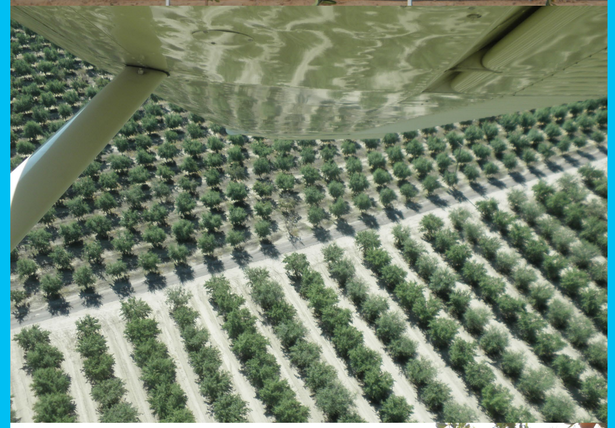
CALIFORNIA CITRUS PRODUCTION

THOMAS C. MULHOLLAND

A retrospective …















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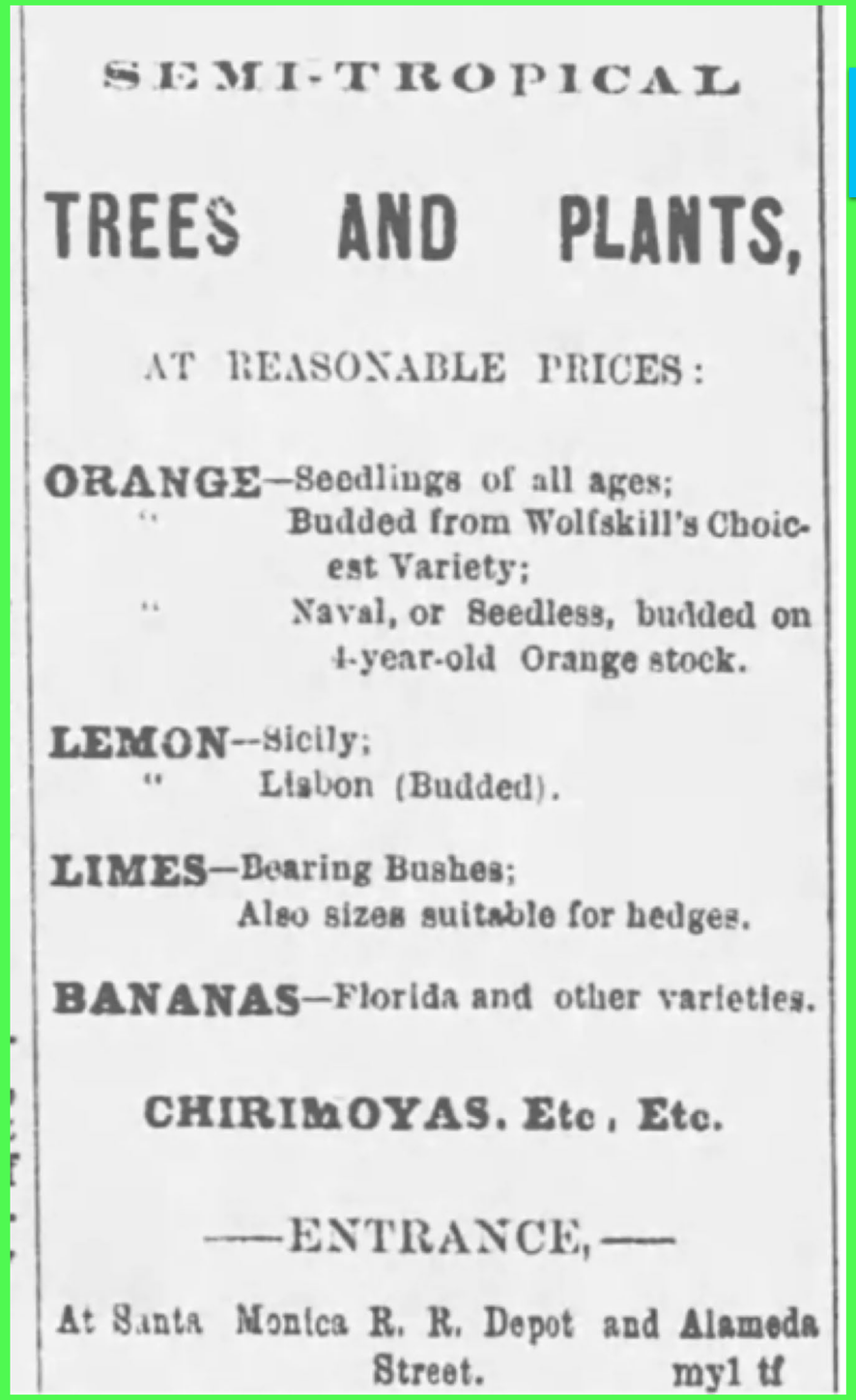
Spanish missionaries in San Diego planted the first orange trees in California in 1769. Oranges were brought by the Spaniards as they settled. The first grove in Southern California was planted at the Mission San Gabriel in 1804.



