



***Finding Ourselves
in the Groves:***

Stories and Storytellers of Citrus in Inland Southern California



Introduction

Finding Ourselves in the Groves features portraits of people who have shaped the citrus landscape of Inland Southern California, and whose stories of labor, migration, and immigration continue to resonate today. The contributions of people of diverse ethnic backgrounds recounted here, including the often-overlooked involvement of women and children, chart a social and cultural genealogy—a family tree—of citrus in the region. They help us connect people to place. They also show how the citrus landscape has been constructed by laboring hands and minds, industrial and technological developments, and public policies about race, immigration, and segregation.

The exhibition represents people from long ago as well as today. These include “storytellers” who preserve histories of race and place, and new migrants and immigrants who continue the struggles of earlier generations for equity and rights. Their oral histories and photographs, drawn from family collections and local archives in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties, animate *Finding Ourselves in the Groves*. They inspire the questions at the heart of the exhibition. What makes community? How do ideas about belonging and citizenship change? How are our experiences of migration and immigration interwoven and inscribed on California’s citrus landscape? *Finding Ourselves in the Groves* invites you to share both your stories of the past and your ideas for how California’s story ought to play out in the future.

Finding Ourselves in the Groves is part of the Relevancy and History Project partnership between the University of California, Riverside, and California State Parks. The pilot project at California Citrus State Historic Park focuses on migration and immigration and includes new research, partnerships, student participation, community story collection, site-based installations, and outreach events.

Budding Landscapes: African Americans in Citrus

Many African American settlers to Inland Southern California in the 1870s and 1880s started out as manual laborers and became independent grove owners and respected arborists. Israel Beal found ample work hauling lumber and cement and digging irrigation ditches alongside local Native Americans when he arrived in the San Bernardino valley in 1870. Soon he bought his first twenty acres of land for \$250 in northern Redlands. He eventually prospered as a grove owner himself, although he continued to work as a teamster and laborer. John B. Adams helped graft the first navel oranges, upon which the region's citrus wealth was built. David and Oscar Stokes planted trees at the Citrus Experiment Station (later University of California, Riverside), which enabled crucial scientific research. All contributed their labor and knowledge to build the region's citrus industry.

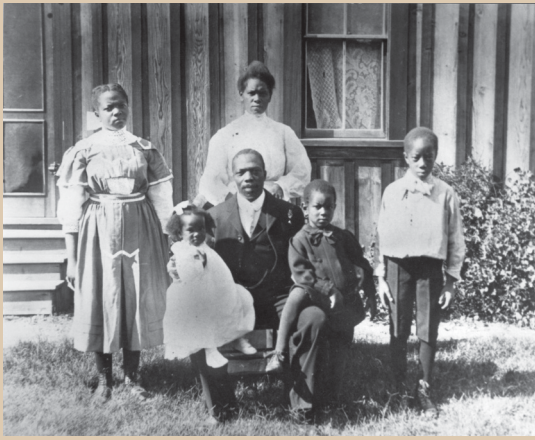
Israel "Doc" Beal (1849-1929), born to slavery in Virginia, joined the Union Army as a teamster, and later helped develop much of early San Bernardino County. He was nicknamed "Doc" for his skills in horticulture. Yet he did not initially believe oranges could grow on the arid land he bought in 1874. Eventually he and his family cultivated many acres of citrus in Redlands.

Heritage Room, Smiley Public Library, Redlands. t



We did not think we could grow oranges then.

-Israel Beal, Redlands grove owner, reflecting on land he purchased in 1874



David Stokes (pictured c. 1906) came from Georgia, joining relatives and other early African American residents of Riverside who migrated from the South. Some perhaps were urged West by grove owners to replace Chinese laborers when anti-immigrant sentiments escalated in California. The Stokes family, like others in the community, used the wages of their labor to invest in real estate and to start other businesses.

Standing: Cecile, Janie (wife), and Oscar. Seated: David with baby Wilhelmina and Walter.

Riverside Metropolitan Museum,
Courtesy Jayne Thomas.



By posing in a citrus grove for their formal portrait (c. 1895), Reverend William G. and Elizabeth Boswell Goodwin of Riverside signaled the promise of Westward migration: autonomy and prosperity in a land purportedly free from Jim Crow discrimination and the racial violence of the South. The Goodwins were among early African American civic leaders whose establishment of religious, social, and business organizations brought the community together.

