Cypress Street Barrio Historic Context Statement

Introduction

Cypress Street Barrio comprises a small, but historically significant neighborhood in Orange. Located near the northwest corner of the Old Town Orange National Register and local register historic districts, the heart of the barrio consists of the 400 block of North Cypress Street between Sycamore and Walnut Avenues.[1] The approximate boundaries of the extent of the Cypress Street Barrio are Rose Avenue to the north, Glassell Street to the east, Almond Street to the south and the railroad tracks to the west (Figure 1).

Cypress Street Barrio's development was closely tied to the citrus industry and its Mexican-American workers, and it was well established in Orange by 1920.[2] The barrio's transformation from a rural picker village to an urban blue-collar barrio parallels urbanization patterns of other citrus *colonias* ("villages*")* in Orange County.[3] Segregation permeated nearly every aspect of life in the *colonia,*[4] yet the cultural and community life remained rich, intricate, and stable.

Beginnings: 1890s – 1930s

Citrus did not become the area's predominant agricultural product until the early 1890s, after an earlier grape crop failed, and other fruits and nuts were harvested in the 1880s. Other early industries in Orange included rope and wire manufacturing, a cotton mill, and a lumber company. But by 1893, citrus had become so dominant that the Orange County Fruit Exchange (now known as Sunkist) was organized and incorporated. The headquarters for this agricultural cooperative was constructed at the northeast corner of Glassell Street and Almond Avenue. The location of the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe rail line three blocks from the center of the Orange business district provided opportunities for the development of industrial facilities for the receipt, packing and shipping of locally raised agricultural products. This arrangement led to the construction of several fruit packinghouses in the late 19th century. These facilities were quickly inundated, shipping approximately 350 train-carloads of oranges yearly, in addition to lemons, walnuts, dried fruit, potatoes, peanuts, grapes, and cabbage (Figures 2-3).

Many of the packinghouses constructed during this boom in Orange's citrus industry were located just to the west and south of Cypress Street Barrio.[5] With the growth of the citrus

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[1] On the 100 block of South Cypress, south of the heart of Cypress Street Barrio, another small community came into being: it is often referred to as "El Otro Barrio" ("The Other Barrio").

[2] Brigandi, Phil, *Orange: The City 'Round the Plaza* (Encinitas, CA: Heritage Media Corporation, 1997) 96.

[3] Gonzalez, Gilbert G., *Labor and Community: Mexican Citrus Worker Villages in a Southern California County, 1900-1950.* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994) 15. Gonzalez defines a *colonia* as a settlement popularly known as a "camp" on the fringes of the town, but very close to the area of employment.

[4] Gonzalez, Gilbert G., "The Los Angeles County Strike of 1933," a working paper for the Center for Research on Latinos in a Global Society, University of California, Irvine, 1996. 9 May 2005. <http://repositories.cdlib.org/cgi/>.

[5] The Villa Park Orchard's Association Packinghouse complex, built in 1919, is located at 350 North Cypress Street. This former Santiago Orange Growers Association (SOGA) packing plant was built to take advantage of the Santa Fe Railway on the west side and the Pacific Electric on the east. The Villa Park Orchards Association's offices are located one block north of the packinghouse at 544 North Cypress Street in a building that was formerly the segregated Cypress Street School, built in 1931 to educate the Mexican and Mexican-American children of Cypress Street Barrio and El Modena.

industry, there was a demand for more workers in the area. Mexican citrus workers had settled on Cypress Street beginning in 1893 when a packinghouse was built on the 300 block of North Cypress to facilitate shipping using the nearby Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad but during the first two decades of the 20th century, additional citrus workers settled in the neighborhood due to its proximity to work. In addition, some of the packinghouses provided worker housing in the neighborhood.

