

Legacy Links



**PRESERVING OLD LA VERNE'S
ENVIRONMENT:
MAKING HISTORY FOR THE FUTURE**

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Every Picture Tells a Story



The LVHS recently received a collection of articles written by members of the Hanawalt family. They were sent by Kent Hanawalt, who has lived in Montana for 40 years and manages a ranch that was homesteaded by his wife's grandfather in 1896. His early years in La Verne were strongly connected to

his experiences in citrus. Dwight Hanawalt, Kent's father, lived at Hillcrest Retirement Community where his wife Imy still lives. The following stories of smudge pots and the process of smudging are a reminder that winter was the time when smudge pots were used throughout the citrus belt in Southern California.

All About Smudge Pots

Dwight Hanawalt

Several friends and family members have encouraged me to write about "smudging" – a practice no longer

part of our "winter" customs. So many memories of smudging flood over me that I know not where to begin, soo...

As the growing of citrus fruit – primarily oranges, lemons, and grapefruit – became big-time crops, their protection from freezing in winter became important. In the U.S., citrus growing has been restricted to the warmer climates of Florida, Southern California, and Arizona. Citrus loves sunshine, and the above states provide lots of that most of the time.

My own experience taught me that oranges will freeze if subjected to cold below 28° for more than 2 hours at a time. Grapefruit is about the same. Lemons are more tender and freeze a degree or two quicker. Seldom, around La Verne, did the temperature fall to 27° and lower as early as 4: AM. Then as soon as the sun came up, the temperature, or at least the sunlight, began the de-freezing process.

In the Southern California area, with which I was most familiar, frost seldom occurred before December 15, and was rarely experienced after February 15. In my boyhood, the chief means of protecting citrus fruit

from freezing was to heat up the air with stove-like contraptions called smudge pots.

In general, smudge pots were centered to radiate and warm the contiguous sides of 4 trees, or alternate rows each way. Most frequently we only lit every other row or pot.

Smudge pots came in many sizes and shapes. They all had 5 to 10-gallon fuel tanks, smokestacks 2-4 feet tall, and a variety of vent mechanisms to control the burning rate – and thus the fuel consumption.

The fuel was called Smudge Oil. It was a much cruder product, taken off early in the gasoline refinement process. At the time I was most involved – between 1928 and 1942 – smudge oil sold between 4¢ and 8¢ per gallon, when gasoline was 14¢ to 25¢ per gallon. On a cold night we might burn 400 gallons on a 5-acre orange grove. In a typical below freezing night in the La Verne area, several thousand gallons of smudge oil would be consumed, and the atmosphere would be filled with smoke, so that all vision of mountains were drowned out, and car travel was impeded.

Once we reached the winter smudge season in Southern California, the protection of our major agricultural crop was on everyone's mind. Although you might not be involved in the citrus industry, you suffered the results of the odor, oily deposit, impaired vision, and general inconvenience of a smudgy night. How often did this occur? Let me relate a typical winter memory:

Nights begin to be nippy in early December. The weather Bureau begins a nightly broadcast on station KFI – a major radio station in Los Angeles – at 8:00 PM by Floyd Young, meteorologist, in which a forecast of lowest expected temperatures for the night ahead was predicted. The most common report took only a minute or two, as the temperature was not expected to dip below the danger point. If, however, the night was expected to be cold, he went step-by-step, citing

each city in the citrus areas and gave the projected low temperature readings and approximate time of the coldest point.

In my boyhood, we all relaxed if the weather projection was for rain, clouds, wind, or warming trends. If freezing temperature was projected, usually to occur after midnight or later, my brothers and I went to bed soon after the broadcast in order to catch any sleep before “smudge call”.

The Orange Growers Association in our area hired a “frost” watchman to check temperatures all night. If the temperature reached 30° in our area, Dad would receive a telephone call warning of this occurrence. Later, my dad would get up and check the various thermometers in some 3 different groves for possible danger points. He often checked 3 or 4 times on cold nights. If he felt the temperature readings had reached a danger point, he would rouse my older brother and me to help light the smudge pots.

