



# Early History of Olives in Texas



Larry Stein  
TEXAS A&M  
**AGRILIFE**  
EXTENSION

# Biblical reference

- Scripture when the dove returned to Noah's ark carrying an olive branch in its beak  
(Gen.8:11)



Photo credit: William F. Dankenbring

Originated in what is Turkey and Syria today



# Known Olive History-Texas

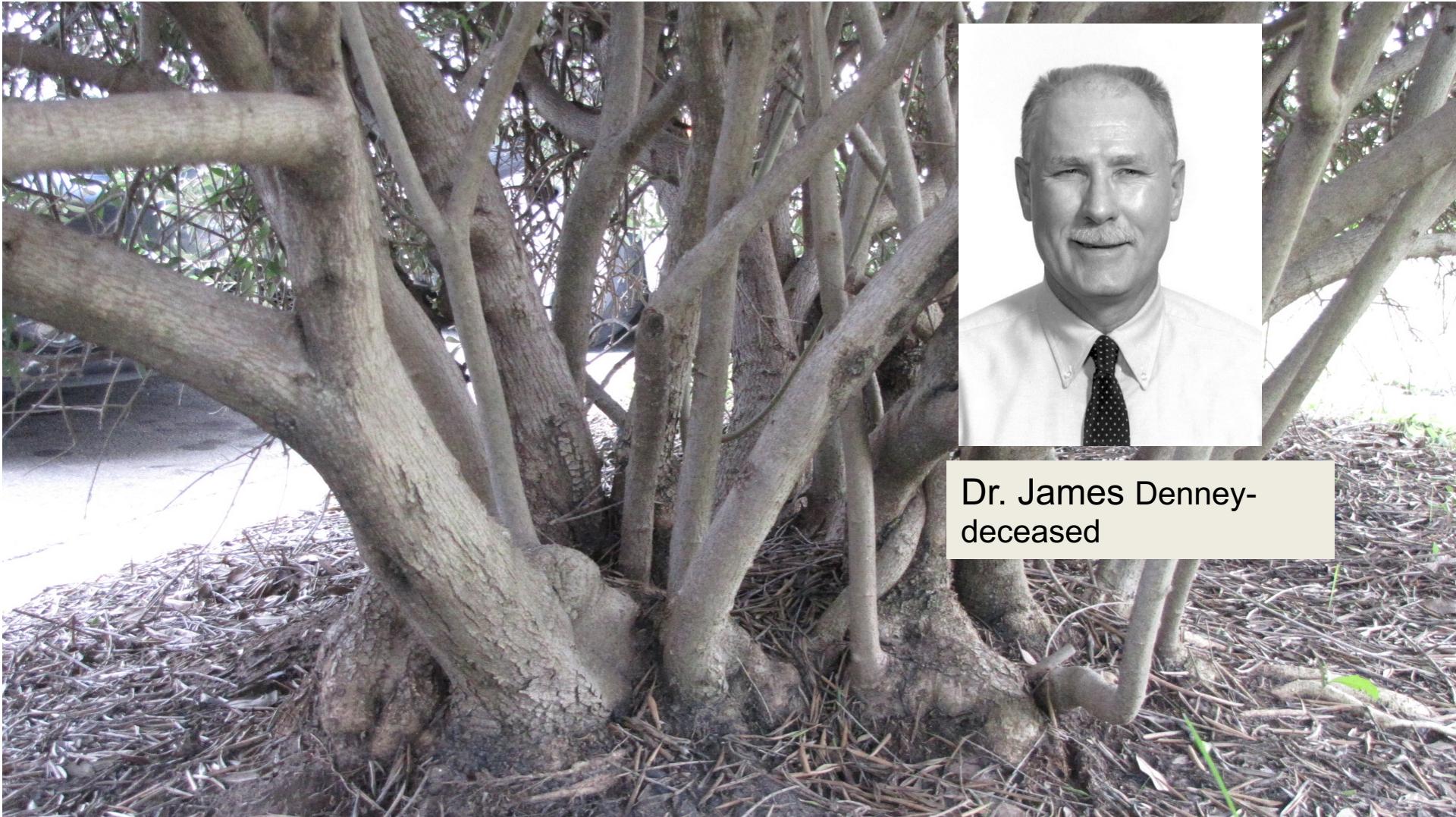
- **Onderdonk (1900)**, important Texas nurseryman and fruit explorer wrote favorably of olives in San Luis Potosi, Mexico, but was otherwise silent about them.
- Old trees dated 1920's exist and bear fruit at places like Asherton & Galveston.
- **Mortensen (1938)** described olive varieties introduced from California as "fair" for Wintergarden area and better for dooryard than commercial purposes.
- **Hartmann (1951)** "Twenty-year effort in South Texas has failed to see fruiting" (Weslaco/Brownsville).
- 