Between 1918 and 1924, Mexican labor became indispensable to the citrus industry throughout California. Among many Cypress Street Barrio families, husbands picked and hauled, children picked, and women washed, graded, and packed the fruit (Figures 4-5). As citrus work in Orange was seasonal (six months out of the year), Cypress Barrio residents often migrated to work in other areas in the late fall and winter. For growers, having an easily accessible, stable, and housed workforce assured a lesser chance of labor problems or shortages.[6] Initially, Mexican families in the Cypress Street Barrio lived in older homes that were moved onto the low-lying properties near the railroads. As the area developed, homes ranged from a tenement area called "La Vecinidad" (Figures 6-7) to Queen Anne, Classical Revival, and Arts and Crafts homes and bungalows (Figure 8). "La Vecinidad" (sometimes referred to as "Mr. Lewis' Court") was a self-contained neighborhood with several homes and small businesses located at 442 North Cypress Street. It was established in the early 1920s, and torn down in the 1970s. The Cypress Street Barrio still retains some of its original early 20th-century character in the form of small bungalows, commercial buildings, and packinghouses (Figure 9).

Residents of the Cypress Street Barrio have remained a tight-knit group throughout the history of the neighborhood. Many of the new residents arrived from the central plateau of Mexico: the states of Jalisco, Michoacan, and Zacatecas, in particular. Many were related to each other, as their families came north from the same villages, particularly the village of Santa Maria de Enmedio of Jalisco.[7] Some families have lived in the Cypress Street Barrio for more than four generations.[8]

To support the Mexican-American population, Cypress Street Barrio's small businesses included grocery stores, bakeries, tortillerias, restaurants, bathhouses, automobile shops, barbershops, and pool halls. Many of these businesses were owned and operated by Mexican-American families that lived in the neighborhood as well (Figure 10). Among the long-standing businesses along North Cypress Street were the Cayatano "Pete" Cruz grocery store at 440 North Cypress, (Figure 11), Filiberto Paredes/Simon Luna/Emilia Luna's grocery store at 418 North Cypress and Pete's Pool Hall at 405 North Cypress. Emilia Luna's grocery store has operated for over six decades in the community.

Recognizing that the residents of Cypress Street barrio were among the most underserved in Orange, The Friendly Center, Inc., one of the oldest non-profit family resource centers in Southern California, formed to provide much needed services within the community. Originally called the Orange Mexican Friendly Center, this Mission Revival style structure was built at 424 North Cypress in 1922 with funds from the Orange Community Men's Bible Class on land donated by major Cypress Street Barrio land holder James Fielding Lewis. When it opened, the

[6] Gonzales, Gilbert G., "The Mexican Has Played the Role of. . . Atlas," in the *Journal of Orange County Studies 3/4, Fall 1989/Spring 1990*: 24.
[7] Orange Unified School District, "Cypress Street Retrospective," video.
[8] Wheeler, Mary Lou, "Survey of Cypress Street and Adjacent Areas." Unpublished manuscript, California State University at Fullerton, 1973. See also the "Cypress Street Retrospective" video.

center offered "Americanization" courses, homemaking classes, health clinics, and childcare services to Cypress Street Barrio residents. (Figure 12)

Challenges and Triumphs: 1930s – 1950s

Two events defined the 1930s and 1940s in the Cypress Street Barrio: the Citrus Strike of 1936, and the *Mendez v. Westminster* court case officially ending school segregation in the area in 1946-1947. Fruit picking, the fundamental way of life for many Mexican-Americans in the Cypress Street Barrio, was difficult work, and disagreement often broke out between picking crews and their employers, the fruit growers and packinghouses. Pickers took issue with their low wages, the growers' frequent withholding of payment until after the harvest, and on-the-spot firing, which was not uncommon. By the 1930s the pickers had begun to organize, and shortly before the 1936 Valencia orange picking season, Celso Medina, an El Modena resident, was elected chief organizer for the major pickers union, the *Confederación de Campesinos y Obreros Mexicanos* (Confederation of Mexican Peasants and Workers). Medina held meetings all around Orange County in an effort to rally support for union demands. On June 11, 1936, after the growers refused to meet with union representatives, the "largest strike in the history of the citrus industry" began, as "nearly 3,000 pickers across Orange County walked out during the height of Valencia season."[9] The Cypress Street Barrio neighborhood was so centrally involved in the strike that California Highway Patrolmen searched the records of all parked cars on North Cypress Street looking for "imported agitators and aliens" during one of the strikers' committee meetings, which was reported to have brought over 1,000 workers to the barrio.[10]

