

WRITINGS OF CHARLES A. ROLLINS BEFORE HIS DEATH IN 1925

He was the Great Grandfather of J.C. Downall, Jr.,  
Also a pioneer of the Tombotosee area and a Civil War  
Veterian.

Orange Raising  
in Florida

THONOTOSASSA, Seminoles known  
for Flint Lake.

There is no positive record  
as to the time orange were  
first raised in Florida

It is quite probable the  
early Spanish settlers, on the  
East Coast especially, brought  
from their home orange, lemon  
and possibly other citrus seed  
or trees; but the section of  
I write was, up to 1835, al-  
most exclusively held by the  
Red Man, the whites being con-  
fined to the Gulf Coast and  
Tory Coast, Tampa at that time  
being one of such.

From all I can learn  
there were very few orange

These in South or Central America  
 prior to 1858. Mr. M. M.  
 Riley, whose father and family  
 migrated hither from Alabama  
 in the early '50's, tells me that  
 the ill-fated Gadsden expedition  
 (U.S. soldiers on the march from  
 Santa Fe to Fort King) in 1855,  
 halted and camped for some  
 days in this neighborhood, some  
 4 or 5 miles from Lake Thompson-  
 serra, which, translated, means  
 Rent Lake; that some of these  
 soldiers had oranges, brought  
 from Santa Fe and presumably  
 brought there from Cuba or  
 some of the small fishing  
 boats which filled their trade  
 along the coast.

It is reported that these soldiers planted the orange seed on the site of their camp, built a crude palisade around, remarking that should any of them ever return they would have orange trees started; but a few days after the whole command, 139 men under Major Francis L. Dade, were massacred by the Indians. Mention the seed germinated, grew into a dense thicket until some had attained the size of 3 or four inches in diameter.

Mr. Wiley relates that from the nursery, planted under such peculiar conditions, in the 50<sup>th</sup> his father and others possessed trees which they planted

around their leaves and from  
 which ~~some~~ <sup>large</sup> quantities of  
 fruit were grown and thou-  
 sands of other trees propagated.  
 The earlier settlers paid scant  
 attention to the trees; they were  
 not set out, as are the grove  
 nowadays, with that precision  
 which, when well and uniformly  
 grown, give long avenues or vistas  
 flanked by unobscured growths  
 of <sup>with</sup> several-hued leaves, at this season  
 (February and March) filled with  
 rich creamy blossoms, filling the  
 air for miles around with their  
 dense rich odor. We have one  
 tree that is a prodigy. It has  
 ripe fruit of the February bloom  
 of a year ago, fruit from last

June's bloom, some of it ripe, ~~then~~  
 only partially colored, green fruit  
 from September bloom, a cluster  
 of quite small fruit from  
 bloom I discovered on Dec.  
 17<sup>th</sup> and the heaviest, <sup>densest</sup> ~~densest~~  
 set fruit from this February  
 bloom I have ever seen, and  
 she's still blooming. The tree  
 is a seedling, from the original  
 stock of what was the largest  
 Suddler tree we had in the  
 grove up to the disastrous  
 freezes of 1874-5, when it, with  
 thousands, in thousands of groves,  
 froze to the ground, then, in  
 a single night destroying one  
 of the most promising industries  
 in all Florida, reducing many more

The poverty, paralyzing not only every industry in Canada, as all more dependent, in a greater or less degree on orange culture; the merchants, the lumbermen, the saw mill men, the transportation companies, the laborer, all interdependent were all affected. Indeed, it affects everybody, not only in Canada but elsewhere, who handle or traffic in Canada-grown citrus fruit. It will be ~~remembered~~ recalled that at the time of our disastrous freeze-out that the famine in Nebraska had justly awakened the sympathies of the people of our whole country. Through organizations of

a charitable character success  
 was hurried to our brethren  
 in Nebraska. I have read that  
 car loads of supplies were on  
 their way to the aid of the  
 starving Nebraskans when the  
 donors in Florida awoke to  
 a realization of the fact  
 that they had not only  
 lost the proceeds of a crop,  
 but the labor of years, some  
 of them twenty and more  
 years past, and many crops in  
 the future; but the country  
 at large know very little  
 about it, and now comfort-  
 ably few people outside of  
 Florida realize the enormous  
 loss, so widespread, about

all of the orange-producing sec-  
 tions of the State being un-  
 dermined, - inflicted on so many  
 thousands in a single night.  
 The most surprising thing connected  
 with the disaster was the fact  
 that I never heard of any  
 appeal for aid, for succor, though  
 God knows, many, many needed  
 it. No, no, the Florida Cracker,  
 though often held up in derision  
 and ridicule, never equals his  
 neighbor in any way, but he, never.  
 I wish I could delineate his  
 ignorance to a fault, his pitifulness as the  
 old-time Southern, much to the  
 usage of humility, but, oh Lord,  
 don't excuse his animosity.  
 No organized effort was made to