Temperatures in Southern California generally begin to fall after the sun sets, and continually gets colder until just before sun-up. Very seldom did we “light up” before 2:00 AM. Nights of sub-freezing temperatures seldom occurred more than 2 or 3 nights in a row. Only once in my memory did we smudge more than 4 consecutive nights, and that was a very memorable time. Many, many winters passed without smudge, and many more passed with 6 or 7 occurrences of one or two nights in a row.

The period between 1930 and 1950 was my most memorable smudging years. By 1950 several innovations were introduced to reduce “smog” and improve heating methods. One method was to plan a superstructure “wind machine” in 2 or 3 places in a 5-acre grove. This machine had an airplane-like motor and propeller, stood 20-25 feet high, and blew warmed air in all directions. Another was to have heaters using natural gas every 4 trees like smudge pots, but without the “smudge”. The use of overhead water sprinklers

was tried – and succeeded until the temperature was so cold the water turned to ice.

In the 60s, a disease called “quick decline”, and large housing developments eliminated citrus growing in the Pomona Valley.

In Memory of the Smudge Pot

Kent Hanawalt

The town of La Verne, where I was born and raised, was notable for two things – La Verne College, and the orange groves which surrounded the town. Distinctly visible along the railroad tracks were the “packing houses” where the oranges were sorted at picking time and crated for shipment all over the world.

We lived at the foot of the San Gabriel Mountains. Our house was flanked on three sides by citrus and backed by a cactus-covered hillside. Our perch on the hillside set us just above the orange trees and gave us a view over the entire San Gabriel Valley. I attended La Verne Heights School where my grandmother had taught before she was married. The school was completely surrounded by orange groves, and a foul ball from our recess baseball games would roll out among the trees.

Southern California has quite a pleasant climate – freezing temperatures are infrequent on the valley floors. But oranges, grapefruit and lemons are ripening on the trees over the winter months, and the occasional frost is a real danger.

Wind machines were common in the groves in the 50s. These were mounted on towers above the trees and had propellers like a small airplane which circulated the warmer layers of air down through the trees. One could gauge the temperature of a winter morning by the sound of the wind machines when the air dipped to freezing temperatures.

The second line of defense in some groves was the sprinkler system. All groves were irrigated – most by trenches among the trees, but some with sprinklers. The water comes out of the ground at about 55

degrees, so it had the capacity to warm things up. The danger was that if it got too cold the water could freeze on the trees and cause even more damage.

When things got really cold, it was time to fire up the smudge pots.

The “lazy flame” pot (pictured at the beginning of the article), stand about four feet high, and hold about ten gallons of “smudge oil”. This was a low-quality oil – only a few steps up in the refining process from raw crude. It did indeed burn with a black smoke (AKA smudge), and a cold night would result in distinctly black haze lying across the valley.

When a young man was of high school age in the middle of the 20th century, he was eager to be included in a “smudge crew”. Each orchard owner would put together a roster in the fall of the guys he could call when the temperature threatened to fall below freezing. Being on such a crew would elicit a seasonal guarantee of something like \$25, a nightly guarantee of maybe \$10 if a person were called, and possibly \$1/hr for the time he actually spent at the grove.

So important was the citrus industry in that time and place that the major radio station – “50,000-watt Clear Channel station KFI” – broadcast nightly “Fruit Frost Reports” at 8:00 PM every evening during the “smudge season”. Those of us signed up for smudge crews would drop everything to listen to the report. Most often the forecast would be “All stations, all districts, above 32.” But when cold weather was anticipated, the announcer would go through each of some two dozen districts, predicting the low temperature and the “dew point” expected for the night.

And the role of the young men involved in smudging was recognized in the rules of the schools: being called out to the grove in the night was an excused absence.