During the strike the growers frantically hired replacement workers, along with armed guards to protect them. When the growers continually refused to meet with the pickers, violence broke out and over 100 strike leaders were arrested. On July 27, 1936, the strike finally ended, when the Mexican Counsel in Los Angeles helped negotiate a settlement that granted slightly higher wages and an end of withholding payment to the pickers. These successes were short-lived, however, because in the wake of the strike, growers changed their employment approach and started hiring outside picking crews, eventually leading to a system of seasonal employment for Mexican nationals rather than the Mexican-American laborers residing in Orange.[11] Another impact to Cypress Street Barrio residents was the decline in citrus farming in the area in the late 1940s. However, since the nearby packinghouses were able to import fruit from throughout Southern and Central California, barrio residents were not as immediately affected by the decline in the citrus industry as their compatriots in El Modena. Still, many barrio residents began to seek out new jobs outside the citrus industry.

Throughout World War II and the postwar period, Mexican-Americans found work in fields previously closed to them, including jobs in construction, manufacturing, and defense work. Cypress Street Barrio resident Santiago Ramirez became Secretary-Treasurer of the International Hod Carriers', Building and Common Laborers' Union of America in 1946. At around this same time, nearly 50% of all men in the barrio had jobs in the construction industry.[12] In addition, several men from the Cypress Street Barrio enlisted for military service during World War II. Due to these changes in the labor force, growers in Orange County found

[9] Brigandi 100.
[10] Gonzalez, *Labor and Community* 153.
[11] Brigandi 100-104.
[12] Paul Guzman, Board Member of the Orange Barrio Historical Society (O.B.H.S.), interview, 4 June 2005, "Shades of Orange." Other Board Members of O.B.H.S. include Augie Morales, Leo Castro, Luis Garcia, and Philip Colin.

themselves with a shortage of labor and supported the widespread use of temporary contract workers: Filipinos, German prisoners-of-war, wartime refugees, Jamaicans and Navajos were hired throughout these periods to fill the void. By 1946, 80% of Orange County's picking force was comprised of Mexican nationals through the *bracero* program.[13] Two bracero camps were built on North Cypress Street in the 1940s; one of these camps housed German POWs during the war (the exact location of these camps is not known).[14]

With the diminishing role of Cypress Street Barrio families in the citrus industry, burgeoning wartime and postwar industrialization with increased job opportunities for Mexican Americans, and the rapid suburbanization of Orange and other surrounding cities of Orange County, the Cypress Street Barrio gradually became a blue-collar *barrio.* Little new housing appears to have been built over this period, however. In an effort to provide affordable housing to barrio residents, The Friendly Center instituted an innovative plan for affordable housing in the Cypress Street Barrio by replacing housing in "La Vecinidad" with triplex units. Other new residential construction may have been deterred by a change in the City of Orange's zoning laws in 1946. At this time, large sections of the Cypress Street Barrio area, which had had a mix of residential, commercial, and industrial uses throughout its history, were rezoned for light industrial. Because of this zoning, residents could not qualify for permits to rebuild or remodel their homes.[15] This zoning led to further deterioration of the housing stock, and many houses were eventually condemned and torn down.

