

Legacy Links



**PRESERVING OLD LA VERNE'S
ENVIRONMENT:
MAKING HISTORY FOR THE FUTURE**

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Every Picture Tells a Story

In Southern California, we have citrus on our minds in January. La Verne's city seal features an orchard and the LVHS International truck transports a giant orange. The lead article for this edition of *Legacy Links* tells the stories of workers of color in the citrus industry. It reminds us that not all contributors to success in La Verne's citrus industry were grove owners and that California continues to depend on persons of color as the backbone of its agricultural industry. The images that accompany the narrative tell a multiple of stories!

Our lead article is accompanied by a second article that continues the citrus theme by describing the tasks involved in the complicated processes that brought citrus from the fields to consumer tables. Bill Lemon, whose parents met while working in a citrus packing house in La Verne, contributed his knowledge to our understanding. Another citrus-themed article describes the contribution of a local non-profit that sends volunteers to homes to harvest excess fruit and donate it to a local food bank. Citrus is a gift that keeps giving and our past is repeated in today's mini backyard orchards.

As we contemplate what we are thankful for in 2022, we might include our mild climate and the beautiful fresh fruit that continues to sustain La Verne's residents. Aren't we fortunate?

Workers of Color in the Southern California Citrus Industry

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Generations of historians and journalists have written extensively about the agricultural capitalists who created the citrus industry that propelled the economy of Southern California in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, only in recent decades have researchers paid closer attention to the workers who planted trees, picked fruit, and packed the oranges and lemons that drove commercial expansion in the region. Importantly, many people of color made the citrus industry flourish in Southern California towns like La Verne. Native peoples, Asian Americans, Latinx workers, and many more helped the citrus industry thrive.

Laborers in the California citrus industry fell into two camps: fieldworkers who planted trees, harvested

fruit, and did other outdoor work, and packers who worked indoors, preparing fruit for transit to markets in the eastern United States by rail. By far the most physically intense labor was fieldwork. This consisted of planting orange and lemon trees, digging irrigation ditches, harvesting fruit, fumigating the orchard to prevent infestation, and lighting orchard heaters to thwart frost damage. Citrus fruits are sensitive, so workers harvested them by hand, rather than relying on machines. As a result, citrus pickers had to work slowly, carefully, and methodically to preserve the integrity of the fruit. Workers typically toiled with the sun beating down on them. By completing such physically demanding tasks, workers guaranteed the success of the citrus industry through taxing work.

The first citrus workers in what would later become the Golden State lived in the Franciscan missions established by Spanish conquerors in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. Franciscan missionaries made significant plantings at Mission San Gabriel and Mission San Fernando.

While Spanish friars and settlers introduced citrus trees, they forced indigenous peoples like the Tongvas of San Gabriel Valley to plant them and harvest the fruits. Indigenous peoples continued to harvest oranges and lemons after the citrus industry expanded in the 1870s and 1880s with the introduction of new varieties of fruit. These pickers were often the descendants of those who survived diseases and physical punishments at the missions.

Even after 1900, when different populations became more numerous in the groves, native workers still picked and packed fruit. At Riverside, Native American students from across the country studied at a boarding school called the Sherman Institute (now called Sherman Indian High School). The school's outing program allowed students to gain outside employment, and many ended up in orange groves and packinghouses in Riverside and nearby towns.

Students from the Sherman Institute appear below on a visit to a packinghouse.



East Asian workers became the backbone of the California citrus industry in the 1880s. Many Chinese immigrants had come to California in the 1850s during the Gold Rush. Many Chinese who struck out at mining became railroad workers, completing the first transcontinental railroad and laying tracks to Southern California. Many stayed in the Southland, becoming pickers in orange and lemon groves.

Racism against Chinese workers in California abounded in the 1880s. Leaders of the state's labor movement claimed that Chinese accepted lower wages, which negatively impacted the labor market. In 1882, the United States Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, which ground immigration to a halt. White workers frequently attacked Chinese labor camps in the orange groves and Chinatowns in cities such as Riverside and Redlands. A group of Chinese orange pickers in Santa Ana appears below.



