

Chapter 3: A School Among the Orange Groves

Chapter 3: A School Among the Orange Groves takes us back to the mid-1950s, when California's only state-run school for deaf students was located in San Francisco, known as the California School for the Deaf. This institution became a vital center for Deaf Culture in the state, offering a space for both education and community. However, for families residing in Southern California, especially those living near the Mexican border, the long trip to Berkeley posed a significant challenge, particularly given the limited transportation options. Following the post-World War II boom, as Los Angeles grew into a major city, advocates pushed for the establishment of a second school in the Southern part of the state. This led to the creation of the California School for the Deaf in Riverside in 1946, under Governor Earl Warren, which aimed to provide greater accessibility for students in Southern California. This move was a game-changer for many families who had long struggled with the geographical and logistical obstacles of sending their children to the northern part of the state.

In 1946, Riverside was a modest city of about 50,000 people, mainly recognized for its extensive orange groves. These groves had become a symbol of the area, flourishing due to irrigation systems that transformed the arid land into fertile soil. This agricultural boom was largely fueled by the introduction of the navel orange from Brazil in the 1870s, a sweet and prized variety that revolutionized the citrus industry. The city's transformation into a citrus powerhouse helped establish Riverside as the epicenter of California's orange industry. As the region's oranges became widely acclaimed, with awards won at prestigious events such as the New Orleans World's Fair, Riverside gained national recognition. This agricultural success laid the groundwork for the city's future growth, which would go on to include significant

industrial and economic development, contributing to its expansion into a thriving urban area over the coming decades.

In 1948, Riverside was chosen as the site for the new school, located amid barley fields and orange groves. This location was selected intentionally to distance the school from the stigma associated with mental institutions, ensuring that the new facility would offer an empowering and positive environment for its students. The land was purchased for a modest price of \$68,500, which would later prove to be an incredible investment. Although the school did not open its doors to students until 1953, the anticipation for the school's establishment was palpable throughout the region. The California School for the Deaf in Riverside was strategically located with views of the San Gabriel Mountains, providing a peaceful, inspiring backdrop for students and staff. The school's expansive, well-maintained grounds were rare among state institutions at the time, offering an ideal space for education and personal growth for its students.

As the years passed, Riverside underwent significant changes. The once-thriving orange orchards began to make way for suburban development, and the city's population grew exponentially, reaching 300,000 by 2022. Riverside's strategic location in Southern California, with its close proximity to freight and logistics hubs, helped to solidify its role as a key player in the U.S. economy. The city adapted to a more car-centric culture, with housing developments sprawling across the area, which changed its landscape significantly. Despite the transformation into a bustling urban center, Riverside still retained ties to its agricultural heritage. Revitalized downtown areas and public parks dedicated to its citrus legacy served as reminders of the city's agricultural roots. Local historian Vincent Moses captures the sentiment surrounding these changes, reflecting on how Riverside evolved from a peaceful agricultural community to a thriving urban landscape. His observations highlight the complexity of such a transformation, emphasizing both the growth and the preservation of Riverside's unique history as the city adapted to the pressures of modern development.

As Riverside continues to grow and evolve, its shift from a small farming town to an industrial powerhouse serves as a model of adaptability. The city's legacy, marked by its agricultural foundations, remains an important part of its identity even as it embraces its role as a logistics hub in the modern era. Through all of these changes, Riverside's transformation illustrates how cities can maintain a connection to their past while adapting to new challenges and opportunities. The creation of the California School for the Deaf in Riverside stands as a testament to the city's ability to evolve while maintaining a focus on the needs of its residents, particularly those in the deaf community.



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