SEMI-TROPICAL

TREES AND PLANTS,

AT REASONABLE PRICES:

ORANGE—Seedlings of all ages;
" Budded from Wolfskill's Choicest Variety;
" Naval, or Seedless, budded on 4-year-old Orange stock.

LEMON—Sicily;
" Lisbon (Budded).

LIMES—Bearing Bushes;
Also sizes suitable for hedges.

BANANAS—Florida and other varieties.

CHIRIMOYAS. Etc, Etc.

—ENTRANCE,—

At Santa Monica R. R. Depot and Alameda Street. myl tf

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William Wolfskill is considered the "father of the early citrus industry." Before he passed away in 1866, Wolfskill developed the Valencia industry for orange juice. Wolfskill was one the largest landowner and wealthiest persons of his time. He was also the greatest producer of tablet grapes and wine grapes.

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The “Mother Orange Tree” at Tidwell’s Bar, Butte County, California. A sweet orange seedling planted in 1856. In 1965, this was the oldest and largest orange tree in California. (Photo, about 1930.)

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L.F. CRAM RANCH TREE

Old orange seedling on the L.F. Cram ranch, East Highland, California, planted in 1869. Until it was removed in 1961, it was probably the oldest and largest orange tree in Southern California. (Photo, 1930)





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Eliza Tibbets, born in Cincinnati, was an activist and horticulturalist. She introduced the first Navel orange tree in California at Riverside in 1873. The parent tree was one of the two that were imported by US Department of Agriculture from Brazil.