Riverside Metropolitan Museum,
Courtesy Dorella Anderson.



In 1905, the Colored Mercantile Association opened this two-story building in the Eastside neighborhood of Riverside to serve the growing multiracial community that had developed close to the railroad tracks and citrus industry jobs. Investors David Stokes and Aaron Wiley ran the grocery store on the ground floor. The social hall above served as a Masonic Lodge and gathering place that welcomed all, significant in an era of racial segregation.

Riverside Metropolitan Museum,
Courtesy late Maitland Stokes.



Helen Armstrong (b. 1929), Thelma King (b. 1924), and Eunice Lisberg (b. 1943) share stories of their grandfather, John B. Adams (c. 1860-1934), and his journey from slavery in the Carolinas to working as a free man in California on “Lucky” Baldwin’s San Gabriel ranch. Adams flourished as a “budder,” someone who grafts budwood onto existing rootstock to create new trees. He spoke of his work with Eliza Tibbets, who planted Riverside’s first navel orange trees in 1873.

Photo by Kate Alexandrite, Courtesy Relevancy and History Project.



Restricted from membership in white fraternities and sororities, Riverside’s African American community established the Masonic Orange Valley Lodge #13 in 1905 (pictured with its sister organization in 1933). They met at Mercantile Hall, which also hosted Filipino dances in the 1920s, labor meetings in the 1930s, and a Freedom School for Latinos and African Americans protesting school segregation in 1965. The Masons continue to operate the lodge today (12th Street between Park and Howard Avenues).

Riverside Metropolitan Museum,
Courtesy Dorella Anderson.

Single and Segregated

The groves illustrate a recurring pattern in U.S. history regarding how immigration policy is guided by economics, racial politics, and changing ideas about citizenship. Chinese men became an indispensable work force in the first decades of Western rail, canal, and citrus industry development. Yet soon thereafter the first U.S. laws restricting immigration were directed at the same group. Later the California Alien Land Law of 1913 forbade land ownership by “aliens ineligible for citizenship,” thus excluding Asians (and especially targeting prominent populations of Japanese and Sikhs) from buying the land on which they worked.

Mexican agricultural workers filled the void, migrating without limits in the 1920s, even as quotas severely restricted immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe and barred most immigrants from Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. But as jobs disappeared during the Great Depression, California state officials rounded up people of Mexican heritage, including some U.S. citizens, and systematically deported them. At the same time, federal officials ruled unlawful return a felony and unauthorized border crossing a misdemeanor, subject to fines, imprisonment, and deportation.

During World War II when labor was again needed, more than 80% of the pickers in California’s citrus industry came from Mexico. These single men (they could not bring their families) participated in the guest worker agreement between the U.S. and Mexico known as the Bracero Program (1942-1964). The program’s scant regulation of labor conditions, pay, and housing gave a competitive advantage to citrus growers striving to keep their costs low even as it was criticized by unions, churches, and some participants.

For many braceros, including Luis Barozio Ceja from Michoacán, Mexico, the experience was bittersweet. At first, he was warmly welcomed to fill wartime labor shortages in Corona (near Riverside). Later he and other braceros were perceived as threats both by American labor organizations and established Mexican American communities.



Riverside resident Joe Venegas, Sr., whose family had emigrated from Mexico in the 1910s, was a bracero crew leader in the late 1940s and 1950s (pictured at bottom left, next to his son Joe, Jr.). He trucked braceros from camps to the groves. Bracero housing in the Riverside area was often hastily arranged at fairgrounds, along the Santa Ana River, and in converted warehouses and prison barracks.

Courtesy Manuel and Yolanda Venegas.

*They want us when we can serve them,
when we can work hard.*

–Luis Barozio Ceja, on his experiences in the Bracero Program



By 1920, the Italian population of California (86,610) almost equaled that of the Mexican population (88,502). Many Italians worked citrus, such as this work crew posed in the 1910s in Arlington Heights (near today's California Citrus State Historic Park). Italians in this era lived in segregated labor camps and neighborhoods next to Filipino and other Asian and Latino laborers.

Riverside Metropolitan Museum.