For residents of Cypress Street Barrio, isolation and segregation from white residents of Orange were unfortunate facets of life, extending to many popular recreational activities: swimming, baseball and softball, and movies. For example, Mexican-American children could only use the local public pool (Plunge) on Mondays because it was drained on Monday night;[16] Mexican-Americans were also restricted from playing ball in public parks (Figure 13). Segregation impacted Mexican-Americans most, however, in terms of schooling. In El Modena, after the Roosevelt Elementary School was constructed in 1923, the local school district began enrolling Anglo[17] students in the new school, reserving the older Lincoln Elementary for Mexican-Americans.[18] In the Cypress Street Barrio, the old Lemon Street School educated both Mexican and Anglo children, but in separate buildings. Mexican and Mexican-American students were instructed in "La Caballeriza" ("The Barn"), a two-room wooden schoolhouse behind the Lemon Street School (Figure 14). [19] When the Lemon Street School was condemned in the late 1920s,

[13] Between 1942 and 1964, 5 million Mexican nationals participated in this program established by a bilateral agreement between the United States and Mexico to address the labor shortage brought on by World War II. The workers were commonly known as *braceros* because they worked with their *brazos*, or arms (Gonzalez, *Journal of Orange County Studies* 19-27).
[14] Neither of these camps is extant.
[15] Wheeler, "Enforced Relocation," np.
[16] Gobbel, Marge and JD. Oral interview by Christopher Arriola, 15 August 1991. Stanford Library, Special Collection, Box 3, Folder 2. Note that all references to the Stanford Library Special Collection are from <http://www.mendezvwestminster.com/_wsn/page2.html.>
[17] The term "Anglo" here refers to White, or Caucasian. In some sources "Anglo" may refer to non-Hispanic people. The students at Roosevelt School were Anglos, in addition to light-skinned Mexican-Americans and Asians.
[18] "El Modena Notes," *Orange Daily News*, 19 March, 1923. Stanford Library, Special Collection, Box 2, Folder 2.
[19] "La Caballeriza" was located where Chapman University's garage currently stands. (source: "Cypress Street Retrospective")

the Cypress Street School was built for Mexican and Mexican-American children in 1931, using scrap lumber from the Lemon Street School (Figure 15).[20]

In the 1940s, Mexican-Americans in Orange County rallied in protest of school segregation. In Westminster, a town about 15 miles west of Orange, Gonzalo Mendez, a successful tenant farmer, along with a group of Mexican-American World War II Veterans, filed a lawsuit in federal court challenging school segregation in four Orange County school districts.[21] The 1945 suit, filed on behalf of 5,000 Mexican-American children in the area[22] with help from the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC),[23] sought a court injunction that would order integration of schools in the Westminster, Santa Ana, Garden Grove and El Modena school districts. Federal District Judge Paul McCormick[24] ruled in favor of Mendez, asserting that segregation "foster[s] antagonisms in the children and suggest[s] inferiority among them where none exists."[25] The decision was quickly appealed, and the case moved to the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco. Recognizing the possibility of the case reaching the Supreme Court and yielding results on a national scale, several minority groups came out in support of Mendez, penning *amicus curiae* or "friend of the court" briefs. Authors of these briefs included Thurgood Marshall for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), American Jewish Congress, American Civil Liberties Union, National Lawyers Guild, Japanese-American Citizens League, and California Attorney General Robert W. Kenny.[26] The briefs strengthened Mendez's case, and on April 14, 1947, the court ruled that "school districts could not segregate on the basis of national origin."[27] In the wake of *Mendez*, California Governor Earl Warren – who would go on to write the decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court – pushed the state legislature to repeal laws segregating Asian and Native American schoolchildren.[28]

Very little physical evidence remains from this chapter of the Cypress Street barrio's history. The most prominent example is the formerly segregated Cypress Street School at 544 North Cypress Street, which today serves as office space for the Villa Park Orchards Association (Figure 16).

Throughout this period, The Friendly Center remained an important facet of life in the barrio. During the late 1940s, the popular *jamaicas,* or church street fairs, were held in front of the Friendly Center. Because the number of Protestants in Cypress Barrio diminished by the late 1940s, the center changed its religious focus and became a community center in the 1950s.

