

History of the Los Angeles Flower District

Two large wholesale [flower markets](#) and several storefront tenants comprise the core of the original Los Angeles Flower District, from Seventh to Eighth streets on Wall Street in Los Angeles. This is America's largest wholesale flower district.

Flowers to America from the Colorful Land of California

By Peggi Ridgway, Editor, *The Bloomin' News*

The incredible, nourishing climate of Southern California

In the 1800s, expansive open areas along the Southern California coast and around Los Angeles enjoyed the natural color and beauty of native grasses and wild flowers. The Los



Angeles Coastal Prairie, a large coastal area near the El Segundo dunes, featured vernal pools and marshes and was carpeted with spectacular displays of wildflowers. Indian paintbrush, mustard, lupine, poppies, verbena and other flowers formed a kaleidoscope of color that surprised and delighted residents and tourists alike. The sweet moisture of evening and morning coastal fog intermingled with daily rations of sunlight to create a nurturing, year-round semi-tropical growing environment where plants and flowers would flourish.

Spectacular growth of the Los Angeles area

In the 1800s, the great diversity and industry that characterizes Southern California today were beginning in earnest, including agricultural enterprises on the fringes of Los Angeles. Orange groves and dairy farms were common. Within the city's limits (and very near today's Flower District), the garment and fashion districts were putting down their roots. A second rail line, built between Los Angeles and Santa Fe, New Mexico, brought in thousands of new residents and made it possible for California products to reach Eastern markets quickly. In 1890, Edwin Earl invented the refrigerated railcar and the first Tournament of Roses Parade was held in Pasadena. In 1892, Edward L. Doheny discovered oil in Los Angeles. By this time, the population of Los Angeles had passed the 50,000 mark.

Setting the pace of floriculture in California

In 1892, a handful of Japanese American farmers began planting and cultivating flowers in fields near Santa Monica and south of the fast-growing city of Los Angeles. Only a few Japanese Americans lived in Southern California at the time (possibly less than 100), with the greatest population residing in the northern part of the state, since San Francisco was the main port of entry. They made an impact upon the entire California flower industry that would set its pace for the future.

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*Above left, the Southern California Flower Market, on Wall Street, in the 1920s.
At right, the Los Angeles Flower Market of the American Florists' Exchange, Wall Street, circa 1959.*

Beginning the Los Angeles Flower Markets and Flower District

In 1913, the Japanese flower growers and sellers started the Southern California Flower Market* just a few blocks northwest of its current location. That market moved in 1923 to the 700 block of South Wall Street, where it resides today. Around 1917, the American Florists' Exchange was organized by a handful of European immigrants working as flower farmers and wholesalers. Incorporating in January, 1921 as the American Florists' Exchange dba Los Angeles Flower Market*, they moved from their first location at Fifth and Winston streets to a former garage on Wall Street, right across the street from the "Japanese market" (Southern California Flower Market). The 700 block of South Wall Street became the core of today's Los Angeles Flower District and the "grand central" of trading between the wholesalers, shippers, florists and flower farmers, who trucked their blooms fresh from the fields to market nightly.

Editor's Notes: The history of the American Florists' Exchange dba Original Los Angeles Flower Market is documented in its 2008 hardback pictorial book, ***Sending Flowers to America: Stories of the Los Angeles Flower Market and the People Who Built an American Floral Industry***. The history of the Southern California Flower Market is documented in its 2004 hardbound book titled, ***A Scent of Flowers***, by Naomi Hirahara, and can be purchased by contacting the SCFM. Visit www.LAFlowerDistrict.com for contact information.

Everybody Contributed

William Mulholland's California Aqueduct had ushered its first precious gallons of water to Los Angeles, from 200 miles north, in 1913, paving the way for unprecedented growth of the Los Angeles metropolitan area. The Los Angeles area's floriculture industry was well underway, nurtured by dedicated families, smart business leaders and hard workers. Japanese American entrepreneurs followed a vertical chain concept that resulted in many essential operations – from farming to shipping to retail sales – being performed by Japanese American businesses from the beginning to the end of the supply chain. Other families, including many Latinos, Greeks, Italians, Dutch and other Europeans, grew flowers at first on small plots of ground and as the years went by, expanded and passed their businesses from generation to generation. Some of today's leaders in the floriculture industry started with the small land parcels and flower stands of yesteryear.

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Photo, left: Tike and Dan Karavas in the Karavas family flower field in Redondo Beach, early 1940s.

Below, Florists await the ringing of the 6:30 a.m. opening bell at the Los Angeles Flower Market.



Of the floriculture industry that evolved from the small farms and markets of Los Angeles, one thing was certain: **Californians supplied the entire nation with its cut, fresh flowers for many decades.** During the icy cold and snowy winters, and during the off seasons for certain flowers in various regions of the United States, roses, carnations, gladiolas, chrysanthemums and many other fresh blooms were harvested, packaged and shipped daily from Southern California to fill the orders of florists from coast to coast. Even today, old-time wholesalers in Texas, Michigan and eastern states recall ordering from their California wholesalers.

What changed?

In the 1960s, with great advances in air transportation and the advent of refrigerated trucks, fresh flowers began to be imported from other countries to the United States. Adding to the increasing demand for imports was the urbanization of the Southern California farming areas, which were quickly evolving into housing tracts and shopping centers. Finally, adding to the challenges faced by retail florists, supermarkets and large discount chains began selling fresh flowers. Suddenly, driving down a country road past flower and citrus farms was but a memory. Los Angeles area flower wholesalers now ordered their cut flowers from foreign growers. Wholesalers and local growers made research trips to South America and Holland, to see for themselves the efficiencies of the farms there. Even though they import many flowers, today's wholesalers still order from California growers the specialty blooms (peonies, tea roses, etc.) desired for unique or custom arrangements; and growers like Mellano & Company, which operates The Flower Fields at Carlsbad, still grow a wealth of beautiful blooms for florists and event decorators across the United States.

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Awesome growth

Unlike flower districts in many large cities and metro areas, the Los Angeles Flower District has grown to become the largest wholesale flower district in the United States. The two historic flower markets that comprise its core, located between Seventh and Eighth streets on Wall Street with streetside floral-related businesses – all of whom are part of the official Los Angeles Flower District – are now surrounded on nearby streets by dozens of independently owned wholesale and retail florists, floral suppliers, floral related retail shops and small flower malls.

Although they contribute to the overall economy and health of the area, *most of these stores are not enrolled, badge-holding members of the official Los Angeles Flower District.*

We encourage you to visit the real Los Angeles Flower District on Wall Street and enjoy the spacious, flower-bedecked aisles of two historic flower markets and the suppliers of Wall Street. Visit our vendors.

We'd love to see you at the District!

