

Citrus Roots

Preserving Citrus Heritage Foundation

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Citrus Roots – Preserving Citrus Heritage Foundation

P.O. Box 4038, Balboa, CA 92661 USA
501(c)(3) EIN 43-2102497

The views of the writer may not be the same as this foundation.

*California citrus spurred colonization
The Quest Continues ...*

The Building Boom of 1887 induced the Citrus Gold Rush

Richard H. Barker

The "building cycle" is a wavelike movement which has a range of 16 to 22 years. It is fairly regular and reveals six "building cycles" during a period from 1830 to 1934. The aforementioned is different from the business cycle, for it is driven by production and economic activities. As an example, the business cycles from 1882 to 1909 are shown in the graph below. You will note that they are much shorter in duration. The variance is distorted when a business cycle coincides with the building cycle.

Imagine your own thoughts during a bitter winter storm in January while you were living on the plains in Iowa. Your hypothetical, conjectural mind would flash to what you had read and heard regarding the early stories of Billie (William) Wolfskill or Don Benito (Benjamin) Wilson. Their orange trees produced \$100 to \$125 per tree from their salubrious climate.

Your thoughts then shift to the banners on the passing trains carrying citrus which read an "Orange for Health ... California for Wealth." Suddenly, the image of the bright "California Cornucopia" of Southern Pacific appears in focus: "... a climate for Health and Wealth with no cyclones or blizzards."

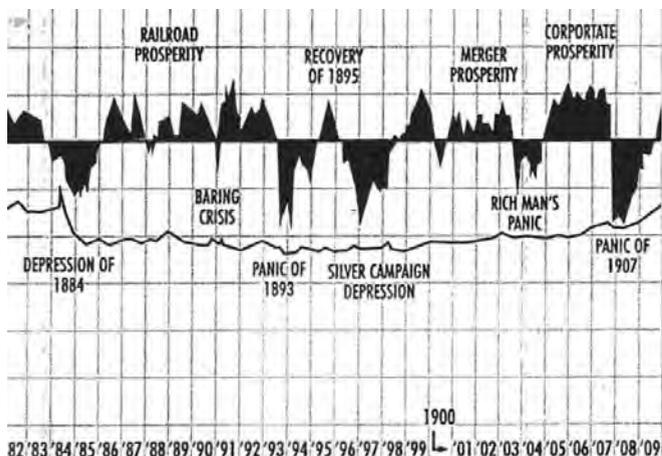
Then, in reverie, before you is the Southern California Citrus Fair, which in 1886 you attended while in Chicago. You were so moved that you saved the supplement which appeared in The Daily Inter Ocean newspaper. An unforgettable spectacular exhibit of Southern California's subtropical climate with its fertile soil which would grow anything!

All of these points have been echoing in a continual robust pulse to see firsthand this paradise! But you were not alone, for in the minds of thousands in search of a healthier lifestyle, this drumbeat never receded.

Southern Pacific Railroad had no real competition within California until the late 1880s. What they did have was a period of stagnation after the Gold Rush played itself out. The population had contracted, for it was considered to be a society of miners. This continued for over 30 years until the Boom of 1887.

California was one of the slowest-growing states, and hence the traffic income was very low. The main goal of the many elaborate exhibits was to change the impression of California to one of a fertile subtropical wonderland where almost any seed would grow, and every description was in the superlative.

In 1873, in an attempt to thwart the slowness, Southern Pacific Company hired a well-known writer, Charles Nordhoff, to write a promotional book "California for Health, Pleasure and Residence". Later this book provided many opportunities as promotional material, and the paraphrase an "ORANGE FOR HEALTH - CALIFORNIA FOR WEALTH" was also drawn from the text. The drumbeat grew louder and never lost its pulsating beat.



Business cycles 1882 to 1909. (The wavy line is the wholesale price index.) Courtesy of M. Boyd and R. H. Barker, "Our Legacy: Baldy View Entrepreneurs".

The Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe built south-southwest, and their wood-burning locomotives were sent over their bridge spanning the Colorado River. They entered Los Angeles in 1885, and now Los Angeles was served by two transcontinental lines.