Ernest Mortensen, Winterhaven, TX Exp. Station

An olive tree found in La Villita in San Antonio produced regular crops of fruit until it was severely damaged in the freeze of December, 1983. This tree was most likely planted in the 1930's when the Works Progress Administration performed the restoration and landscaping in downtown San Antonio.

**Thermal constraints on the productivity of olive (*Olea europaea* L.)  
in the climates of olive-producing regions and of Texas, Thesis,  
Texas A&M Dept. of Horticultural Sciences, 1982**



**Dr. James Denney-  
deceased**

s were  
more  
e and  
years  
useful  
other  
mmer-  
d their

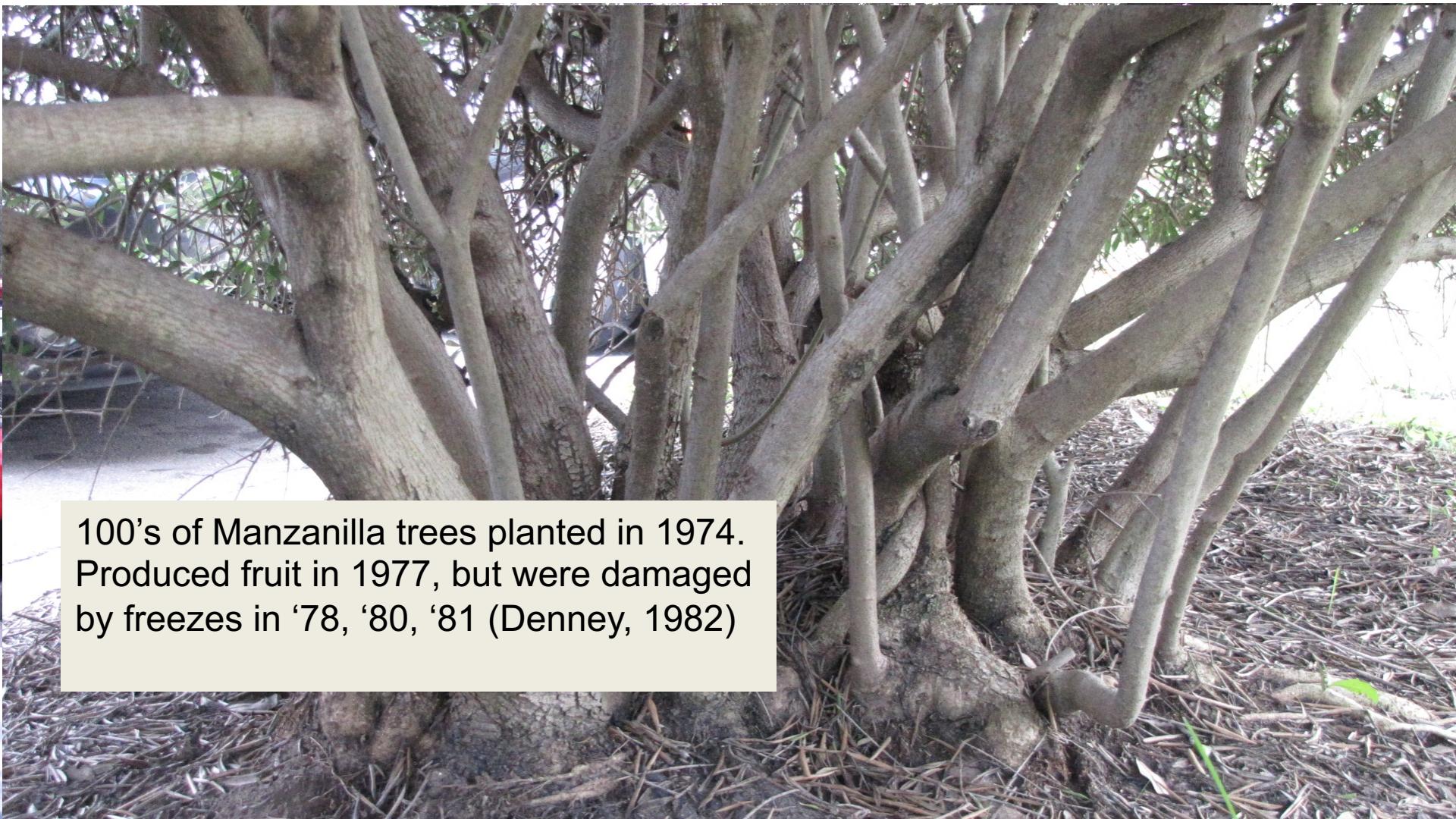
## 2.2. *Thermal model*

The thermal model developed for olive by Denney and McEachern (1985) was used to evaluate vernalization periods for each site using daily maximum mean temperatures of <21.1 and >12.5°C and minimum mean temperatures of <12.5 and >0.0°C.

In the northern hemisphere, the vernalization period was from 1 October to 30 June, and in the

Denney and extension horticulturist George Ray McEachern. The study defined a “thermal adaptability zone” in a large portion of southwest Texas that might support the cultivation of fruit-bearing olive trees. The study also indicated “that a number of Texas sites show temperature.” patterns similar to where the olive is cultivated

# Olives on Texas A&M Campus



100's of Manzanilla trees planted in 1974.  
Produced fruit in 1977, but were damaged  
