

California Avocado Association 1933 Yearbook 18: 85-90

Policing Avocado Orchards

E. W. Biscailuz

Sheriff of Los Angeles County

Address delivered at Annual Dinner at Whittier, May 5, 1933.

Mr. Chairman, Members of the California Avocado Association, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Sitting here tonight took me back many years in California history, and I can go back a few years myself. I remember reading of my Grandfather, William Warren, who came to California in 1850 and was Chief of Police of Los Angeles from 1868 to 1870, and while Chief of Police, having seven patrolmen under him guarding the life and property of the citizens of that Pueblo at that time, and needing more men. He was killed while still in office. At that time the property of the people of the city of Los Angeles was guarded by the Chief of Police and eight men. There were 8,000 people in the city of Los Angeles in 1870 and yet per capita, police protection was better in those days than it is today, both in the city of Los Angeles and the County of Los Angeles. The Sheriff's Office and Los Angeles Police Department have not had an increase of personnel in over four years.

We think back—that in 1880 there were 40,000 people living in Los Angeles; then the population in 1890 jumped to 50,000; in 1900 to 103,000, in 1910 to 319,000; 1920 to 569,000 and in 1930 to a million and one-quarter, all in rough figures. It is hard to realize that the city of Long Beach today has 50,000 more people than Los Angeles had in 1900. So you can realize what a job it is in the protection of life and property to keep up with this influx of population in Southern California and particularly into Los Angeles County in these last few years, and it has been a problem. As an example for comparison, when I entered the service of Los Angeles County in 1907, there were only 27 of us in the entire department. There were only nine departments of the Superior Court in Los Angeles County in 1907. There are now 50 departments of the Superior Court as well as 30 in the Municipal Court to take care of litigation up to \$2,000. You know, in 1907 we had to do all our work by horse and buggy, street car and train. A call to Whittier meant going to the stables, renting a horse and buggy and start out, all of which took a day. We can easily do this now in an hour's time. You know the Los Angeles Police Department did not obtain a machine until 1909; nearly two years before either department had an auto at their disposal and autos were numerous in those days, we used to be a one-man office. I remember very well in those days, if the Sheriff left his office the entire work had to be left undone, but now we have our offices patterned just like any public service—into departments, into squads, having the men below understand the work of the men above, so that all executive heads could be called away at a time and the office could still function. With a centralized organization as in the old days, all from one office this would be impossible in the center of this metropolis of ours. We find, however, that we now have approximately 500,000 people living in Los Angeles County outside of incorporated territory that look to Sheriff and Constabulary

for their protection. They do not have their Chief of Police as you have in Chief Essley, who efficiently can take care of your life and property but these other people have to look to the Sheriff and Constabulary. We have an old pioneer here tonight—I wish at this time to have Bob Way stand up, so you can all see the new uniform. I know the things I am talking about of the past finds Bob sitting smiling and realizing how truthful they are. How times have changed. You folks who have arrived in California in the last ten or fifteen years, it is hard to realize what this great state of ours has been doing in the last 30 to 40 years but anyhow I was mentioning the centralized organization, of one office in center of town trying to serve the people in suburban district—after we found we had half a million people looking to us for this service, we began to decentralize our office and now we have nine miniature Sheriff's offices, stationed in nine parts of Los Angeles County where the greatest number of people can be served by that particular sub-station in the best manner possible. These sub-stations are open 24 hours a day with necessary men and equipment to take care of any situation. We find also that the crime problem has changed in the last 15 or 20 years. The crime problem was local, confined to city and county. Now it is international. In those days, if a crime was committed, a robbery or murder—in most cases before nightfall the Chief of Police with a horse and buggy or on horseback could get his man. Now, in two or three hours' time these bandits cross the border before apprehended. Naturally, means of communication and transportation also had to be perfected. We have also the teletype system. You all know the uncanny typewriter which is used so much commercially. Each sub-station has teletype connection with our main office, where a secretary can type out orders of what is necessary to all sub-stations at one time and an answer comes back—not a chance of misunderstanding, alibis, or mistakes. There is so much that is being done in public service at the present time, I am talking generally, and I might say that I know quite a little about them, which should be interesting to you because I know very little about your business—and you cannot know very much about our business. That is why I always try to give you highlights of what law enforcement organization is like. We find that in most cities or towns where crimes are being committed that the people in these cities and towns immediately think there is a crime wave on—a great army of bandits—if there are 75 or 100 naturally they think that there are that many men in town committing the crimes. I am glad to say that is not the case. They work in criminal mobs—2, 3 or 5 men will get together, look over a district or situation, such as a Board of Directors would,, and then start out pulling their jobs as we would call it. These men do not do this work indiscriminately. They don't enter places until they have surveyed the situation and they know just where they are going before they strike—think the pickings will be fruitful and the chances of getaway good. Sometimes weeks go by, and you will wonder what is wrong with your Sheriff or Chief of Police—no one has been captured; then all of a sudden you will pick up the paper and see where two or three men have been captured, confessions obtained and thousands of dollars awaiting identification at headquarters. The law of averages get these fellows for surely they will be captured for the second or third offense in this game.