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[20] Villa Parks Orchards Association remodeled Cypress Street School to serve as the association's office space in 1981.
[21] Arriola, Christopher J. "A Landmark Little Noted – Until Today," *Los Angeles Times*, 14 April 14 1997.
[22] Lozano, Mimi, editor. "Somos Primos: Dedicated to Hispanic Heritage and Diversity Issues" (October 2002, <www.somosprimos.com/spoct02.htm>)
[23] Cooke, W. Henry. "The Segregation of Mexican-American School Children in Southern California," *School and Society, Volume 67, Number 1745*, (Claremont (Calif.) Graduate School, 5 June 1948).
[24] Arriola (*La Raza*) 185.
[25] Brigandi 104.
[26] McWilliams, Carey. "Is Your Name Gonzalez?" *The Nation 164:302-4*, 15 March 1947, 302; Butler, Bill. "El Modena ruling changed school segregation policy" *Orange City News*, 27 June 1984.
[27] Arriola (*Los Angeles Times*).
[28] Arriola (*Los Angeles Times*).

Recent Past: 1960s – Present

Since the late 1940s and 1950s, the residential nature of the Cypress Street Barrio has diminished. Access to housing choices throughout the City, decreased dependence upon jobs in the citrus industry, and the increasingly industrial nature of the neighborhood, has all contributed to residents leaving the Barrio. Those residents that do continue to live in the neighborhood are generally recent immigrants. Interestingly, many of the most recent residents of Cypress Street Barrio have come from the same city in Mexico that previous residents hailed from – Santa Maria de Enmedio in Jalisco.

The Friendly Center continues to serve area residents. In 1967, the Friendly Center incorporated as a non-profit organization emphasizing housing and education, with a multicultural and multiracial board. As part of this newly defined mission, The Friendly Center, Inc., together with the City of Orange and property owners, created Orange County's first rent-supplement project and upgraded affordable housing in the early 1970s after surveying housing needs of Cypress Barrio residents. The study found that most Cypress Barrio residents liked the area where they lived, given its cohesiveness as a community and children's access to bilingual education in the local schools, but were willing to pay higher rents for "decent places to live."[29] The Center was also involved in the construction of an 8-unit Housing and Urban Development (HUD) apartment building to the east of Cypress Street on Lemon Street in 1972. The Center also commissioned internationally-renowned artist Emigdio Vasquez to paint a mural on the south and east walls of their low-income housing units on North Cypress Street. Completed in 1980, the mural, "Proletariado de Aztlan," which depicts an Aztec Indian, a zoot-suited Pachuco, a miner and railroad engineer, Mexican immigrants, farm workers, and youth from the neighborhood, is a "tribute to the Chicano working class," said the artist (Figure 17).[30] In 1985, The Friendly Center, Inc. moved from its original building, which has been rehabilitated for commercial and residential use, to a new operating office at Killifer Park on North Lemon Street.

Conclusion

Although its character has changed from a rural picker village to an urban blue-collar barrio to an industrial area, the Cypress Street Barrio remains an important Mexican-American, working class neighborhood in the City of Orange. The Friendly Center, Inc. continues to provide much needed education and housing related services to the neighborhood's residents and a number of historically significant buildings remain extant. These buildings include the original Friendly Center, the former Cypress Street School (now administrative offices for Villa Parks Orchards Association), the former Santiago Orange Growers' Association packinghouse (now owned by the Villa Parks Orchards Association), Emilia Luna's grocery store, Emigdio Vasquez' mural on the walls of 430 North Cypress, and the residents' small, wood frame bungalows and cottages (Figures 18-19).

[29] Wheeler, "Enforced Relocation," np.
[30] "For art's sake, for the community, for the working class," *Orange City News*, March 14, 1979.

FIGURES

Figure 1: Cypress Street Barrio, aerial photograph, 1947 (Orange County Archives).