Near my bed I kept a pile of clothes, laid out carefully and in order, to don quickly when the call came. Underwear, long underwear, and several layers of

clothing were stacked up for weeks every winter, waiting for the night when the phone would ring, calling me to come out to the grove and protect it from the ravages of nature. Over the course of several of those years in my youth, that call came only once.

I was contracted to George King in neighboring Pomona, and I had organized a crew for him. I had just fallen asleep one night when the phone rang. After speaking with George, I made a series of phone calls to line up several more fellows on my list to respond in protection of his grove.

It was just before midnight when five of us converged at his house, located on the road at the edge of the grove. George had retired from a career as salesman for a meat-packing outfit and had returned to his roots in the Pomona Valley in his 'golden years' to finish out his life raising oranges.

The first order of business was coffee and pastries, which his wife had ready on our arrival. We clustered around a new-fangled electronic temperature monitor he had installed in his kitchen. With a click of the switch we could see the precise temperature of the first tree level, then overhead, from a sensor mounted on a mast that was twenty feet high. The night was cold by California standards, but no real danger yet.

The next task was to take the Jeep and check the thermometers placed strategically in several places in the orange grove. These were horizontal "minimum/maximum" alcohol grove thermometers that contained markers to indicate how high and how low the temperature had reached since the last time they had been reset.

In gauging the danger, one must take into account the stage of ripeness in the fruit. The sugar content increases as the fruit matures – earlier in the season there is less sugar, and therefore a higher critical temperature. Lemons have a lower sugar content than oranges, and therefore a higher critical temperature.

After recording the readings from each of the thermometers in various stations in the grove, we judged that we were safe to wait awhile before taking action to raise the temperature. We enjoyed more coffee and pastries and swapped a few more stories. Some of us stretched out on the couch, the recliner, and the carpet to catch a few Zzzs.

It was about 2 AM when George decided it was time to light a line of pots. The predominate breeze was off the ocean 40 miles to the west, and we headed out into the night to fire up a series of smudge pots laid out along the western border of George's grove. We had drip-torches fueled by diesel that had an exposed wick.

At each pot we flipped open the lid at the top of the stack and the cap on the side over the tank at the base. Tipping the nose of the torch downward sent a stream of diesel, ignited by the wick, into the pool of smudge oil in the bottom of the pot.

After lighting that first line, we returned to the house for another round of coffee and pastries, and a reading from the electronic thermometer – again checking the temp at tree-level and overhead.

A quick round of the grove thermometers showed that the temperature was continuing to drop – we needed to light another line of pots.

It was four o'clock AM when we returned from the second round of firing. Betty now had a pan of lasagna heated up and ready.

Again, we consulted the electronic thermometer, then dug eagerly into the early morning lunch.

The next round among the grove thermometers showed that the temperature was moderating. The oranges were safe for a while. The coldest temperatures, we knew, would come just after dawn.

Again, we spread out and laid down for a quick nap. But the drama of this battle against the cold had all of us wound up – there was little actual sleep.

At dawn we made another circle in the jeep checking thermometers – the temperature was up two degrees all the way around. While the general valley air-mass was still frosty, we had warmed it up enough within our 40 acres to save the oranges.

After sunrise we made a circle to close the lids on all the pots, thereby smothering the flames. The dark haze was evident in the daylight, hovering just above the ground. The odor of the burning oil now permeated the area. Soot had collected in black streaks just under our nostrils.

Back in the house we peeled off our coats and gloves and lined up to scrub our hands and faces. Betty had bacon and eggs in the skillet and cinnamon rolls fresh out of the oven. After a last cup of coffee, the party broke up and the crew headed home for showers and clean clothes.

To a California native, the sight and smell of smudging was just a part of winter. But the population of the San Gabriel Valley had tripled in the years since my father had worked on a smudge crew, and there were 100,000 new people moving to the area every year who had never heard of a smudge pot.

