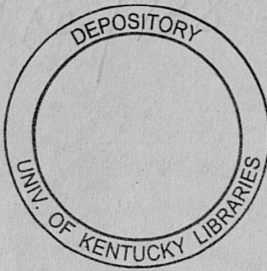




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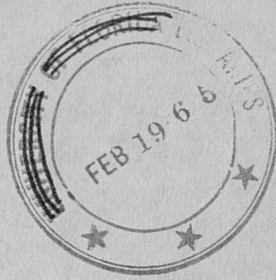
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STORIES OF FLORIDA



THE HISTORY OF CITRUS IN FLORIDA

by

Carita Doggett Corse

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## THE HISTORY OF CITRUS IN FLORIDA

by

Carita Doggett Corse

Florida and oranges are as synonymous as Florida and flowers. Yet when Ponce de Leon named this new country in 1513, there was not an orange tree on the whole great North American continent.

Originally imported from Ceylon by way of India and Palestine, oranges were well established in Mediterranean countries when Rome ruled the world. They reached the West Indies as part of Columbus' cargo on his second voyage, in 1497. By 1557 Cuban groves were flourishing, and expeditions to the Florida mainland carried oranges and lemons for the health of the soldiers. Menendez, founder of St. Augustine, won many Indian friends by giving the chiefs European delicacies to eat, and Spanish missionaries, taking their cue from this great leader, planted orange groves around their missions to induce the Indians to remain near them. In 1696 Jonathan Dickenson said of St. Augustine: "It is about three-quarters of a mile in length, not regularly built, the houses not very thick, they having large orchards, in which are plenty of oranges, lemons, pome-citrons, lymes, figs, and peaches: the houses, most of them are old buildings, and not half of them inhabited..." \* General Oglethorpe, scouting in Spanish Florida in 1735, noted the fine groves on Amelia Island where a Spanish mission had flourished but a few years before.

William Bartram, King's botanist, in an account of his travels in Florida in 1773, often mentions the orange groves along the St. Johns River from Cowford (Jacksonville) as far south as DeLand. Bartram also mentions passing orange groves on his trip from the St. Johns River to the Alachua

\*God's Protecting Providence, pp. 77-8



savanna. At all of these places he speaks of the magnificent orange trees covered with golden fruit and fragrant blossoms. One grove he describes as follows: "Orange trees were in full bloom and filled the air with fragrance," and another grove, "On the right hand was an orangery, consisting of many hundred trees which were large flourishing and in perfect bloom and loaded with their ripe golden fruit."

At the time of Bartram's travels, there were few white people in Florida, and the Indians were the principal consumers of oranges. The three varieties of oranges then existent in Florida were known to the Seminoles as "Yallaha" (sweet), "Yallahaasompa" (bitter), and "Yallahaachena" (sour). The only method of transportation was by water, and even for this purpose only a few boats were available; consequently very little of the fruit found its way out of the immediate region in which it was produced.

By 1779, during Humboldt's travels in the Antilles, the citrus had become an integral part of the Island vegetation, and caused Humboldt to remark: "St. Augustine was like an orange grove."

The importation of citrus fruits from the Islands to the Florida mainland is explained by the Encyclopedia Britannica as follows: "Some of the earlier botanical explorers regarded oranges as an indigenous tree; but it was undoubtedly brought by the Spanish Colonists to the West India Islands, and was probably soon afterwards transplanted to Florida by them or their buccaneering enemies."

Dr. H. Harold Hume, eminent citriculturist, explains how the orange and lemon became as generally disseminated after their introduction to Florida: "The fruit was obtained by Indians and carried about; seeds dropped eventually produced trees where they had been deposited. As a result, wild groves were formed on shores and lakes and streams."

Existing records show that every place where citrus fruits were observed the Spanish explorers had preceded the travelers. The citrus groves that began with Columbus' first planting in the West Indies and spread to Florida, today trail across the Gulf States to Mexico and extend north into California, following the paths of early Spanish migrations.

