

PICTURING PARADISE

THE ART OF CALIFORNIA ORANGE BOX LABELS

Between 1885 and 1955 California artists designed more than 10,000 different label graphics for exclusive use by orange packing companies in California. The labels they designed were trademark-registered brand names and images that were used to market their crops of oranges.

The labels were pasted on one end of every wooden shipping box and served to make it possible for fruit buyers to know this specific information about the oranges in the box they were buying.

Each label stated who grew the oranges and the variety (Navel, Valencia, etc.); where they were grown, and in most cases if they were first-, second- or third-grade oranges.

The challenge for the artists was to include all that information and still produce an outstanding graphic design that would help sell the product. In many cases the label graphics not only succeeded in accomplishing that goal, but they also served to sell California as a paradise found.

When the boxes of oranges were shipped out and ended up in places all over the world, the label graphics served as mini travel posters. These labels were many peoples' first glimpse at the magical land known as California. The art on the orange box labels, in fact, played a key role in selling California as a paradise found and most people who came to California before the 1940s attest to the fact that indeed, a paradise of sorts was exactly what they found.

Today the labels are highly sought-after collectables and the artists who designed them have risen from obscurity to receiving international recognition for their efforts.