It is necessary for us to perfect ourselves by having an identification bureau second to none in the United States of America—and a criminalological laboratory for scientific purposes. You know we have the largest county jail in the United States of America—with 1868 prisoners in jail—at the corner of Temple and Broadway. The top five floors of

the Hall of Justice are filled with * prisoners and 500 more are in camps in Los Angeles County. In passing, I would like to mention that phase of our work—that is, crime prevention and rehabilitation of those who have slipped for the first time. In 1920, my predecessor, former Sheriff Traeger, had the progressive thought to establish camps in Los Angeles County and we now have nine honor camps working eight hours a day, building roads, under competent supervision, without a sign of a gun or handcuff. They are strictly on honor and after working eight hours, play baseball, pitch horseshoes, and other recreational activities, under the rules of the camp, and while at camp they are earning 50c a day which accumulates to their account, when they leave our custody. They have had a chance to work with their hands and keep happy under the sunshine, and have become physically fit, mentally alert and with a grubstake, can go back into society as a credit rather than a menace. I am only hoping when we get out of this depression and when money can be again expended usefully that I can, as Sheriff, take at least another 500 men out of that Los Angeles county jail and give them something useful to do and make them self supporting, and where they can take the burden off of the shoulders of the taxpayers. In the old country, they are closing a major penitentiary—closing for the want of inmates—while we are building bigger and better jails all the time. You cannot safely cage up in tanks, regardless of efficiency, criminals and give them nothing in the world to do. You must give them a task to perform—not coddle them. We have some groups which are watched every minute of the time. Those who have committed their first crime in many instances you can save—and the honor camps have only had a few of two or three time losers. Only about one percent of those who in the last twelve years have passed through that system of ours. Surely it is worthwhile—to apprehend and at the source of crime in the first instance,, prevent that crime—how much better off in the end for that particular program. We find that we have been handicapped in the last few years. We have not had an increase in personnel. We have been at a standstill as far as increase or expenditure of money is concerned for a long time. A few years ago we found that the losses in citrus industry, avocados, oranges, lemons and poultry—different things which had to do with farming or agriculture—was tremendous .in Los Angeles County. With a centralized office we couldn't do very much about it. The duty of protection devolved on the county of Los Angeles. In 1930, we instituted a Farm Theft Detail—the first Farm Theft Detail in the United States of America, so far as the Sheriff's office is concerned. I am very glad we have with us tonight in person Howard Brooks, Captain of that Farm Theft Detail. Although he is in plain clothes tonight, if he had a uniform on, none would look better than he. I would like to have Captain Brooks at this time stand—and that is his wife sitting next to him. Now he should really be on this program as the one to tell you about the prevention and apprehension as far as thievery in citrus groups are concerned. I can only talk as one who is directing activities and furnishing the man power that the work shall be done with, but the men under the Sheriff naturally work in the field and I am glad to say Capt. Brooks from what I can understand, has brought about a fine feeling of understanding between the law enforcement officials and those whose property must be protected a surety that property that you are engaged in growing and producing will be protected, and naturally it is fine. I know we have in the past—there has been a feeling that the Sheriff's office is just another law enforcement agency—they don't care very much except to draw their salary, that the people could worry about their troubles, but I

want to tell you sincerely that not only in the Sheriff's but other branches of public service a real effort is being made every day to bring about better service in public office, and it is bearing fruit. We know that there were several million dollars a year lost by your group, and those whom you represent, before any real activity was taken to protect your interest. I know that at least \$5,000 or \$6,000 a month were stolen just in our territory and I know that is now minimized to only a few hundred a month. I have been very sorry that we have had to reduce our patrol system to where the service now is. What we need is more investigations and having Capt. Brooks' men follow up the fence—the fellow who is encouraging the thievery and then finding the market for it. Investigating cases of that kind rather than patrol which is so very necessary. I know through your efforts, Judge Halm, we are going to give you better service if the recommendation of the County Civil Service and Efficiency Bureau recommendations is adopted by the Board of Supervisors. You all know the Police Department in Los Angeles has had a radio patrol system in operation for several years now, and that has been a very successful thing. It was thought that in Los Angeles County, the unincorporated part of the county, because we were scattered territory—that radio would not work—so we tried out an experiment and have had three cars working in Belvedere Garden District nearly a year and we find they are doing yeoman service and cutting down the crime there. So we made application over a year ago for a service of patrol cars attached to each one of our substation, districts, and were happy to receive the report of the Bureau of Efficiency recommending to the Board of Supervisors and furnishing the Sheriff's department with cars for each sub-station district, so I believe we are going to get them. The only thing I am worrying about—in these days of retrenchment—many times there is false economy used. Now you know well enough that unless we have new cars of moderate price—not Buicks,, Studebakers, but those of Chevrolet, Ford or Plymouth class, for these men to use, with radios, we won't get very far because if we start using second-hand cars with that patrol work the cost will be terrific, and I understand that was one of the recommendations—that we use second-hand cars. So on Monday, I am taking up with that Board this matter, for I strenuously object to using second-hand cars of all description in that particular work and I believe that we will get somewhere, and if not, I am going to call upon the committee again. I realize that you folks, by what you represent, have shown the Board of Supervisors the necessity of this patrol service and I don't believe my recommendation alone would have brought about what I believe this system will do unless the officials realize that there was a very representative body of people representing millions of dollars wanting just this service, so I am hoping all will be all right.