Housing and work crews were segregated by race even within a single labor camp. Asian details adorn the buildings at right, which housed Japanese workers of Arlington Heights Fruit Company around 1915. Citrus industry leaders held this up as an architectural model in response to state and federal criticism of poor housing conditions for immigrants. Industry-sponsored housing was short lived, however, while lean-tos and shacks persisted as a predominant form of shelter.

Riverside Metropolitan Museum.



Korean Independence leader Ahn Chang Ho (third from left) formed a citrus labor bureau in 1904 in Riverside, where he also established the first organized Korean settlement in the continental U.S. “Pachappa Camp” or “Dosan’s Republic” housed Korean American families—not just single men—in buildings originally constructed for Chinese railroad workers. The Korean population dispersed in the years after the “Great Freeze” of 1913, when crops and picking opportunities diminished.

Korean American Digital Archive, University of Southern California.



F. B. Devine packinghouse, Riverside, 1888. Chinese laborers introduced methods of irrigation, clipping, and packing essential to the mass distribution of citrus. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 banned their further immigration and that of wives and families of men already in the U.S. Even after its passage, however, Chinese American settlements and encampments swelled to serve Riverside-area citrus groves, especially during harvests.

Special Collections, Rivera Library, University of California, Riverside.



Bicycles—available in the 1880s and cheap by the 1900s—were the transportation of choice for men whose tent camps and boarding houses were in or adjacent to the groves. The area of Arlington Heights, close to California Citrus State Historic Park, had at least five camps.

Riverside Public Library.



Labor today in effect remains segregated by race and gender. Picking is done almost exclusively by Latino men, including Wilver Hernández, who was photographed in 2017 while working the commercial groves that are part of California Citrus State Historic Park.

Photo by Thomas McGovern, for the collaborative project with Juan Delgado, *Manos, Espaldas y Blossoms* (2017), Courtesy the artists.

Women's Work

Since the late 1890s packing citrus has been women's work. Promoted by Redlands Chamber of Commerce in 1906 as "light and pleasant work," most women instead experienced the same assembly-line conditions as in Eastern factories: long hours, repetitive movement, relentless pace, and few guarantees regarding pay. Yet the packinghouse was also where women created community. Women were known to organize strikes. They also formed mutual-aid associations, such as Mexican *mutualista* societies, which pooled resources, helped those in need, and advocated for worker's rights. These social networks made adaptation possible to the hard conditions of citrus work and life, particularly for migrant and immigrant women with the double burden of earning income and caring for home and family.

In the 1990s, women workers at several of the largest lemon packing companies in California won sexual discrimination cases charging unequal access to the same hours, jobs, and pay as men. Despite this, women (mostly Latinas) still grade and pack citrus while men (mostly Latinos) do the handwork of picking fruit. Today the jobs themselves are disappearing, as workers are replaced by digital tools and mechanization in citrus sorting and packing.

Inez Florez packed at station #17. She wrote on the back of this photo in 1939: "Mama, here is a picture of the packinghouse where we work." Florez worked among other Latinas who came to occupy most of the packinghouse jobs beginning in World War II, when white women gained entry to higher paying work in defense industries.

David Boulé California Orange Collection,
Special Collections, The Claremont Colleges Library.



16 DE JUNIO DE 1939

***Mama aqui le mando este retrato de el empaque
en donde trabajamos.***

June 16, 1939

Mama, here is a picture of the packinghouse where we work.

–inscription on back of photograph by Inez Florez



White women were the mainstay of packinghouses at the turn of the 20th century, including those posed here in front of Orange Growers Cash Association Packinghouse, Redlands (c. 1905). Immigrant women joined their ranks, similarly anxious to earn enough to support themselves in California.

A. K. Smiley Public Library, Redlands.



“I Remember Bryn Mawr,” held in 1987, reunited a thousand residents of the small, predominantly Latino citrus community of Bryn Mawr, in Eastern San Bernardino County. Community members like Jenny M. (Rojas) Ramos and Eva Yanez pledged to keep their town’s agricultural history alive, despite housing tracts crowding out citrus trees and only remnants of former packinghouses still in view.

Loma Linda Area Parks and Historical Society.



Promotional materials for the 1929 Valencia Orange Show in Anaheim proclaimed Ruby Riley and Lucille Jones of Santa Ana-Tustin Mutual Packing Association to be an “exhibition in teamwork” whose “lightning-like hands” propelled them to the World Championship orange packing contest. Paid by the box, speed meant packing hundreds of boxes a day to make a living wage.

