## How Orange County Got Its Name

An address delivered March 11, 1974 on the occasion of the county's 85<sup>th</sup> anniversary, in Dept. 1, Superior Court, old Orange County courthouse, the Hon. Franklin G. West presiding.

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Your Honor, members of the jury, ladies and gentlemen. Despite a host of local histories written about Orange County, none has ever come to grips with its name. In consequence, two popular but unfounded theories still persist. One is that Orange County was named for its most promising crop; the other that it was named to honor the town of Orange, which supposedly commemorates Orange County, Virginia, which in turn honors the European House of Orange. Neither of these suggestions coincides with the facts.

The truth is, the name which this county has borne since 1889 is a hand-medown, initially suggested in 1871, four years before our first valencias went in the ground, two years before the village of Richland was renamed Orange, and only six months after the first orange seeds were even planted here. In 1871 oranges were merely 'a promise,' *not* our most promising crop.

The first attempt to create a separate county out of the lower third of Los Angeles was a bill introduced in the Legislature of 1869-70 for the proposed 'County of Anaheim.' Its most enthusiastic promoter was that town's first mayor, Major Max von Strobel. Needless to say, Anaheim was not lightly suggested as the intended capital.

Arguments favoring division included the great distance our citizens had to travel to the old county seat, the \$6 stage coach fare, taxation without representation, and the fact that the only roll of fire hose in the county was kept in L.A.

Strobel's bill passed the Assembly. The night before the Senate voted, Mr. Strobel threw a champagne supper. Regrettably, he himself did not recover from it until after the vote was taken. The bill died, and, after starting a short-lived division newspaper, so did Mr. Strobel.

Late in 1871 a new attempt by an Anaheim committee gave rise to the name 'Orange County.' this name was introduced on January 6, 1872, at a division meeting held at Gallatin. Now non-existent, the settlement of Gallatin was soon absorbed by the town of Downey. With some variation, all five division attempts

prior to '89 included everything in Los Angeles County south of the San Gabriel River.

Our most promising products at the time included sheep, corn, grapes, and hogs. However, those words lack a certain charm as a name for a county. While Anaheim could boast of a few experimental orange trees at this point, most were still in the pot stage. Nevertheless, to encourage immigration, the area was 'boomed' by real estate promoters as a semi-tropical paradise – a place where anything could grow, and nearly everything was tried. The name *orange* has a Mediterranean flavor about it, so for that reason it was selected to suggest our climate.

Indicating the newness of citrus here, in 1872 the Anaheim *Gazette* carried the statement that "Orange and lemons begin to bear at nine years from seed, and at fifteen (at present prices) are yielding a profit of \$2,000 per acre." That prospect was still 13 years off, however, and the grove cited was William Wolkskill's old one in L.A. – *not* the potted plants in Anaheim. As for the hamlet of Orange, still called Richland, late in 1871 it had precisely four houses – scarcely a place of much consequence. This initial 'Orange County' proposal was introduced in the legislature, but never reached a vote.

The next attempt to form the county was also under the name of 'Orange,' in the session of 1873-74. A petition was circulated claiming a population south of the San Gabriel River of "not less than 7,000 (not counting Chinamen)," and that its citizens paid one third of the taxes and got nothing in return. That's just what the petition got, too.

In 1875 the chief tub-thumper for the 'County of Orange' was Judge W.C. Wiseman, who issued an election paper called *The Broadaxe*. Wiseman's favorite term for political enemies was spelled B-A-S-T-A-R-D-S, a pleasantry he wrote out in capital letters. But once again our State Legislators turned a deaf ear – no doubt having been called much worse.

By 1876 the idea of an 'Orange County' was so thoroughly repugnant in Sacramento that a fresh suggestion was made to change it to the 'County of Santa Ana.' That got no where either. In fact, the name carried considerable stigma. One Westminster gentleman pointed out: "... the name would have been a terrible incubus to our prosperity," and went on to cite the various pronunciations of the name Santa Ana, Santy Ann, Santy Annie, and so forth. He also drew attention to the closeness of the word *Santanna* and *Satana*, concluding, "There may be a certain propriety in making a *satanic* division of the county of Los Angeles, but when we try again, suppose we leave the saints in peace."

Responding to that, a citizen from the still-neglected village of Orange brightly suggested, "We propose the name of *Orange*" – which he did largely on the grounds that it was easier to spell. As a side note, the people of Santa Ana opposed the 'County of Santa Ana' bill, anyway. It would have made Anaheim the county seat.

Our last failure was in 1881. As the name Santa Ana withered, so the name 'Orange' revived, this time with some justification. Though grapes were now our most profitable industry, sheep and hogs were in hot pursuit. Interestingly, the man who prepared the '81 bill often stood in this very courtroom. His name was Victor Montgomery, long considered the dean of Orange County lawyers.

On the advantages of separating from Los Angeles, Montgomery noted that he had resided in Anaheim for five years and had observed that "This end of the county furnished comparatively few of the criminals, yet has to pay for feeding all the others." As to the name, he remarked, "If county division could be secured, the name of the new county, 'ORANGE,' emblazoned upon the map of our state, would in my opinion, have more effect in drawing the tide of emigrants to this section than all the pamphlets, agents and other endeavors which have hitherto proved so futile."

Montgomery's bill succeeded no better than the rest, but eight years later it became the outline and explanation for naming the county on its sixth and final try. The only significant change was a last minute foreshortening of the county's length from 60 miles to 42 miles by Assemblyman E.E. Edwards, of Santa Ana, to knock out Anaheim's bid as the logical spot for the county seat. A plebiscite held on June 4, 1889, created the County of Orange; an election on July 17 established Santa Ana as its county seat; official county business began August 1.

By 1889, after a devastating blight wiped out the grape industry, oranges had indeed become our most promising crop, even if they were not responsible *per se* for the county's naming.

J.M. Guinn, who lived through all the division attempts, summed up the matter nicely: "The organizers of Orange County chose that name for the sordid purpose of real estate. They argued that Eastern people would be attracted by the name, and would rush to that county to buy orange ranches, forgetful, or perhaps ignorant, of the fact that there were more than a hundred other places in the United States named Orange."

On that subject, Prof. Guinn may be permitted a few sour grapes. He was from Anaheim. He also overlooked what is perhaps the most distinctive feature of all about the name *orange*. There isn't another single word in the entire English language that rimes with it! Try in some time.

Your Honor, that concludes my testimony.

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