We are now a uniformed body—the first Sheriff's office that has their men uniformed. We found we were a county-wide police department rather than Sheriff's office, so vast in activity, that we started out as an experiment the uniforming of men by sub-stations. At first I know the majority of men didn't like the idea of dolling up in a uniform but gradually when one saw the other, he rather liked the idea. And I was very glad that we were ready when the Long Beach earthquake occurred—for we had over a hundred men already in uniform and we were able to go into that area to work and our men in plain-clothes, working side by side with the men in uniform—found their efficiency I was greatly hampered. This sold to them immediately the idea of the value of uniforms and since that time an order has gone out that the first of July will be the dead-line as to the

uniforming of our men. That doesn't mean all our men will work in uniform but they are going to have a uniform as a part of their equipment so they will have one to use. Many investigators could not work in uniform but there are times of riots and disaster where a man in uniform can do the work of many men in plain-clothes. I am mentioning these things to show you that a lot of thought must be given to Police work of the present day.

You know that we have two penitentiaries—San Quentin, where there are 5700 prisoners, the first offenders, and Folsom, with 2700, who are second and third-time hard boiled offenders, as we call them. Folsom is a keg of dynamite.

We furnish 45% from Los Angeles County to these two penitentiaries and 60% come from Southern California. That does not mean we are any less law-abiding, but a great metropolis—for crime is committed where there is congestion and where the picking is good.

We took 1092 prisoners last year to different institutions of California. Our transportation bill last year was \$102,000.00 in transporting these prisoners with guards. Just two weeks ago, we brought about a change for the better. In Sacramento, a system whereby our county will be able to save at least \$27,000.00 a year in transportation expenses by cutting down man-power. We must have a penitentiary in the South. We must have a place for first offenders in the Southern part of the state—it might even pay for itself in 20 years' time, and at the same time eliminate the danger of transportation and expense brought to the taxpayer.

I know I have been hitting and missing around and probably off the subject assigned to me to talk about, but there is not so much on the subject itself, except it is a matter of police patrolling the roads and keeping after these fellows every time their heads pop up. I know that not so long ago Capt. Brooks was able to convict one who had been eluding us for a long time. He kept after those concerned and finally had him tried not for the thievery that he committed but for receiving the stolen goods and finding a market for it. It is difficult to prosecute but it was finally successful, and the fellow has been convicted and is now awaiting an appeal to the Appellate Court. Each day things of that kind are coming about, and we want to enhance the importance of this Farm Theft Detail. I want you to know that instead of minimizing this work we are going to do everything we can to build it up to even greater efficiency, and a greater number of men, but we cannot do much when we can't get an increase. We are working with the same tools we have used for several years past and trying to do our best. I want to mention that we are not unmindful of the great responsibility. When I was appointed to the unexpired term of Sheriff Traeger, there was a lot of work to be done. I know—having been in the Sheriff's office since I was a boy—I must know something about that work,, having been under one roof for so many years, and I am going to give you the advantage of every bit of my knowledge of the office and every bit of honesty and integrity I possess and in that way give a decent, clean job as Sheriff of Los Angeles County, and only hope that everyone of you will feel that I am your business agent as far as life and property is concerned and that it is a business of ours together. It is not a one-man job, and needs wholehearted cooperation. I want to say also that Los Angeles County is still the white spot so far as crime is concerned in the United States of America! We have had racketeers and gangsters come into Los Angeles County, but we have been able to keep those fellows on the move and I want to say that with the

District Attorney's office and our office and certain police departments in the County of Los Angeles working together, hand in hand, we will be able to keep them moving. If we get to fighting among ourselves, it would be a great day for the crooks. If we work together we can still keep it a white spot. We have organized a Racket Squad, working with our Vice Squad, two men who have had years of experience in the Homicide Squad and know who gangsters are. This is developing just like Howard Brooks has developed his squad to do his work. We are going to work with the business interests in the city and county of Los Angeles and find out what their problems are, get the names and addresses of these undesirable aliens coming here and reaping a harvest on account of conditions of the last few years. We are at least going to see, if possible, that they are deported somewhere else where they can ply their trade without bothering us. We are trying to develop the best methods for whatever line we are engaged in, and I am happy to have had this opportunity of talking to you. Please do not hesitate to call on us at any time if we can serve you.