During the English occupation of Florida, quantities of oranges, orange wine and preserves were shipped to England. Considerable delay to shipping was caused by the "orange winds." These winds were of gale intensity blowing from a northeasterly direction; ships were forced to remain in port for many days during these winds and huge piles of oranges perished on the docks. It was then discovered that by a process called "wilting" the fruit could be held over until conditions were favorable for shipping. This "wilting" was accomplished by spreading the oranges in the direct sunlight. This caused the evaporation of the excess moisture from the peel and hardened the inner peel. It is said that fruit treated in this manner reached its destination in sound condition.

Extending a mile along the lagoon on one side and Dummitt Creek and the Indian River on the other, in the north part of Merritt Island, what is said to be the oldest living grove in Florida is still standing. It bears fruit each season and seems destined to live another hundred years. It was planted close to the year 1830, according to H. E. Nason, who now resides on the tract, and gets its name from its founder, Capt. Foulas D. Dummitt, one of the early pioneers of Florida.

Dummitt obtained his bud wood from the Jones' grove (now extinct) situated between New Smyrna and Port Orange. The Jones' grove was budded from original seedling stock brought to Florida during the Spanish occupation. Dummitt budded Jones' stock on native sour-orange trees



growing on his property. Part of the old sour grove still remains. This is the parent stock of the famous Indian River orange.

About 1870 citrus growing was begun on a commercial scale. The only citrus fruit planted during 1870 to 1880 was oranges, and plantings were made mainly in the territory that is now composed of Duval, St. Johns, Volusia, Putnam, Alachua, and Marion Counties. In fact, up to 1894 the territory along the St. Johns River and Orange Lake is said to have been the chief center of orange growing. This section not only produced a large amount of the fruit but it also supplied a good portion of the planting stock and buds for the areas farther south. These plantings were confined to localities close to rivers and lakes, joined by canals as there were few, if any, other means of transportation. By 1884 production had increased to approximately 600,000 boxes per year.

The major disasters to the citrus industry were caused by freezing. The effects of low temperature on the flora of early days are indicated by the writings of John Bartram, the botanist, "The night of January 2, 1766 was the fatal night that destroyed the lime, citron and banana trees in St. Augustine, many curious evergreens up the river (meaning, probably, the Matanzas River) that were nearly 20 years old and in a flourishing state; the young green shoots of the maple, elm, and pavia with many flowering plants and shrubs never before hurt." Bernard Romans, in his Natural History of Florida, 1775, says: "On January 3, 1766, a frost destroyed all the tropical productions in the country except oranges. In 1774 there was a snow storm which extended over most of Florida (meaning what is now north Florida). The inhabitants long afterwards spoke of it as 'an extraordinary rain,'"

A very severe freeze occurred in 1835. At this time it was cold enough in St. Augustine to kill mature seedling trees to the ground. John Lee Williams,

writing in 1837, recounts the great freeze, "A severe northwest wind blew for ten days. During this period the mercury was seven degrees above zero. The St. Johns was frozen several rods from the shore. All kinds of fruit were killed in the ground, and many of them never started again, even from the roots."

Another freeze occurred in 1886, at which time the crop was injured and many young trees killed. At this time many of the growers believed that these freezes were caused by the cutting of timber in north Florida and Georgia. They contended that the forests constituted windbreaks and that the cutting of these trees by the lumber industry and the plantation owners brought the cold winds to their groves.

Then came the two freezes of 1894 and 1895 that killed a great many orange trees. Since that date there have been recorded three serious freezes, 1899, 1917, 1935, at which times a large number of young trees perished. A minimum temperature of two degrees below zero at Tallahassee on February 13, 1899, is the Florida record for a century.