Herald-Examiner Collection, Los Angeles Public Library.



Today the few packinghouses remaining in Riverside employ a fraction of the women once needed. Nearly all who remain are Latina, including women pictured here in 2017 at Corona-College Heights Orange & Lemon Association’s packinghouse, where fruit picked from the groves at California Citrus State Historic Park is brought.

Photo by Thomas McGovern, for the collaborative project with Juan Delgado, *Manos, Espaldas y Blossoms* (2017), Courtesy the artists.



Elizabeth Carranza has worked at Corona-College Heights Orange & Lemon Association’s packinghouse since 1981 and is still the fastest packer. She even outpaces machinery intended to do her job for her.

Photo by Thomas McGovern, for the collaborative project with Juan Delgado, *Manos, Espaldas y Blossoms* (2017), Courtesy the artists.

Child's Play?

From lighting smudge pots to picking low-hanging fruit, citrus was never really child's play. It was required labor for families in which everyone needed to work and when educational opportunities remained unequal. Students from Sherman Institute, a federal Indian boarding school in Riverside, for instance, spent long days hard at work at nearby Fontana Farms and Riverside Orange Company. Yet some also experienced the groves as a place of escape after hours, a welcomed relief from the military-styled regimentation of daily life at the boarding school.

Likewise, former *ratas* (boys who scurried beneath the trees to collect fallen fruit, nicknamed "rats") and other youth describe "snowball" fights with rotted oranges. These playful moments became increasingly rare as children matured into more demanding jobs, taking them out of their classrooms at various times of year. Many remember being summoned by siren to light smudge pots when temperatures dropped low enough to freeze crops. This messy work blackened clothes (and just about everything else) and made children late for school. Today, many local residents still recall the difficult but adventurous time spent as youth in and around the groves.

During the morning break [from picking], when our parents would warm up burritos in the coals, a lot of the kids would get together and start orange fights. We'd just pick up the ones already laying on the ground, a little rotten so they'd just kind of fall apart when they hit you. God, it was so much fun running around doing that.

—Gary Lemos, East Highland, 2017



Irving School students (shown here in the 1920s) came from Riverside's multiracial Eastside, which developed primarily as a citrus labor community. Some sarcastically called it "Irving College," since many of its students went no further than 6th grade. It became a focal point in 1965 when the school district became the first in the nation to desegregate voluntarily.

Riverside Metropolitan Museum.



Boys playing at the headwaters of the Gage Canal (c. 1895), which carried water for irrigation over 20 miles from San Bernardino to Riverside. The canal was where many youngsters learned to swim. Lifelong Riverside resident Bob Lynn learned to surf, too, by riding the canal on a piece of plywood pulled by a horse running alongside!

Riverside Metropolitan Museum.



The Sherman Institute trained Native American students as part of their boarding school curriculum to work in fields and factories. Administrators compelled many students to participate in the school's "outing program" (1902-1940), which provided cheap labor to local businesses, homes, and groves.

Sherman Indian Museum, Riverside.



Grove maintenance as staged here (c. 1910) was truly a family affair. It included small children with a baby (foreground), and a boy perched high on the ladder-and-pulley system used to foist tents over fruit trees. These tents were filled with sulfuric acid and cyanide to fumigate crops by killing pests and disease.

California Historical Society.



Bob Lynn, a third-generation citrus grower in Riverside and a founding docent of California Citrus State Historic Park, with his "babysitter" Greta, in 1935. As a child, his job was to clean smudge pots, dig irrigation furrows under the trees, and fill gopher holes with newspapers and mud.

Courtesy Bob and Marty Lynn.



Manuel Venegas of Riverside (pictured in 2017) worked in citrus for much of his early life. As a five-year-old rata he collected fallen fruit, supplementing what his father and brother picked. At age ten, he got his own clippers and crates to fill. He continued to work weekends through high school. The experience motivated him to find other career paths. At seventeen, he joined the Marine Corps.

Photo by Kate Alexandrite, Courtesy Relevancy and History Project.