Santa Fe was a very aggressive company, for it built, bought and negotiated its way through California, and ran tracks from San Bernardino to San Francisco. They came through the El Cajon Pass and began to do for the southern half of the state what Central Pacific did for the region around San Francisco.



Blockbuster ad by Southern Pacific touting California as having "a climate for health and wealth, without cyclones or blizzards".

In the spring of 1886, Santa Fe withdrew from the Transcontinental Traffic Association, and a major price war commenced. The normal fare from St. Louis to Los Angeles was \$125. The "war" caused fares to plunge. By March 1887 the rate had fallen to \$12, and for a few days a ticket could have been purchased for \$1.00. (The panic of 1893 led to AT&SF declaring bankruptcy, and later they reorganized.)

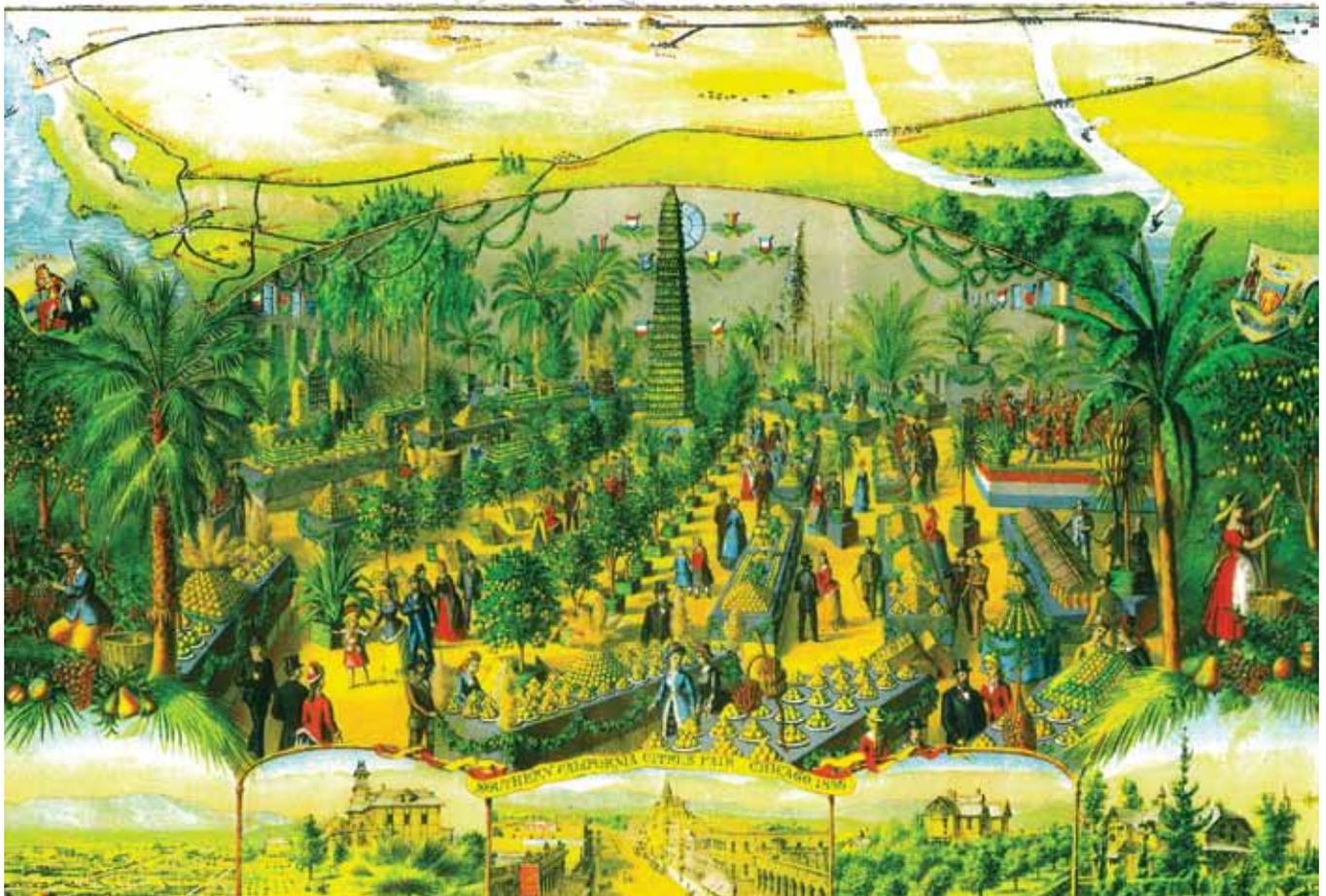
To set the stage for this high drama, take another look at the graph "Business Cycles 1882-1909 (see left column this page), and note that the economy was in a positive mode. Consumer confidence was high, and employment was the same. People had money.