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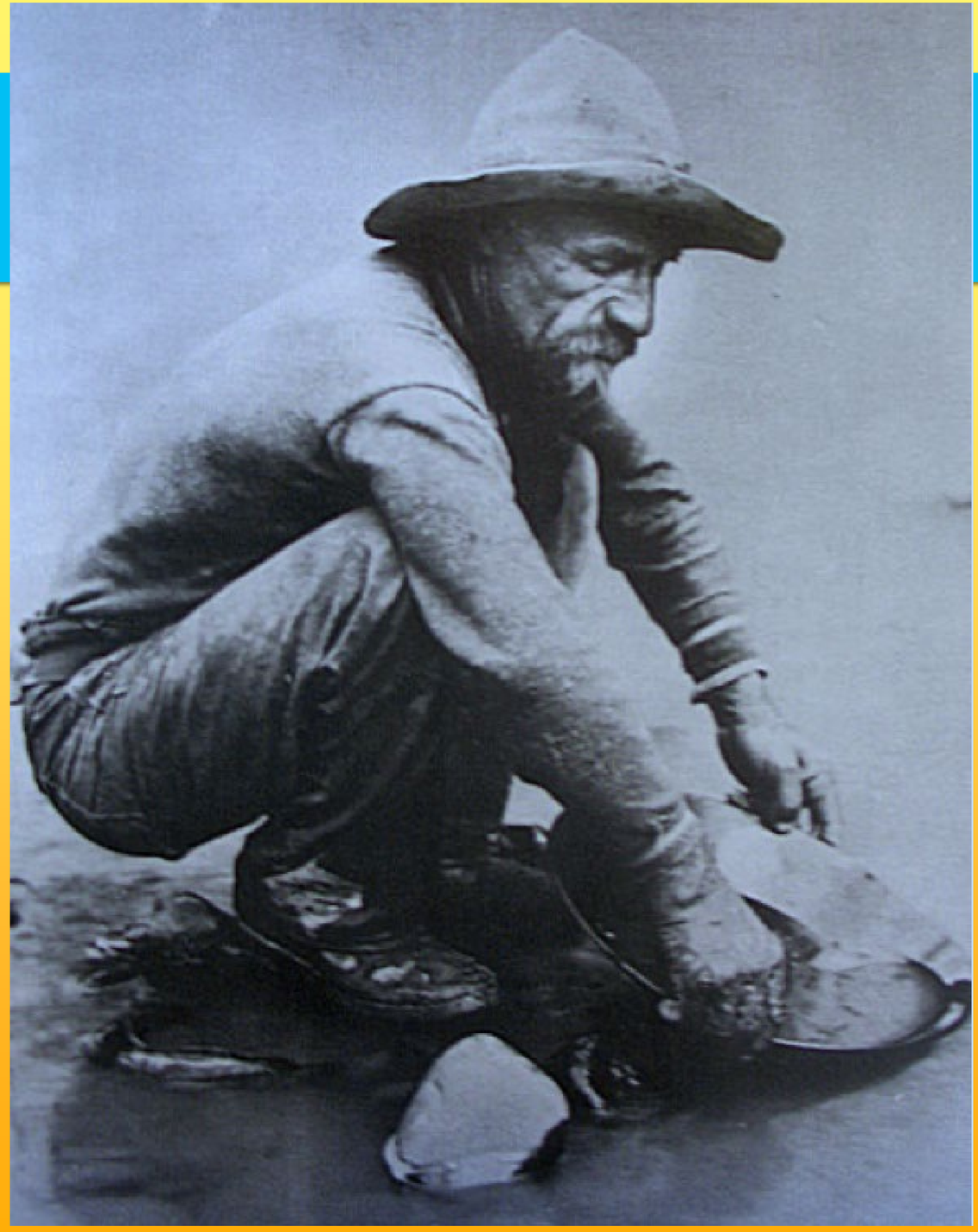
The California Gold Rush of 1848-1855 and the transcontinental railroad completed in 1870, moved the United States into an age of industrialization and economic development. They also played a critical role in the success of the citrus industry by allowing farmers to supply their produce to a national market.



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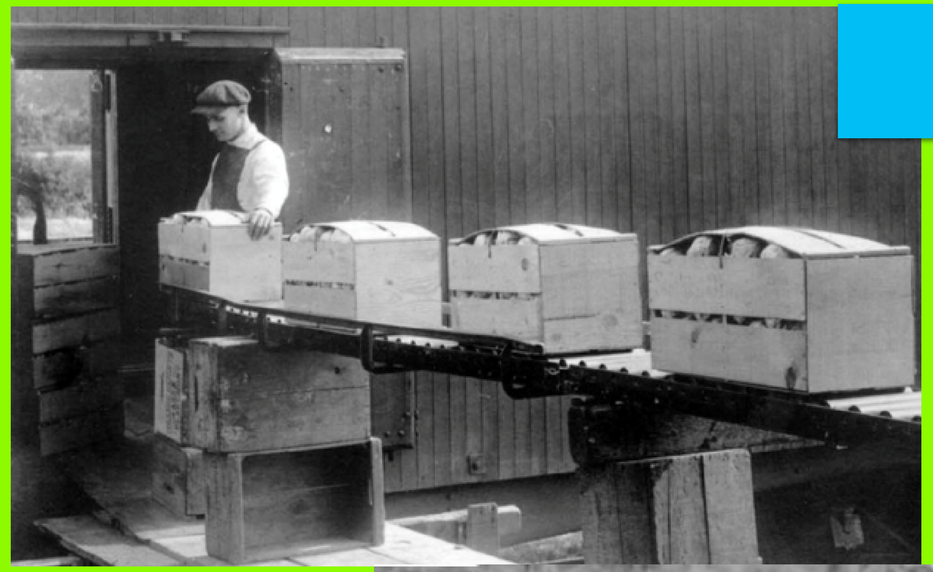

Wooden boxes, each filled with seventy pounds of oranges, were loaded onto a rail car for shipment.