Sweet and Sour: Stories and Storytellers Today

California Citrus State Historic Park is on land that Cahuilla, Luiseño, Serrano, and Tongva/Gabrieliño still call home. Native Americans in California continue to thrive despite the cultural upheavals and high rates of mortality resulting from Spanish, Mexican, and American occupation. Yet citrus is a powerful emblem of the changes wrought upon the land and its first peoples. Franciscan missionaries first brought orange trees to California. This water- and labor-intensive crop became part of the large-scale ranches and European-styled agricultural methods that displaced Native Americans, altered the precolonial cultural landscape, and disrupted the indigenous subsistence economy. In the aftermath, Native Americans toiled to construct irrigation canals and as citrus-related laborers. Some also gained sustenance from orchards they planted.

The land occupied by California Citrus State Historic Park reveals the contours of indigenous migratory routes connecting desert to sea. From almost anywhere in the park, one sees mountains used to narrate Native American creation stories. Sacred canyon sites nearby mark the solstice. So, while the Historic Park commemorates the citrus industry, it also connects us to times and traditions well beyond the specific advent of these particular groves.

The sweet smell of orange blossoms at the park in spring, for instance, transported recent Afghani visitors to memories of their home before war, when a variety of citrus flourished in Afghanistan. Another visitor who spotted the sour *kalamansi* (calamondin) fruit ripening in the park's varietal grove recounted her Filipino grandparents' recipes. Others reflected on *etrog* (citron) used during the Jewish holiday of Sukkot, and various kinds of citrus used to signify good luck and prosperity during Chinese New Year. Savoring the sweet and sour stories of the California past links us to myriad world populations in sometimes unseen ways. Preserving California's multifaceted and diverse citrus history also allows us to reckon together with the opportunities and challenges of global migrations—of people, natural resources, and cultural traditions.



William Madrigal, Sr., and his family at California Citrus State Historic Park, May 2017, shared Bird Singing and Dancing that has been an important part of Cahuilla tribes in Southern California and Arizona for centuries. Bird Songs tell the story of creation and migration of Cahuilla people around the continent and connect back to this place, right here.

Photo by Kate Alexandrite, Courtesy Relevancy and History Project.

Each Bird Song tells a little part of the story of our people and our journeys...back to this land where we are today.

—William Madrigal, Sr., Mountain Cahuilla Lead Bird Singer



Lovella Singer, Executive Director of the Dora Nelson African American Art and History Museum (Perris), talks with park visitors at the May 2017 Sweet N Sour Community Celebration. African Americans have often been left out of the archival record, but local historians reveal the many ways in which they were active participants in the culture and economy of California's citrus landscape.

Photo by Kate Alexandrite, Courtesy Relevancy and History Project.



Mesbah D. and her family are refugees from Afghanistan who participated in the March 2017 Sweet N Sour harvest celebration at the park. By sharing memories of orange blossom festivals held back home in the Nangarhar province, where official celebrations include poetry competitions, they put a human face on global migrations of people, food, and cultural heritage.

Photo by Kate Alexandrite, Courtesy Relevancy and History Project.



Born in 1922, Simona Valero has lived her entire life in Casa Blanca, a historically working-class citrus community of Riverside. Her stories of Italian, Japanese, and Mexican neighbors, segregation, meeting her bracero husband (a Mexican national brought to Riverside to work citrus), and musical accomplishments offer a vibrant portrait of place.

Photo by Gabriel Luis Acosta, Courtesy *Riverside Magazine*.



Park Docent Jay Dhruva and Curator of University of California, Riverside's Citrus Variety Collection Tracy Kahn serve citrus at an annual tasting event, March 2017. Community members and growers advocated in the 1970s for the formation of an agricultural greenbelt and parks to preserve the citrus identity of the region and stem sprawl. Some became founding docents when California Citrus State Historic Park opened in 1993. Volunteers are still essential to park operation.

Photo by Kate Alexandrite, Courtesy Relevancy and History Project.



Participants in Save Our Chinatown Committee's 5th Annual Ching Ming (Grave-sweeping Day), Olivewood Cemetery, Riverside (2013) pay their respects and make offerings to Riverside's Chinese pioneers. Save Our Chinatown Committee was formed in 2008 by local preservationists working to protect from inappropriate development the historic Chinatown archaeological site (at Tequesquite and Brockton Avenues) in Riverside, one of several sites where Chinese American and citrus history intertwine.

Courtesy James Koga.

**Relevancy
& History** PROJECT



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