In 1885, the Santa Fe entered Los Angeles from the south, and a brass band was there to herald the arrival.



William Wolfskill making a fortune from his "citrus gold".



Newspaper supplement promoting the Southern California Citrus Fair in Chicago, 1886.

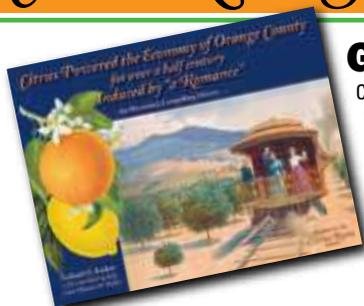
Most who were physically able wanted to see California, and with the deep discounted fares they could now afford the trip. This pent-up demand to visit, and the echo of the “roll of the drums” motivated hordes of visitors. Excursion trains from Los Angeles brought the multitudes to various areas. To further understand the mania or rage, just look at the number of buggies driven by salespeople. The mania was all over Southern California, though the greatest concentration was within the overall Los Angeles area.

“Social group dynamics” drove the situation to unheard-

of feverish prices. A \$5,000 sale was quickly followed by an offer of \$10,000, and in three months this same property was \$50,000.

The excitement became lunacy. The “group dynamics” of the crowd was heightened by the synchronization of the excursion train schedules. The recurrence came as waves and caused a feverish atmosphere which compelled one to make a decision at once in acquiring land. The graph is better than a thousand words regarding the flurry from May to the pinnacle in July!

Citrus Roots Series...

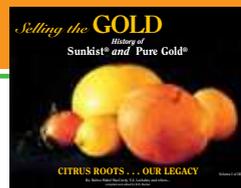


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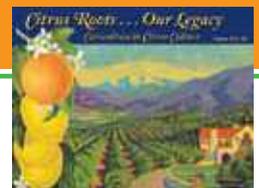
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Citrus Roots

Preserving Citrus Heritage Foundation

Keeping citrus heritage alive in the minds of those living in California through publications, educational exhibits and artistic works

(Fed. Tax ID # 43-2102497)

Now addressing the sales force, most came from the other side of the Rockies, and as J. M. Guinn wrote in an article, "The Great Real Estate Boom of 1887", the salesmen were "very adept in the tricks of real estate boomings." They came to sell, and they had success due to the fervor.

Landowners became developers, viewing this as a fortunate opportunity. Between the eastern limits of the City of Los Angeles and the San Bernardino County line, a distance of 36 miles along the newly laid Santa Fe tracks, they platted in delirious haste 25 new towns -- an average of one town for each mile-and-a-half of track. A high percentage of these new towns ended as "ghost towns" after the bust. The aforementioned was along the Santa Fe right-of-way. Along the Southern Pacific Railroad, further new towns were platted, though to a lesser number for this line was more established.

In "The Boom of the Eighties", Glenn S. Dumke wrote that "during June through September of 1887, a buying frenzy took place ... over \$38 million changed hands in real estate transactions in Los Angeles County, and the figure for the year was nearly \$100 million."

In 1888, interest rates started to rise on the "red hot" deals of raw land, and to the recent investor young groves suddenly looked to be a "money pit" without a return. The impulse was to sell, and sell at any price was a chain reaction. With this mania, the bust gained speed.

After the "Boom", many lots and parcels previously sold went back to the original owners, and it took time to correct. The collapse was more orderly than one would expect, for the

banks had been very conservative in their participation. In the late 1880s and 1890s, owners came to the realization that their property needed to earn a return, and they built structures taking advantage of the glut related to building materials or they planted citrus (as can be documented through the table shown below). The tightening of money also stimulated the holders to develop their land to the best usage.