The Southern California Fruit Exchange was organized in 1893. Fruit was prorated amongst grower members to equal chance for successful delivery and sales. In 1905, it was renamed the California Fruit Growers Exchange as it represented 45% of the California citrus industry. Finally, in 1952, its name was changed to Sunkist Growers, Inc. By 1954, cardboard containers comprised forty-three percent of the growers' shipping containers, reducing the demand for box shook.

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Cardboard cartons replaced wooden boxes as the shipping container of choice in 1955.

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Yield

Citrus yield has increased considerably over the past 100 years (Figure 4). While approximately 100 boxes were harvested per acre in the early 19th century, the yield has now reached some 300 boxes of oranges and 400 boxes of lemons (Figure 4) [7]. The yield of navel and Valencia may differ considerably for any given year. On average however, the yields are very similar with Valencia oranges being slightly more productive.

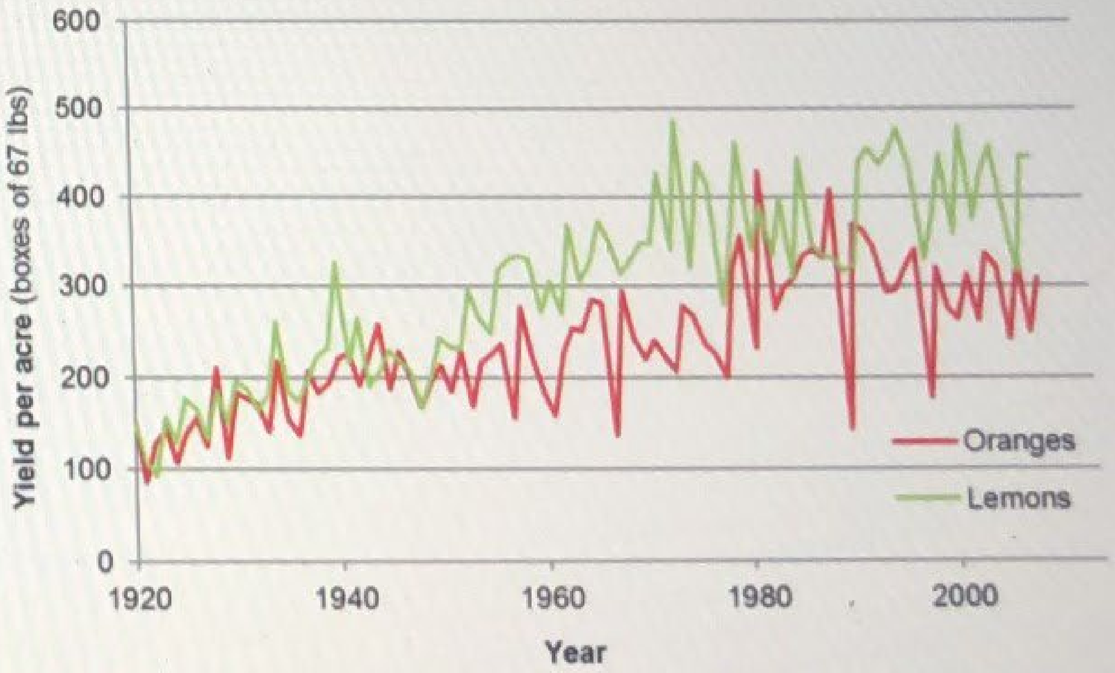

Figure 4: Orange and lemon yields since 1920 in California [7].

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With the construction of the Central Valley Project on the Friant River, the expansion moved to the eastern San Joaquin Valley and later to the Southern Valley. Navels were the predominate cultivar.



