

Citrus labels were in use from the 1890's until the 1950's when packers changed from wooden to cardboard boxes. The labels shown are some of the many area brands used by ranchers during this period and are representative of the millions used to advertise and identify boxes of California citrus shipped throughout the United States and Europe. The Washington Navel, Thomson's Improved, and Valencia Lates were the principal varieties grown in foothills.

The earliest records obtainable about the Monrovia citrus industry state that in 1902, besides the Duarte-Monrovia Fruit Exchange, there were three large packing houses operated by different fruit companies and a number of individual shippers, all originating in Monrovia from where the oranges were shipped.

The best known grower-shippers were Messrs F.M. and C.O. Monroe, and A. Stedman who in 1902 owned thirty-six acres of the original pioneer orange orchards. The oranges grown were Washington and Thomson's Improved Navels on trees twelve to eighteen years old. All the fruit was packed and shipped under the brand Gem of the Foothills, with different grades "Fancy" and "Choice" stamped on the boxes. They shipped an average of thirty-five railroad cars of oranges a year. There is no other information available concerning this high grade citrus fruit and the label is not known to exist.

The most prominent independent citrus fruit brokers of Monrovia were Edward F. Spence and Chester O. Banks. They had a produce company in 1908 in Los Angeles at 341 South Central.

Mr. Banks came to Monrovia in 1902 and entered into the fruit brokerage and shipping business with his brother L.M. Banks. Mr. Spence came to Monrovia in 1894 and established the Spence Fruit Packing House in 1912, which was situated at 130 Railroad Ave. on the Southern Pacific tracks. His label was the Golden Harp which Mr. C.O. Banks took over when he obtained the Spence packing house in 1937.

The C.O. Banks Fruit Co. was the largest in San Gabriel Valley and shipped under his top brands Golden Harp and Billy, and his second grade brand Tonic. No examples of these labels could be found.

THE MONROVIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
IN COOPERATION WITH
THE DUARTE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
MR. RAYMOND SOPER

Orange Box Label Committee:

Mrs. Eleanor Hendricks
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California Orange Box Labels

The Monrovia Historical Society, in cooperation with the Duarte Historical Museum, and Mr. Raymond Soper of Claremont, is proud to present a display of artifacts of the early citrus industry in this area, including reproductions of most of the labels that still exist from the Monrovia-Duarte area. The display will be open for viewing in the Monrovia Public Library on Sunday, May 11th, from 10 AM to 4 PM, and daily during normal library hours until Friday, May 16th. There will be a public lecture on orange box labels and the citrus industry in Monrovia and Duarte at 7:30 PM in the Alvord room of the Monrovia Library on Monday, May 12th.



In the seventy year period from the 1880's to the mid 1950's millions of colorful paper labels were used by California citrus growers to identify and advertise the wooden boxes of oranges they shipped throughout the United States. These labels provide a social history, a history of commercial art, and a history of California business. They are of increasing interest to collectors today because of their attractive designs and interesting subject matter.

Oranges were first grown in California in the late 1700's, brought from Mexico by the Spanish colonists. The cultivations of oranges gradually increased as the population grew and as new areas were found which had satisfactory soil and climate. For the first eighty years of orange cultivation, Southern California had no easy way to communicate with the rest of the county; oranges were grown mainly for local consumption.

The construction of the Southern Pacific and Santa Fe Railroads in the late 1870's and early 1880's linked Southern California to the rest of the continent. This provided an eastern market for the fruit, and led to a rapid influx of new settlers who recognized the agricultural promise of the state. Many settled in rural areas and planted orange groves, especially in the valleys at the base of the towering mountain ranges such as the San Gabriels in communities such as Redlands, Pomona, Duarte, and Monrovia. These early growers were presented with a class of problems that had never been faced on this scale before - how to pack, ship, identify and advertise a perishable product for customers who lived thousands of miles away. The brightly colored, attractively designed paper label proved to be a key ingredient in the solution of this problem.

During the seventy year period of label use, over 8000 distinct designs were developed, and used on over two million boxes of oranges. Considering that orange box labels were discarded after use, it is remarkable that so many survive. Most early labels still in existence are ones that were kept in government and industry trademark and patent files, in salesman's sample books, and in printing house archives. Most early labels are rare - very few copies exist of any of the Monrovia-Duarte area labels, and some are one-of-a-kind.

A number of large orange groves were well-established in the Monrovia-Duarte area by the early 1880's prior to the large influx of new immigrants into Southern California which led to the incorporation of the city of Monrovia in 1886. For many years after the incorporation of Monrovia, the Duarte area remained a more rural district of large citrus groves, during the time that Monrovia was rapidly becoming more settled and more suburban in character, with only a few groves surviving in the more remote parts of the city.

In the 1880's orange growers in Duarte and then in Monrovia either sold to brokers or else shipped their oranges directly to packing houses in Sierra Madre, Pasadena, or Los Angeles. In 1890, feeling that they were not getting sufficient prices from the brokers, the local growers in Duarte formed the Duarte Company. Three years later the Duarte-Monrovia Fruit Exchange was formed, and built their own packing house in Duarte in 1893.

By 1905, increased shipping led them to build a second packing house at Duarte Road and Myrtle along the Santa Fe Railroad in Monrovia. At about the same time, a second packing house was operated by the Spence Fruit Company at the same intersection. In the early 1900's there were several other independent packing houses in Monrovia and Duarte, including the California Citrus Union packing house at Chesnut and Ivy in Monrovia. This packing house was later sold and subsequently operated by the Monrovia Mutual Association by 1918. The Monrovia Mutual and Duarte-Monrovia Fruit Exchange houses were closed in 1928 and 1931 respectively, in part in response to the increasing subdivision of the foothill areas which occurred in the 1920's. The Spence Fruit company house, operated by C.O. Banks after 1935, continued operation until the late 1940's. Because so many of the packing houses closed so long ago, and the citrus industry was pushed out of the Monrovia-Duarte area by encroaching subdivision long before collecting of orange box labels became popular, there are very few remaining examples of labels from this area.



Orange Leaves, Monrovia Messenger Newspaper, Christmas, 1902 (Duarte Museum)

California Orange Box Labels, G. McClelland and J. Last, Hillcrest Press, 1985