As the population grew, the fruit trees dwindled. Yet in the summer after my high school graduation, I found employment with a local grower and spent the summer working in his fields and groves. One of our main jobs was to spray the trees for insects.

In my father's day the spray rig was pulled through the rows by horses, with men afoot and men in a tower on the wagon, all using hand-held sprayers fed by hoses. When my turn came, the spray rig was mechanized and required only a driver. A series of sprayers was attached to both sides of the length of a vertical boom, each jet cycling up, down, back, and forth to reach all the leaves on each tree.

I was one of two people driving the "water wagon" to supply the spray rig. My truck was of a 1932 vintage and had no cab – only a hood and front fenders, and a

large flatbed with a seat bolted on one corner. The thousand-gallon water tank was chained to the center of the bed.

While the tank was filling with water from a nearby stand-pipe, I measured out several containers of chemicals. From the ends of the rows, I kept track of the progress of the spray rig and met it in the middle of the grove when the driver signaled with his horn that he was ready for a refill.

The fruit trees which my grandfather planted in La Verne in 1920 are all long gone – those tens of thousands of trees replaced by tens of thousands of people, and those hundreds of acres that were once covered with shiny green leaves are now covered with roads and houses, stores, and factories.

Forty years later I returned to La Verne with my Montana-born wife, who was eager to see these endless orange groves of which she had often heard me talk. We did indeed find an orange grove - after some search – a small patch of trees which had been preserved as an Historic Site. And thus, the world of my childhood is past.

Rolling with the International

The 1938 International truck attended the 11/19/22 "Cruisin' La Verne" car show, preening in its newly cleaned cab, candy-apple red wheel spokes, a classy black frame, new bench seat, and other indicators of the wealth of care and attention it has received in its journey toward final restoration. Two Bonita High School auto shop students answered questions.



President's Message

November and December were busy months. We visited the Old Mill in San Marino on November 12th and enjoyed hearing about its history. The "Cruisin' La Verne" event followed on November 19th with excellent attendance by admiring car enthusiasts.

Remembering Skip Mainiero

Mainiero Square was re-dedicated on December 3rd in honor of John "Skip" Mainiero. City Council Mayor Pro-tem Rick Crosby spoke movingly of Skip's work to forge strong bonds between the city and university.



Skip's son Andy and his family were present for this event. The combined efforts of Craig Walters, President of the city's Downtown Business Association, and Eric Scherer, La

Verne's Director of Community Development, led to a "new" Mainiero Square that now has a performance stage and better seating. Skip Mainiero will be remembered with re-installation of his original plaque. After the dedication, Santa arrived for picture-taking and citizens turned out to stroll downtown.



Peggy Redman enjoys the moment with her former ULV graduate student Rick Crosby

Music and Merriment Mark the LVHS Vintage Sale

On December 10th, the LVHS engaged residents with a vintage sale and home tour on Third Street. Three homes were on the tour and attendees had their pick of baked goods and delicious homemade jelly! Apple, cinnamon-apple, and pomegranate jelly as well as lemon and orange marmalade were available by the jar or packed with sweet baked treats in gift baskets. All proceeds supported the International truck restoration. Call Sherry Best at 909/596-4679 or email her at sbest@lavernehistoricalsociety.org to place a jelly order. Don't hesitate. Once it's gone, you'll have to wait until next year.



The holiday spirit was enhanced by a performance by the ULV Choral Singers under the direction of Ariel Pistano.

The events just described have in common a spirit of community engagement and celebration. They are examples of the efforts the LVHS has made to offer a variety of experiences to members and city residents. Not everyone wants to attend a car show, visit a grist mill built by indigenous labor in 1816 during time of colonization, be reminded of a La Verne resident who was a bridge-builder between the city and the university, or tour homes that might not exist today if not for the efforts of homeowners who resisted rezoning of their neighborhood in the 1970s and preserved the beauty of original Lordsburg dwellings.