assist him bridge the chasm  
 of dire calamity which confronted  
 him, but an all-wise Provi-  
 dence came to his aid with  
 the most genial climate the sun  
 shines on, with birds and vines  
 and flowers abounding in full,  
 the swamps, hammocks and  
 cypress in green, the ranges with  
 cattle (though the cold winter  
 killed thousands of these, for years  
 after that blanket horses dotted  
 the pine woods, the buzzard feast-  
 ing as ever before); and the veyra  
 took you still with us. With  
 what Nature gave him he never  
 thought of outside aid. The page  
 was to bring a blessing, though  
 in part undecipherable guide, at

the time. With seeds for vegetables, the quick growing turnips, cabbage, collard, etc., for salads and "greens" in a few weeks he arose, Phoenix-like from the ashes of a dire calamity to realize that oranges were not the only things that would grow in Florida's sterile soil.

(Some one has written that it would have been expedient to combine a too good soil with such a glorious climate) The wait for oranges would be a delay of years, so the result was a more diversified industry. Where before everybody was dependent on the one product—orange—now Strawberries, Blackberries, dewberries,

Beans, lettuce, celery, <sup>Tomatoes</sup> cucumbers,  
 watermelons, cantaloups, okras, po-  
 tatoes and many other things be-  
 fore had to obtain snow in our  
 home markets, fill by train  
 and capacious ocean steamers  
 bound to the North, East and  
 West. Yes, it was a blessing  
 in disguise, that freeze. Of  
 course it fell hard at the time.  
 Many lives were reckoned for  
 it, never will. Many left the  
 state, but thousands have  
 come <sup>back</sup> in and <sup>are</sup> engaging in the  
 new enterprise, and never enter-  
 prises are springing up every day.  
 The cattle, in the early days,  
 before the Yankees and the  
 railroads invaded the land,

hauled his oranges, in bulk,  
 in excelsis to Los Angeles or nearest  
 Gulf or seacoast town and  
 disposed of them by the hundred  
 or thousand, generally. Now, as a  
 rule, his haul is a comparatively  
 short one to a railroad sta-  
 tion or packing house. Whether  
 the primitive export was the  
 means of transportation for the  
 product of a few trees around  
 the home, now, <sup>in season</sup> can be seen at  
 near all hours of the day and  
 night long, heavily-laden  
 trains of ventilated and refriger-  
 ated cars, built for the pur-  
 pose, north-bound, taxing the  
 railroads to their full capacity  
 and often beyond it to handle

The product of more than one  
of acres than there were trees  
at the earlier period.

It would take too long a  
story to go into the details of  
Florida orange raising for profit.

In this immediate section the  
culture on a large scale began  
within the last 20 years. Even  
in '94 that a formal road was  
built from Tampa to Houlston-  
daver. The winter following came  
the freeze, and for several years  
there were very few orange  
raisers there who could afford  
to do so, went to work to  
occupate their groves. Even in  
this section, though now famous  
as to location and consequent

Protection from cold, many groves were abandoned, the sites of some almost obliterated, others narrow little grove shoots from around rotting stumps, for the orange some very toxication of life, and even in many of the recuperated groves are vacancies where the trees have been killed and completely or now set trees from nursery, are way behind in growth.

Where the old roots put out healthy shoots there were pulled out and then soon made, with so much overage to start with.

Under the old system of orange culture, in Florida, Texas, where the trees were companions, or receive organic nitrogen compounds, the

Leaves more of a dark, rich  
 burnished green. They were large  
 and lanceolate and concave leaf  
 the fruit-groove right. The length  
 of the leaf was frequently three  
 times the diameter of the orange.

As cultural systems improve, with  
 the use of commercial fertilizers  
 the leaf grows shorter and of a  
 lighter shade, and the orange leaf  
 scars at the base. In case  
 where a fertilizer composed of some  
 chemicals is used, the leaf is little,  
 if any, longer than the diameter of  
 the orange. It is of a light green,  
 sweet and of a tougher fibre,  
 while the fruit has a diameter  
 as great as the length of the  
 leaf. It stands out conspicuously

on the tree; it has a fine-  
 grained, tough, elastic feel; the  
 quality is of the highest; the  
 fruit-steps well and brings  
 remunerative prices. I use a  
 fertilizer composed of fine, high  
 grade materials (chemicals) Sulfate  
 of ammonia, dissolved bone  
 and Sulfate of potash; have  
 used it now the third year,  
 with each year an improvement  
 in every respect - Tree, foliage  
 and fruit. A month ago or more  
 the trees commenced to bloom.  
 Now that bloom, the most luxu-  
 rious I have ever had, the trees  
 are more heavily laden with  
 fruit - than ever before. We  
 have had an extraordinary