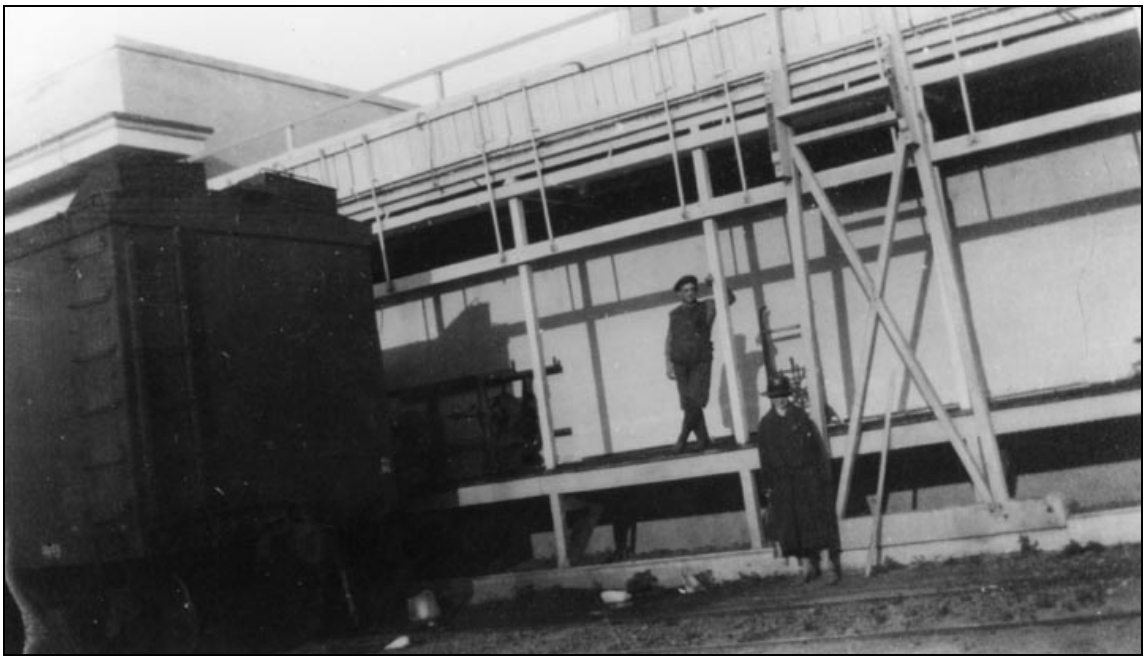

Figure 2: Clift Short (left) standing on loading platform of Santiago Orange Growers Association packinghouse, March 1921. The box car on the railroad track is ready to be loaded with oranges (Orange Public Library, Local History Collection).