As the LVHS moves into 2023, it will continue to look back with a spirit of moving forward. What does this mean? When we plan our "Get on the Bus" tours in

February, we'll introduce new subject matter with a longer tour that encompasses not just the homes of past presidents of ULV, but acquaints us with neighborhoods in La Verne that lie north of Baseline Road. We'll hear from David Allen about 100 years of the LA County Fair, even as we learn about plans to develop much of the footprint of the fair area into housing. We'll visit the Nethercutt Museum and its collection of cars, antique musical instruments, trains, and more. We'll come together to contemplate that fact that the LVHS incorporated as a non-profit 50 years ago, and one of its first presidents was Inman Conety, original owner of the 1938 International truck that will begin rolling again. That's symmetry, the old informing the future, with history being made all around us.

La Verne's Chair of Honor

Don Kendrick

A tribute to our country's POW and MIA heroes, in the form of a beautiful handcrafted chair, sits at the entrance to the lobby of La Verne's City Hall. A plaque next to the chair states:

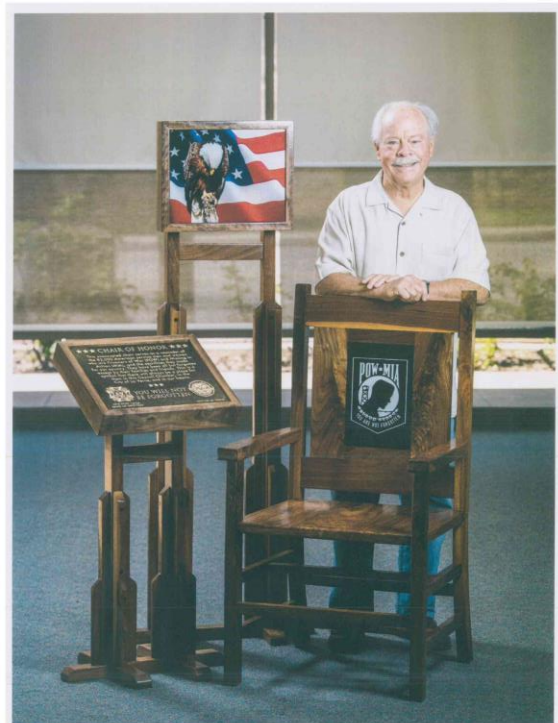
This unoccupied chair serves as a reminder of the 82,000 American service men and women who are Prisoners of War (POW) and Missing in Action (MIA), and the sacrifices they made for our country. They have been all but forgotten except by their families and friends. The chair is a symbol that there will always be a place for them in this Council Chamber, in the City of La Verne, and in our hearts. **YOU WILL NOT BE FORGOTTEN.**

The idea for this chair came from a brief article in *Guideposts* magazine several years ago. The article told of these chairs being placed in racetracks, sports stadiums, and other venues. I thought that the appropriate place in La Verne would be our City Hall. It wasn't until things got a little more "normal" after the worst of the pandemic was over that I was able to get the approval to display a chair and the accompanying plaques in La Verne City Hall.

After three full-scale models made of pine and plywood, the chair began taking serious shape. The design was my own, as all the existing chairs in various places are unique. This chair is made of American Walnut, with many of the prime pieces hand-picked for their specific place on the Chair. The chair and accompanying pieces (including a small table, not pictured, that is used with them in the VFW ceremonies) were sanded until they feel smooth as a baby's bottom, and then six hand-rubbed coats of finish were applied.

The Chair of Honor was dedicated twice, first at a May 2022 meeting of the City Council, and then by the VFW at their Memorial Day ceremony. All three pieces were put on display in the La Verne Council Chambers, along with the American flag and POW/MIA flag, at the beginning of August 2022.

Of all the pieces of fine furniture I have made over the years, this is the project of which I am most proud. As a proud veteran, it's extremely fulfilling to have contributed this to our City.



Don Kendrick poses with the chair, plaque, and framed eagle that completes part of his tribute collection to POW and MIA veterans.