As a result of these freezes, in the northern part of the State, citrus growing has been practically abandoned, with the exception of groves of satsumas. During the past thirty years the citrus section of Florida has been moving southward, and citrus growing in central and south Florida has developed rapidly. The groves of the tender choice oranges are for the most part maintained below the "frost belt," which is drawn across the State at about Orlando by the Frost Protection Bureau.

The advance of the citrus industry and the very evident commercial future of these fruits brought many horticulturists to Florida; they came from Japan and China, where citrus has maintained a foothold for centuries, from the Mediterranean countries, and from the West Indies, and gave to the Florida



growers their knowledge, with the result that many new and valuable varieties of citrus fruits were propagated.

The varieties of citrus fruits now grown in Florida are divided into three classes: the early, midseason, and late. Among the leading early varieties of citrus are: Parson Brown and Hamlin; midseason: Pineapple, Enterprise Seedless, and Jaffa; and late varieties are Valencia and Lue Gim Gong. Thin peel oranges (kid glove) are Dancy Tangerine, Mandarin, King oranges and Satsuma (Owari); the early varieties of grapefruit are Duncan; midseason, Florida Common and Walters; and also, Marsh Seedless.

Among the above named varieties there are three varieties that deserve mention because of their bearing upon the citrus industry. The first of these is the Temple orange, that is either a hybrid or an exceptionally fine bud variation. Named for the late William Chase Temple, who did so much for the citrus industry in Florida, this variety received international attention. Known as the "\$10-a-box orange," its popularity became great, and in 1921 about 10,000 acres were budded to Temples in Florida. The fruit, somewhat resembling the Florida round orange, in shape, has a remarkable uniformity of size, a deep orange-red color, and a smooth, lightly pitted skin. The flavor is sweetly aromatic and lasting to the taste. The very thin skin, although tough, is easily peeled, the segments are uniform and easily separated. This orange is at its best from February to May, in fair shape in January and June. Its keeping qualities place the Temple orange among the very best for shipping and it has proven to be a very valuable addition to the citrus industry in Florida.

One of the late oranges listed is the Lue Gim Gong. This variety was originated by a Chinese peasant of the same name, who came to the United States in 1872. He carried on his experiment in the vicinity of DeLand, Fla., and it was there that he successfully propagated the Lue Gim Gong orange. For the

first and only time in the development of orange varieties, the American Pomological Society awarded Gong the Wilder Medal, an honor accorded discoveries of new varieties. The Lue Gim Gong orange is the last to ripen in Florida and can be marketed longer than any variety now in existence.

Lue Gim Gong died in DeLand June 5, 1925, in the place where he had made his greatest horticultural experiments, and his remains were shipped to the home of his ancestors in China, in accordance with age-old Oriental custom.

The third variety of orange is the satsuma (Owari) which is grown extensively in north Florida. It is one of the mandarin group and is by far the hardiest orange grown in Florida. According to all available accounts, the mandarin oranges originated in Cochin, China, at an unknown date. It is said that this orange was brought to Louisiana by the Italian consul at New Orleans sometime between 1840 and 1850. The introduction of the mandarin orange from Louisiana into Florida is credited by the committee of the Florida Fruit Growers' Association to Major Atway. The exact time of the introduction is not known, but it is believed to have been only a few years after the introduction into Louisiana. The satsuma variety was introduced into Florida by George R. Hall in 1876, and again by Mrs. Van Valkenburg in 1878. At present Florida raises more satsumas than any other state, possibly more than the combined total of all.

Florida citrus fruits are shipped to every part of the world. There is also a demand abroad for Florida fruit juices, mainly grapefruit juice. However, the United Kingdom and Canada are the two principal foreign markets, and the latter takes nearly all of its orange imports from the United States.

And so the first few seeds imported, the crude grove begun by Christopher Columbus in Hispaniola in 1493, were the genesis of what is today in Florida an industry that in 1937-38 had a gross value estimated at \$53,285,353. These returns included rail, boat, and truck shipments, together with fruits canned and otherwise utilized from a 365,000 acreage in citrus trees.