

The Big Freeze

The city awoke this morning in a climate apparently transplanted. Shivers ran where shivers had not run before and the weather bureau was bombarded from early morn with telephone calls to know the reason why. Lightly constructed "Southern California" houses shrank with the cold and fairly trembled with the quivering of their occupants.

--San Diego Tribune, January 6, 1913.

The "Big Freeze of 1913" caught most San Diegans by surprise. A sudden cold front from the north blew into Southern California on January 5, dropping the early morning temperature in San Diego into the 20s. For the next two days San Diegans shivered in the record-setting cold and citrus farmers held their breath as ice covered their lemons and oranges.

The freeze that hit San Diego was the tail end of an icy cold wave running throughout the West. Cheyenne, Wyoming reported 24 degrees below zero and Steamboat Springs, Colorado claimed an astonishing minus 54. Even in temperate Southern California, Pasadena dropped to 24 degrees and Pomona, 18 degrees.

"Yes, it was *some* cold," remarked the *San Diego Tribune*. "Fifty thousand new resolutions were passed to put in furnaces, coal grates, and electric heaters. Breakfast dishes from the little gas stove ovens could not warm the breakfast rooms and the morning meal was eaten in overcoats or in the kitchen."

On January 6--the coldest morning in San Diego history--milk bottles delivered to home porches froze solid. Fire hydrants burst in different parts of town. In Balboa Park, icicles hung from trees and shrubs that had been watered the day before.

At the fountain in Horton Plaza the thermometer reading dropped before dawn to 20 degrees. In the morning, delighted children stomped on the frozen water while photographers snapped pictures. A few broke off chunks of ice and carried home the "cold and fast dissolving relics" wrapped in newspaper.

Less entertained by the novelty of ice were San Diego County's citrus growers, who were caught by the cold snap with little warning. Some burned oil in "smudge pots" to raise the air temperature among the trees. But with little fuel available, others tried to pick their citrus before frost damaged the fruit.

After two days of heavy frost, warm rains arrived in San Diego. Temperatures returned to seasonal norms.

MILLIONS OF DOLLARS DAMAGE DONE TO CITRUS FRUIT CROPS OF STATE

Freezing Temperatures Reported from All Points in California Last Night; Fruit Losses Estimated from Ten to Thirty Million Dollars; Said Orange and Lemon Crops May be Ten to Twenty Thousand Carloads Short; Man is Found Frozen to Death in San Francisco; Zero Temperatures in Mountain States; Salt Lake City Has Water Famine

Associated Press

Los Angeles, Jan. 7.—Showing temperatures from four to six degrees lower than the night before, the cold front which passed through the city last night, showed the hopes of weary and worried orange and lemon growers and traders who estimated that citrus fruit losses would be extremely heavy. In many instances, damage ran from ten to thirty million dollars. Railroad freight losses, figured in terms of shipments, were approximated in the statement from shippers that the 1913 crop of oranges and lemons would be from ten to twenty thousand carloads short.

Last year's crop netted growers \$12,000,000. Eleven millions went to the railroads in freight and refrigerating charges. At the beginning of the season, this year's crop value was estimated at \$10,000,000, and, according to heads of various fruit associations and firms, the damage done by the present two-day freeze will amount, perhaps, to half of the entire crop.

Actual losses to both growers and railroads, however, will be dependent to a certain extent upon the attitude of the government toward the shipment of slightly damaged fruit. W. A. Randolph, head of a big shipping concern, declared that if the government held the same attitude as it did last year in the northern "wreathed fruit" cases, the present crop would be the smallest in the history of the citrus industry. In the "wreathed fruit" the government applied the same "food laws" and ruling that oranges which had been subjected to the freezing process were the same as "unqualified" food, the authorities prohibited the entire shipment.

Growers believe that a slight application of sweating would take the frost out of a great deal of fruit which otherwise would be useless. If the government declines to permit this, so much will be added to the aggregate losses.

News Service, Fresno

San Francisco, Jan. 7.—Huddled behind a pile of frozen refuse, James Clark, a stable man, 26 years old, was found dead today from cold and exposure. Dr. David Stafford, coroner's physician, officially diagnosed the case as death from bronchial pneumonia, caused by cold. No similar death is recorded in the history of San Francisco.

Clark was out of work, thinly clad, and homeless. He had crept into a vacant lot last night and lain down to die.

Orange Picking Rushed

Bakersfield, Jan. 7.—A temperature of six degrees above zero was recorded at Camfield, Kern county, 260 feet above sea level, early this morning. From Camfield the cold swept toward the San Benito and Edison fruit regions, and rose gradually as it went. The lowest temperature yet recorded during the spell at either of the citrus tracts was 22. That was felt at both places early this morning.

In Bakersfield it registered 16 at sunrise this morning.

Due to the cold, the orange picking has speeded up as never before. When the cold struck the citrus men rushed into trucks, low down, and loaded them with every available man. They were then hurried to the groves and worked all day long, picking for the best of the work, picking before sunset in places where thousands of smudge pots sent up a smoky pall.

Gulf States' Are Cold

Washington, Jan. 7.—The cold wave throughout the west extended southward today, to the Gulf states.

The northeastern part of the country has temporary respite from the development of an area of high pressure.

Evening Tribune, January 7, 1913

In the aftermath of the Big Freeze, orchard losses appeared ruinous. An Associated Press bulletin declared, “From San Bernardino to Los Angeles every acre of oranges and lemon trees has been frozen.” Losses were catastrophic in Riverside where one observer recalled, “It looked like fire had swept through the groves.”

San Diego’s Horticultural Commissioner Charles H. Stuart estimated a total loss of nearly five million dollars and declared, “There is not the slightest doubt that the entire crop on the trees is practically lost [and] there will be practically no crop next year.”

Chula Vista grower Russell Allen admitted his losses were heavy: “The temperature in my orchard went as low as thirteen degrees. It would be hard for lemon trees to stand anything like that.” Allen figured the growers in the South Bay would lose about one million dollars from the freeze.

But compared to Riverside and San Bernardino growers, San Diego County citrus producers were lucky. Orchards from Lemon Grove to “frostless Fallbrook” escaped with far less damage than expected.

“The freeze was a visitation of Providence,” Commissioner Stuart decided, “the first of its kind on record and a repetition of which is not to be feared.”

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