By 1900, other Asian populations came to the Golden State. Japanese workers, for example, negotiated beneficial contracts in exchange for their services in the groves. Many Japanese settlers became landowners. Unfortunately, the success of Japanese immigrants angered many white Californians. In response, the state government passed an Alien Land Act in 1913, which targeted “aliens” such as the Japanese by forbidding them from owning land. Nevertheless, Japanese pickers remained crucial to the citrus industry until World War II, when the government of the United States incarcerated them in concentration camps. The war also necessitated housing German Prisoners of War at Pomona’s Fairplex, and they made a labor contribution to the citrus industry.

Filipino workers in Southern California faced less legal persecution. Since the United States had acquired the Philippine Islands from Spain after a war in 1898, Filipinos could easily enter the United States. Many joined the citrus industry in Southern California. Importantly, Filipinos in the Golden State’s farm sector started labor organizations in the early-twentieth century, paving the way for the United Farm Worker movement of the postwar era. Filipino pickers appear in the following image.



Mexican workers made perhaps the greatest impact on the citrus industry in Southern California. As a former province of Mexico, California had always had a substantial number of Mexicans. This population

expanded in the 1910s and after as the Mexican Revolution threw that country into political and economic turmoil. By the 1920s, they had become the largest segment of the farm labor force in the Golden State, including orange and lemon agriculture. The migratory labor force that evolved in the early-twentieth century still exists today, and Mexican Americans continue to harvest oranges in the Central Valley.

The diligence of Mexican Americans ensured the profitability of the Southern California citrus industry. Growers across the citrus belt relied on Mexicans and Mexican Americans to harvest oranges and lemons. At Limoneira, an immense lemon plantation in Santa Paula, Mexican workers maintained one of the most profitable citrus production facilities in the state. By 1925, California furnished 13,000 carloads of lemons annually. This continued even throughout the Great Depression of the 1930s. Mexican pickers appear hard at work at Limoneira here.



Growers in La Verne, the self-proclaimed Heart of the Orange Empire, and San Dimas employed Mexican Americans. The men in the first image below appear in the groves of the La Verne Orange Growers Association, while the men in the

second photograph worked in neighboring San Dimas.





While citrus packing was less physically demanding than picking fruits, it was nonetheless a crucial step in preparing crops for shipment by rail. Among the most important workers in citrus packing were Mexican American women. They frequently worked in packinghouses, such as the women pictured in Ventura in 1931 in the following image. Mexican American women became especially important to the citrus industry during World War II, when many men joined the military, and a large swath of white women entered the defense industry.



Labor for Mexican Americans in the citrus industry was not without benefits. Growers frequently built dormitories or houses for their workers, offering accommodations that were typically better than the transient work camps and boxcars in which workers had previously lived. However, such projects also demonstrated the control growers exercised over the lives of their laborers, shaping their living conditions

beyond work. Evidence of small houses and apartments specifically designed to house grove workers still exist in La Verne.

While this article has discussed the many groups who participated in the citrus industry separately, in reality workers from different backgrounds would have worked hand-in-hand in the fields and packinghouses. The College Heights Lemon Packing House in Claremont, pictured below in 1948, gives a good indication of the multicultural labor force upon which the citrus industry relied.



Furthermore, the article has only discussed some of the larger groups that spurred the citrus industry to thrive in Southern California for over 70 years. Other workers, such as Asian Indians and Sikhs, also picked and packed oranges and lemons. It is important to acknowledge that the citrus industry, and California agribusiness as a whole, thrived because of the labor provided by people of color. Understanding the vital impact they had on citrus agriculture enriches our understanding of this important history.

Dr. Jenkins has recently published a book about the Southern California citrus industry. You can listen to a recording of Dr. Jenkins' book talk by clicking on this link.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fKgmRyPaG7M>



Just Ask Bill

Many La Verne residents own citrus trees and enjoy harvesting fruit during the winter season. A mental image of fruit picking and juice squeezing comes to mind, but most of us are

unacquainted with the many jobs associated with a large citrus operation. La Verne’s citrus was shipped across the nation and even overseas, necessitating careful planning and preparation so that fruit would arrive at its destination fresh and undamaged.