Schedule of Orange and Lemon Trees and Acreage by County (As of September 17, 1891)

	Bearing Trees		Non Bearing (young)		Total Acres	
	Orange	Lemon	Orange	Lemon	Orange	Lemon
Los Angeles	475,726	47,408	511,376	29,564	9,871	769
Orange	89,260	5,097	51,769	19,959	1,410	250
Riverside <i>founded in 1893</i>						
San Bernardino	391,656	24,066	1,895,544	155,934	22,872	1,800
San Diego	26,715	7,006	177,311	58,916	2,048	639

[Please view www.citrusroots.com for additional statistics.]

The Building Boom of 1887 brought people to California in large numbers as another rush, the citrus gold rush. Many of those who travelled via the AT&SF were "lusting to convert the golden fruit nuggets to real gold" as a second career. They also poured into Southern California for a chance, if possible, to get well from various ailments.



An excursion trip from Los Angeles to Ontario and Upland on the Southern Pacific Railroad Company.



Monrovia 1887. An excursion trip. Note the "ocean view" sign.



An excursion trip to Santa Ana on the Southern Pacific. Each buggy of a salesman is ready to take the next wave of prospects out on a buying tour upon the arrival of the next excursion train.

So, money they had, and this movement had a powerful influence on the development of Southern California and the state. Where once the cattle had silently grazed, now American citizens built communities, churches, schools, and trolley lines, and founded banks, citrus packinghouses, plus citrus-linked businesses including water companies to bring water to their thirsty citrus trees, etc.

In closing, I will borrow the thoughts from Glenn S. Dumke's "The Boom of the Eighties" (excerpts), p.276, "The

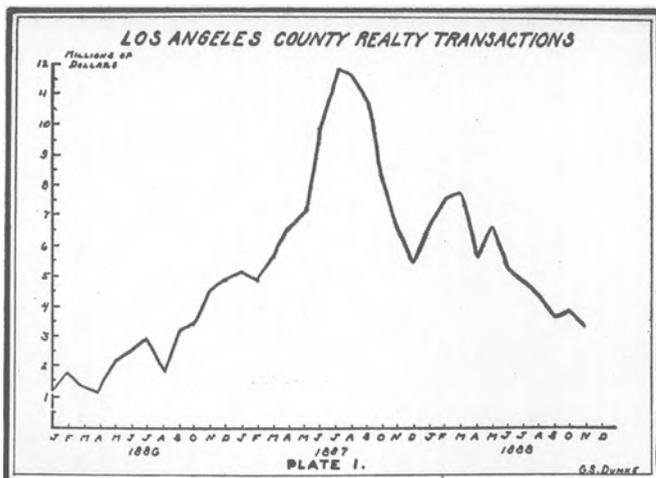
boom was significant... It wiped out forever the last traces of the Spanish-Mexican pastoral economy which had characterized California history since 1769... The boom was the final step in the process of making California truly American."

"All's Well That Ends Well" (borrowing Shakespeare's title), and it was this "Boom of 1887" which induced the Citrus Gold Rush. This rush generated a far-ranging, extensive planting of citrus as you have observed. The young California citrus industry was emerging! The "story" will continue, spurring colonization...

Richard H. Barker is the founder and president of the Citrus Roots-Preserving Citrus Heritage Foundation. For a number of years, he has been leading a drive to bring about a higher awareness of the role citrus played in developing California. Dick is a retired investment banker and was a third generation Sunkist grower. He has published four volumes on citrus heritage.

The author wishes to credit the following: Huntington Library, San Marino; Gordon McClelland; Pasadena Museum of History; Santa Ana Public Library; Upland Public Library.

Note: The artwork from the Chicago newspaper supplement is a copy of a treasured piece in the Jay T. Last Collection of Lithographic and Social History, which is recognized as the largest private collection of color lithography in the U.S. In assembling his collection, which he is now gifting to the Huntington Library, Last collaborated with Gordon McClelland who made the arrangements for the Foundation to receive the copy. ●



From "The Boom of the Eighties in Southern California" by the late Dr. Glenn S. Dumke, best known for his service as chancellor of the California State University system.

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