by freezes in '78, '80, '81 (Denney, 1982)

# Publications

- Denney, J.O. and G.R. McEachern. 1983. An analysis of several climatic temperature variables dealing with olive reproduction. *J. Amer. Soc. Hort. Sci.* 108:578-581.
- Denney, J.O., McEachern, G.R. and J.F. Griffiths. 1985. Modeling the thermal adaptability of the olive (*Olea europaea* L.) in Texas. *Agric. For. Meteorol.* 35:309-327.

# Kenneth Trigg Dealey

- Highland Park native got interested in oil
- Visited California and became intrigued
- Then visited Italy
- Dealey wanted to import and sell olive oil
- Denny research indicated maybe could grow
- There was only limited history of olives in Texas

- Trigg Dealey, Italy is clearly the Ferrari of producers. There he met and consulted with Dr. Giuseppe Fontanazza, a world-famous expert on olives.
- Dealey returned from Italy excited by the news that Fontanazza had analyzed the thermal adaptability report and agreed with Dealey's conclusion that olive trees could grow commercially in Texas

Says Shreve. "He seemed real excited when I told him about the old trees that I saw being harvested in 1976 over in Asherton



- In March 1993, Dealey planted 43 trees as a test at a nursery just south of Austin.
- Dealey met Baxter Adams.
- Adams and Dealey planted trees near Devine

- Adams was the perfect person to partner with Dealey. “Texas is a big country,” says Adams. “We will grow olives here; it’s just a matter of finding the variety of trees to fit the climate.”