Bill reminds us that the citrus industry relied on workers who performed a myriad of functions. Their work often required specialized tools, like these:



The clippers and box maker hatchet are vintage while the picking bag is available commercially. The bag buckles allowed the bag to retain its shape during filling, then was released into a larger container without any need to release the bag from the picker’s shoulder.



This photo from a 1919 edition of the *Citrograph* shows a fruit picker using a lemon sizing ring and clippers.

Citrus Worker Role	Tools for the Job
Picker: This outdoor job was arduous and included climbing an orchard ladder while balancing heavy bags full of fruit.	Picker tools included clippers, a ladder, a special picking bag, a sizing ring (for lemons), and gloves.
Driver: Getting fruit from fields to packing houses required careful handling. Most packing houses were located on railway lines to simplify shipping.	Initially transported in wagons, then by truck, boxes of fruit traveled from orchards to packing houses.
Fruit Receiver: This job required physical strength, endurance, and balance.	At the packing house, a receiver unloaded fruit boxes and used a hand truck or dolly to convey them inside for processing.
Washer: Once inside, fruit received a postharvest rinse with water and sanitizing chemicals and was then placed on a conveyer belt.	Unusable fruit was discarded. The jobs of washing, sorting, and grading were repetitive but required focused attention.
Sorter: Each piece of washed fruit was checked for size as it passed along the conveyer. Once sized, fruit was graded by quality.	Sorters assigned each piece of fruit a size number that indicated how many of that number would fit inside a crate. Sorting required practice to achieve accuracy.

Grader: Graded into “fancy”, “choice”, or “juice” designations, fruit was individually evaluated for quality of shape, color, and size.	Graders needed skill and practice to swiftly grade. Once graded, fruit was delivered down chutes to workers who packed and wrapped it.
Packer/Wrapper: Nobody wanted to receive spoiled or bruised fruit. Packers picked fruit from the conveyer belt with one hand and transferred it to the other hand where a wrapper was waiting. The wrapper was carefully twisted at the top and the fruit was placed into a crate.	Paper wrapping reduced spoiling and cushioned the fruit. Packing fruit tightly but without compression ensured a perfect product.
Box Maker: The citrus industry required both field and shipping boxes. Field boxes had to be sturdy for repetitive use.	Using bundles of slats, shipping boxes were constructed on-site using hatchets.
Pressman: Care was needed to place the box top into position, then press it down to secure the fruit without damaging it.	A special press secured the box top, which was hammered in place.
Labeler: Fanciful labels advertised not just the fruit and its origin, but an idyllic way of life in the citrus industry	Once fruit was secured, paper labels were glued on box exteriors and they were ready for shipping.
Icer: Fruit had to be kept cold and fresh for the journey. Boxcars received ice through openings in their tops. Ice was made on site at packinghouses.	Icers used tongs to lift heavy blocks of ice and ease them through the boxcar tops.

Citrus work included orchard maintenance tasks such as watering, spraying, and smudging during cold spells. These jobs were often dangerous and involved low pay and long hours. There were no considerations of

modern industry standards like exposure to toxic chemicals, ergonomic seating, or temperature control.

For more information, refer to *A woman’s world: A history of female labor in citrus packinghouses*. This article provided clarification to developing the table of work roles and tools and includes excellent references from a variety of sources.

<http://sweet-sour-citrus.org/essays/women-in-the-packing-houses/>

Don’t Let It Drop – Donate the Crop!

The title above is the motto of Fruitfully Yours, a non-profit organization in Glendora that is committed to preventing food waste, preventing food insecurity, and protecting the environment by harvesting fruit from community residents and donating it to local food banks and pantries that distribute it to people who are food insecure.