winter. We had only two nights in which ice formed and that was December 26 and 27, or rather, the early morning of the 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>. The ice was of a very thin character, not as thick as a dime and the temperature did not remain low long enough to do the slightest damage to anything but banana leaves and grass, both of which are susceptible to cold as beans or tomatoes. We are, if anything, having more rain than is desirable; are having a regular rainy season, now of a month's duration. The prospects are for a very heavy crop of orange in this section, provided

we are not troubled with any  
 insect pests and drought, as we  
 were last season but it takes  
 the orange so long to grow and  
 mature with the February bloom  
 all right the earliest oranges  
 we have come the last of Sept  
 or early Oct, those only a few  
 extra early. Then the standard  
 crop comes along maturing in  
 November, December and January.  
 The later varieties in March  
 and April. Santa Late (Lardiff)  
 are good until June; have had  
 some to hang on all right  
 into July.

To raise oranges properly requires  
 an unceasing, unremitting vigilance  
 for instance the 15th Feb we com-

proceed to fertilize, plowing it in  
 and harrowing the ground with  
 an *Stena* groove harrow. Inter-  
 ately rains of the proper kind fol-  
 lowed and the fertilizer began to  
 act immediately. A couple weeks  
 dry weather intervening necessitat-  
 ed another harrowing. What the  
 idea - cultivate, stir the ground,  
 keep down the grass and weeds  
 if it gets very dry, keep the  
 harrow going; it forms a blanket  
 of dust that <sup>conserve</sup> ~~conserves~~ the mois-  
 ture, keeps it to the surface -  
 is almost the equivalent of  
 irrigation. Watch the trees, the foliage  
 remove all known of debris, dead  
 leaves, dead twigs; they make holes  
 for insects, spray to kill insect

Starts with the insecticide <sup>scout</sup> ~~scout~~,  
 about the foliage and Cape links  
 of trees with strong whaleoil or  
 other soap — in a word keep the  
 tree clean as you would the  
 human body with the same  
 idea in mind — health, vigor and  
 consequent good fruit.

Phenomena in the cone  
 applied to both our beautiful  
 Lake and the region for miles  
 around it has the reputation of  
 raising finer fruit than any other  
 portion of Central or South Florida.  
 This is verified for by the best of judges,  
 buyers and packers. Our orange land  
 is of the best type to commence our  
 intelligent cultivation down the coast.

In the days of the aborigines

This station was evidently the great plant for the manufacture of Indian implements - darts, arrow heads, spears, Tomahawks, battle axes, knives, etc. as one frequently finds something of the kind in the soil or flows it up all around the lake and at Lenox a knife or bone from it can be found the flint of which these weapons were made at Lenox besides of the flint, chert or scoria can be found, evidently the debris of their manufacture. It might in its day have been to the Indian what Allouez is of today to the white - the greatest of manufacturing plants of the continent of the times. I have somewhat of a collection of arrow heads, etc. among them a fine specimen of battle axe, splintered from quite a depth in a scabbard cut, the earth being a very stiff clay mixed with a quartz.

Sandstone. From the nature of the formation and depth it must have been there imbedded for thousands of years. I am not geologist enough to tell with any degree of accuracy.

Phonetic is 14 miles by rail, from San Francisco. We have not what may be strictly termed a town, but a thick <sup>average town</sup> settlement consisting of two stores, a post office, a sawmill. Our location is high and dry and healthful, a naturally pretty situation with its beauty well enhanced by nice avenues shaded by umbrellas <sup>of</sup> oaks; the houses set in a fine ground ornamented with only such tropical growth as is to be found in the section of Florida, interspersed with profusions of flowering <sup>of</sup> trees and shrubs all the year round.

We have people every here  
 from near all sections of the  
 country—north, south, east and  
 west. Many come here to enjoy  
 their lives, some so low on the  
 life scale on structure, and  
 their lives have been lengthened  
 even beyond all expectation.  
 It is surely the country for  
 the elderly. I was told, when I  
 came here, it was a fine climate  
 to grow old in. I have found it  
 the reverse—a fine climate to grow  
 young in. At least that is the  
 my experience. I came here in  
 Nov. 1903, then in my 52<sup>d</sup> year,  
 now I feel like 46. Can't real-  
 ize I am older. And such is  
 the almost universal experience  
 of those who lead an almost  
 entirely outdoor life here.  
 I am not writing in the inter-  
 val of long recesses; have come  
 to see myself, but I am

entirely on orange culture  
and have an ambition to equal  
the West-Indies.

While the earlier or former orange  
varieties propagated seedling trees almost  
exclusively and only from seeds  
of those grown in their immediate  
vicinity, still some new varieties  
were produced. Gradually more of  
European fruit-varieties moved into the  
country, new varieties were intro-  
duced from all quarters of the  
globe, and now we have varieties  
owning of into the score and  
filling pages in our <sup>the</sup> nursery cat-  
alogues.