# David and Beverly Anderson

## Anderson Ranch, Dilley, Est. 1997



Slide/Photos: Karen Henry,  
Texas Olive Oil Council





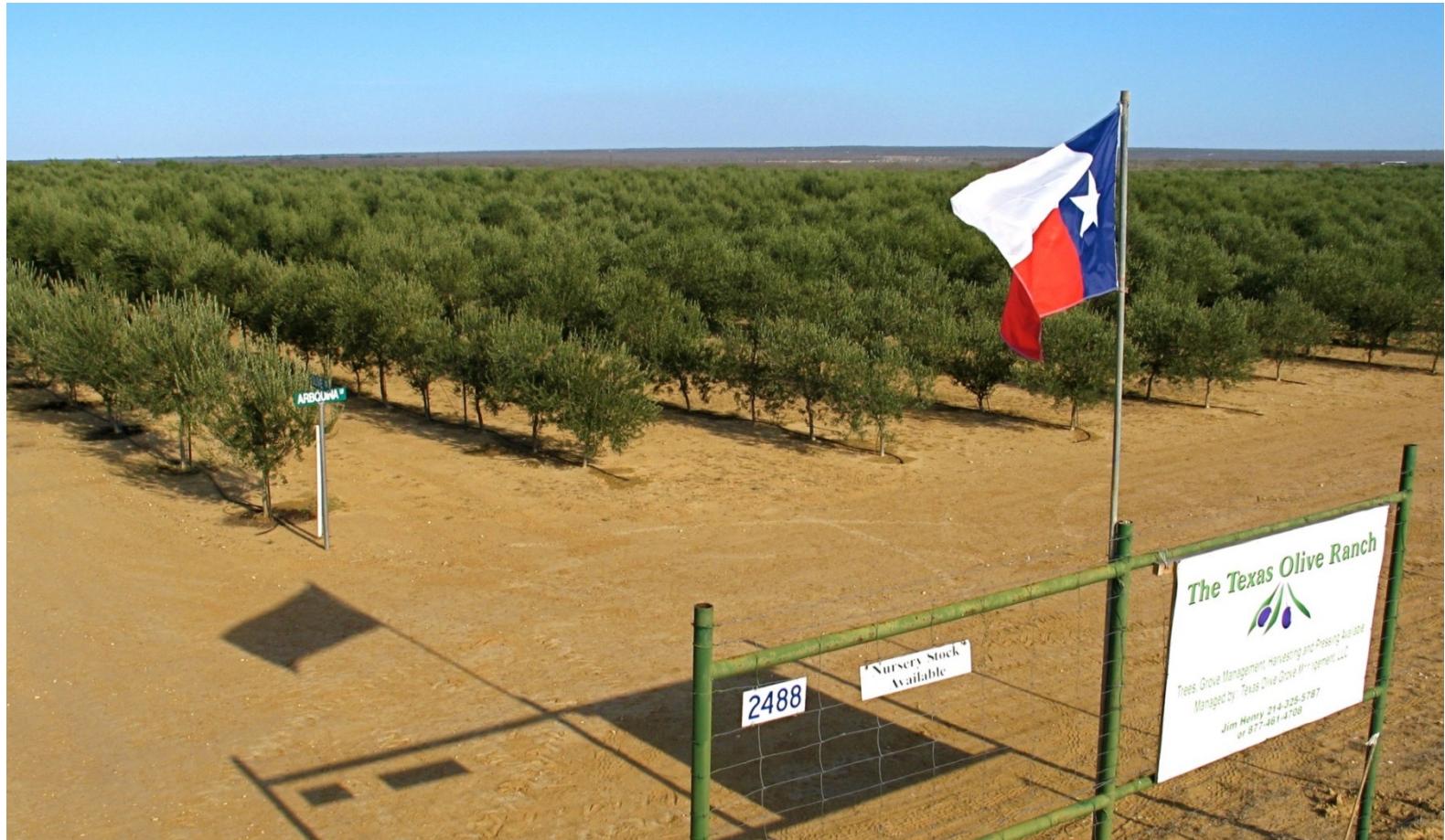
Jim Henry planted his first trees in 1994 near Marble Falls which subsequently froze out

In 2005 established Texas Olive Ranch near Carrizo Springs



# Jim Henry

## Texas Olive Ranch, Carrizo Springs, Est 2005



# Saundra Winokur

Sandy Oaks Olive Orchard, Elmendorf, First  
Planting, 1998



# Bella Vista Ranch

# First Texas Olive Oil Co.

## Wimberly, Texas

- First Trees Planted, 1998



Photo: Coppage, CW News



Tom and Rebekah McCullough; north of  
Castroville

County meeting in Bastrop; interacted with the olive council; Ca trips in March, August and October, 2014







Illustration by Silia Goetz, wsj.com