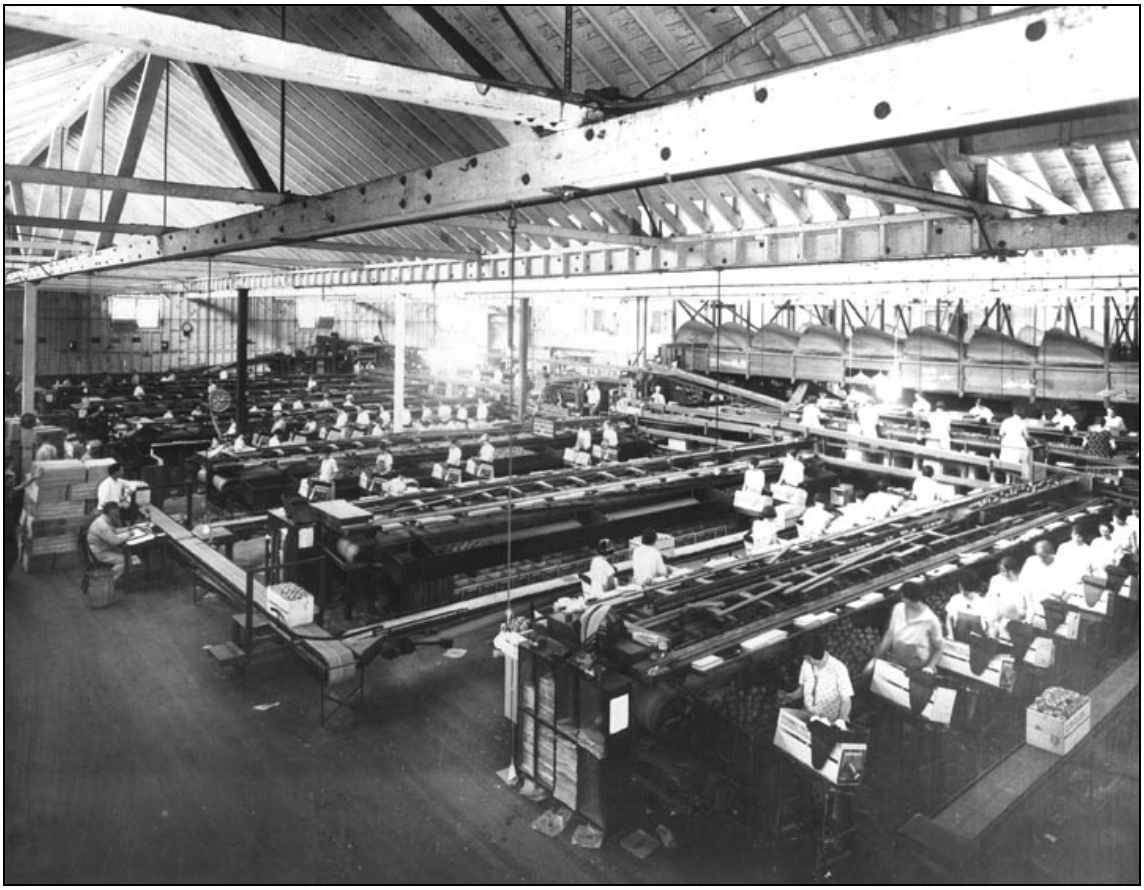

Figure 3: Interior of Santiago Orange Growers' Association packinghouse, ca. 1928 (Orange Public Library, Local History Collection).

Figure 4: Consolidated Orange Growers Association workers, 1938 (Orange Public Library, Local History Collection).

Figure 5: Santiago Orange Growers Association employee group portrait, 1950 (Orange Public Library, Local History Collection).

Figure 6: Bartola Guzman standing in front of "Lewis Court" or "La Vecinidad," at 442 North Cypress Street, 1937 (Collection of Paul Guzman).

Figure 7: Elias Guzman standing in front of chicken coops behind "La Vecinidad" and near the railroad tracks, 1938 (Collection of Paul Guzman).

Figure 8: Home of Jose Sanroman, formerly on the 100 block of Cypress Street (Collection of Luis Garcia).

Figure 9: Santiago Orange Growers Sunkist Packing Plant, 1945-46 (Orange Public Library, Local History Collection).

Figure 10: Alfred Poblano in front of La Casita Restaurant (no longer extant), 129 North Cypress Street, 1948 (Collection of Leo Castro).

Figure 11: 400 block of North Cypress Street showing homes and the Cruz Grocery Store, 1956 (Photographed by William McPherson, Orange Public Library, Local History Collection).

Figure 12: Wedding party at the Friendly Center in Orange, California, 1920 (Orange Public Library, Local History Collection).

Figure 13: The Orange Tomboys, a team within a segregated women's league on West Walnut near North Cypress Street, 1947 (Collection of Paul Guzman).

Figure 14: Mexican American students in front of "The Barn" – the segregated school house for the Lemon Street School, located at Sycamore and Lemon, 1922 (Collection of Orange Barrio Historical Society).

Figure 15: Cypress Street School, 1935 (Orange Public Library, Local History Collection).

Figure 16: Villa Parks Orchards Association, 544 North Cypress Street, formerly Cypress Street School, 2005 (Chattel Architecture).

Figure 17: Emigdio Vasquez' 1980 mural, "Proletariado de Aztlan," located at 430 North Cypress Street (Collection of the artist, Emigdio Vasquez).

