vintage smudge pots can be seen under a tree on Greenleaf. And many homes in Floral Park still have their original orange trees, their fragrant blossoms perfuming the air each spring, a sweet tribute to our proud citrus heritage.