Fruitfully Yours was founded in 2017 by Mihir Anand, then a freshman at Glendora High School. Observing the wasted fruit under trees in his neighborhood, he worked with Glendora’s city government to create a volunteer organization that now serves Glendora, San Dimas, La Verne, Azusa, and Covina. The result is a win-win situation that prevents excess fruit from being wasted and provides a food resource to people who need it most. Since its inception, Fruitfully Yours has diverted more than 50,500 pounds of food from ending up in landfills.

Homeowners benefit from this free and easy-to-arrange service. A telephone call (626/250-9064) or email to Fruitfully Yours is all it takes to help slow harmful climate change, clean up your yard space, and contribute to a positive community in which people help each other. Invite the volunteers at Fruitfully Yours to pick your fruit and consider making a contribution to their worthy cause!



The Fruitfully Yours Team Picks Citrus at Bob Kress' house

[12/2/21 Get Your Kicks on Route 66: Vintage Auto Restoration at Bonita Unified \(buzzsprout.com\)](https://www.buzzsprout.com)



Teacher Rob Zamboni visits with Superintendent Carl Coles and members of the Bonita USD Board

Rolling with the International

A lot has been happening with the 1938 International. Students in the Bonita High School shop class with teacher Rob Zamboni have stripped it to the frame, which was towed by Sander's Towing to Azusa Sandblasting to remove all rust and expose cracks. Project Director Erik Chaputa will weld the cracks and the frame will return to begin parts assembly.



The image above is one of the many cracks and defects that Erik Chaputa will weld to get the frame ready for powder-coating. Then it's rebuilding time



Bonita High School students disassemble the body of the 1938 International from its frame

After painting the chassis, we'll need a steering gear assembly, rear end unit, transmission, power steering and brake assembly, front end (brakes, shoes, and cylinders), and springs.

The California School News Radio created a podcast on December 2nd featuring teacher Rob Zamboni, Bill Lemon, and Bonita High School Students who discuss the challenges of restoring the International. Click on the following link to listen:

LVHS and the BHS Band Make Beautiful Music

The Bonita High School Band made joyful music at the December 11th LVHS-sponsored Vintage Gift sale. Strollers on Third Street looked over vintage glassware, china, and other collectables while they nibbled on cookies and drank hot spiced cider. Baked goods, lemon marmalade, t-shirts, and books about La Verne were for sale. The sale realized almost \$1800 in profits, which were donated to restore the 1938 International. At 4:45pm, the Bonita High School Band marched down Third Street and played a medley of holiday songs.



The Bonita High School Band marches into position

This is the second year of the LVHS vintage sale. Shut down by COVID-19 in 2000, this event came back with a roar as friends re-united to share the holiday spirit. Thanks to all the volunteers who helped at the sales table and we're already looking forward to next year – and maybe a visit by the International!



Sherry Best and Gail Pellettera watch over sales

LVHS Welcomes Kathy Kalousek

Kathy Kalousek has joined the LVHS board and will support its membership team. Kathy is a Realtor with Coldwell Banker, working for over 31 years, serving La Verne and the surrounding communities.



She has worked in all facets of residential real estate, with some commercial experience as well.

She is a 3rd generation, lifelong resident of La Verne. She and her husband Steve live on Third Street with their two kids.

When not working, she loves spending time with her family, sewing, gardening, and listening to classic rock music.

Kathy is excited to be a part of the LVHS and looks forward to getting to know more of its members.

Where Were You in 1949?



If you lived in La Verne 73 years ago, you might remember the famous "Snow of 1949". On Jan. 10, 1949, an unusually cold winter storm dropped snow for several days and stretched from Kern County to the Mexican border.

Orchard heating was required to save citrus crops. Smudge pots were lighted and their smoke or "smudge" warmed the air and prevented the fruit from freezing. Wind machines circulated the heated air rising from the pots. The oily smudge smoke stuck to everything it touched.

The residential photo was taken by Eunice Kreps from her back yard at 2130 Fifth Street. It shows Ben Wells' service station at the northeast corner of Fourth and "D" Streets, and the Lawellen Garage, operated by his brother, William "Red" Wells.