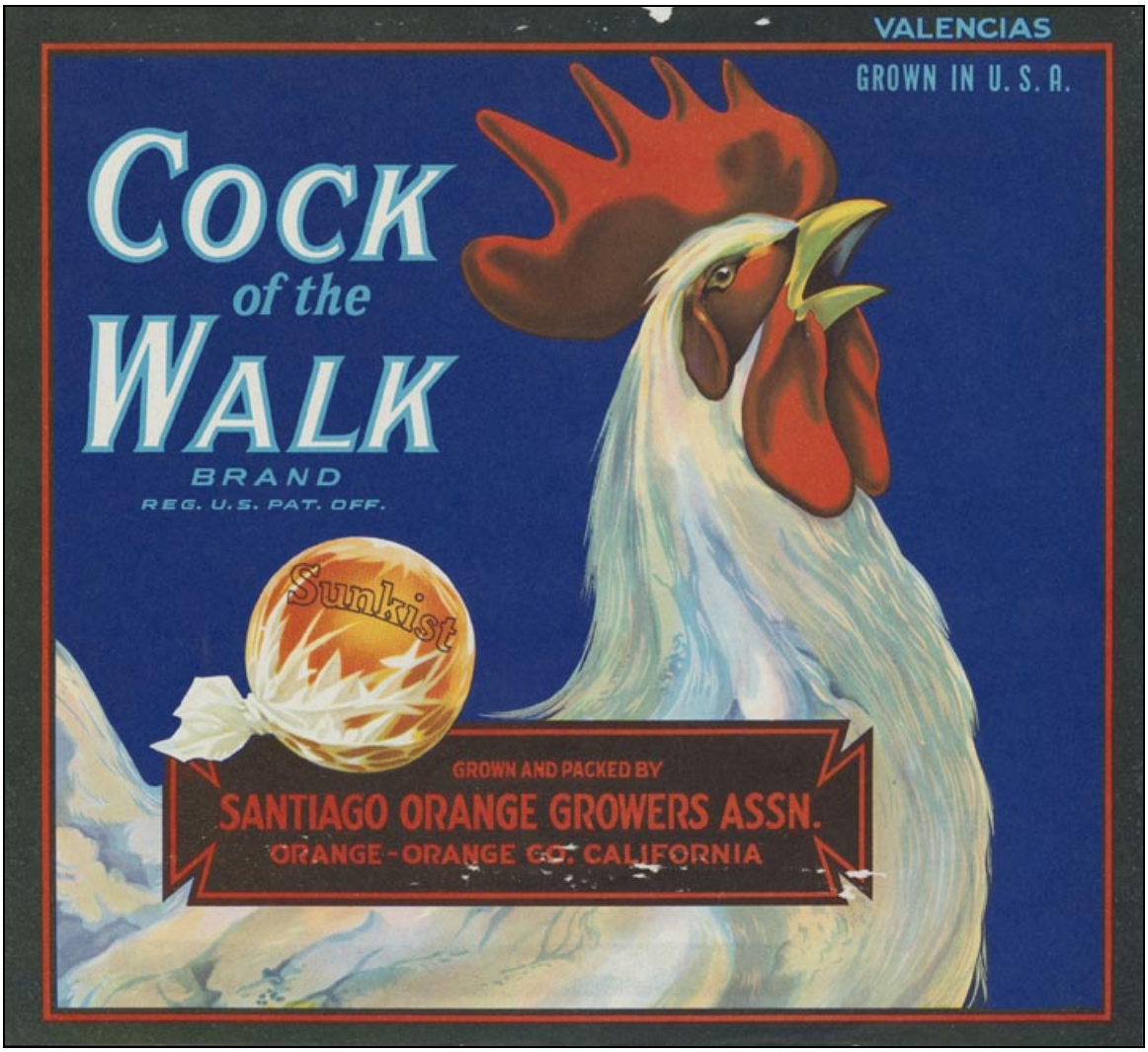

Figure 18: Crate label, Cock of the Walk brand, Santiago Orange Growers Association, 1930 (Orange Public Library, Local History Collection).

Figure 19: Josie Chavez on the train near 129 North Cypress Street, 1942 (Collection of Leo Castro).