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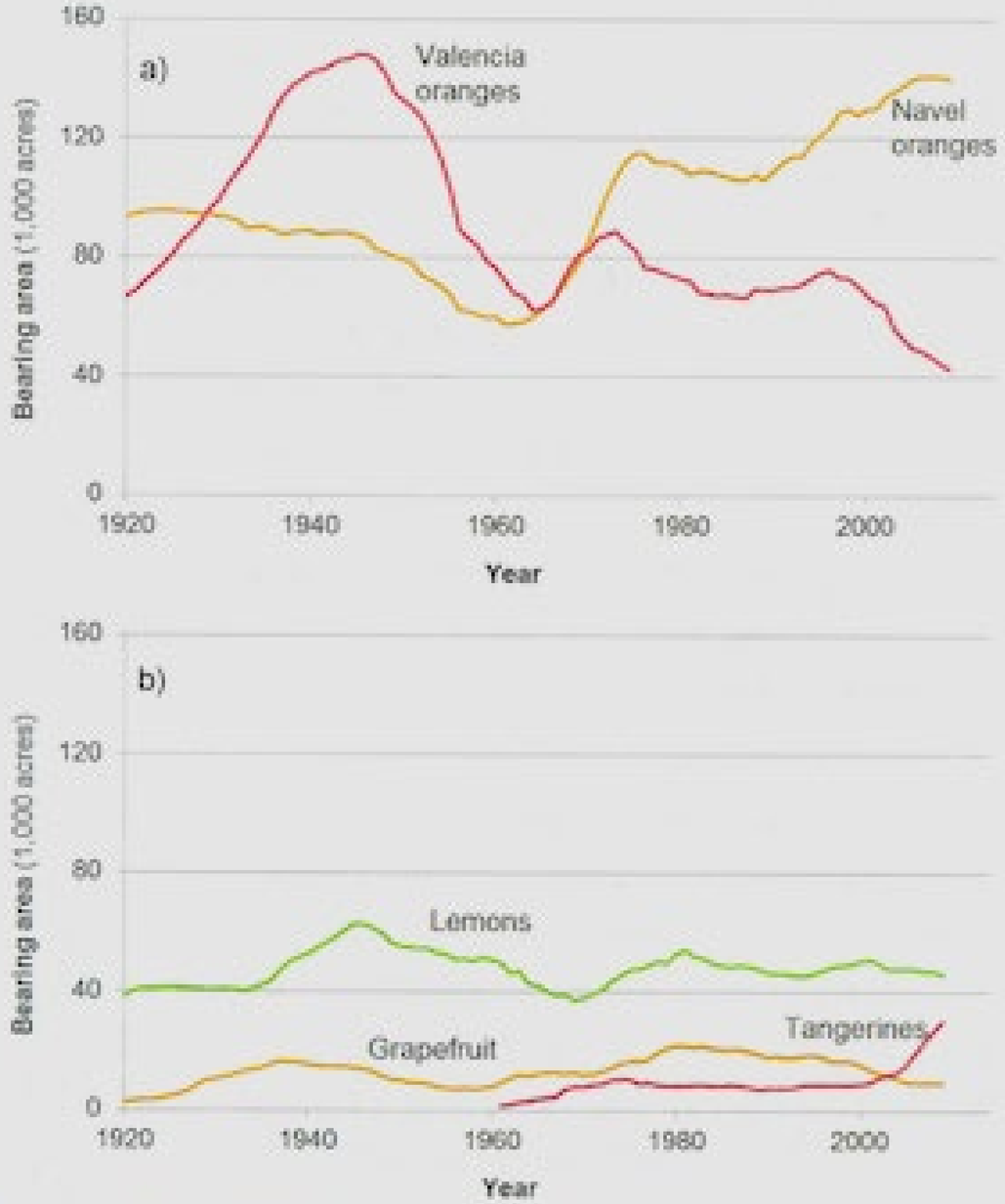
Until the 1930’s, roughly 70% of the oranges produced in the U.S. came from California. Then Florida became the dominant citrus producer with over 75% of market share. Today 70% of California’s orange production is in three counties, Fresno, Tulare, and Kern. Ventura and Riverside counties still are important growing areas.



Figures 1a and 1b: Area of bearing citrus trees in California since 1920 [7].

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CROP	1998 Bearing	2022 Bearing	1998 Non-Bearing	2022 Non-Bearing	1998 TOTAL	2022 TOTAL
NAVEL ORANGES	128,244	110,507	8,270	3,079	136,514	113,586
VALENCIA ORANGES	73,567	25,528	4,739	697	78,307	26,225
LEMONS	47,248	46,692	6,471	4,900	53,720	51,592
GRAPEFRUIT	14,502	7,968	606	626	15,108	8,595
PUMMELOS	2,641	1,032	1,151	199	3,792	1,230
TANGERINES	8,253	63,280	1,841	3,867	10,094	67,148
LIMES	695	512	22	48	717	561

1998 and 2022 CALIFORNIA CITRUS ACREAGE REPORTS
California Agricultural Statistics Service

