

California Avocado Association 1934 Yearbook 19: 54-55

Frederick O. Popenoe

April 1, 1863— September 22, 1934

Death closes the eyes of another organizer of the California Avocado Association. Mr. Popenoe passed away after a lingering illness at his home, in Altadena, where his restless and cultured brain had thought out developments for this section which have meant so much to Southern California.

He it was who brought from Mexico the principal varieties of avocado now grown in this state and it was he who really created the vast date industry in the Coachella valley where the family holdings are notable. He was a past president of the California Avocado Association.

A more minor importation of his was that of the feijoa, but one which is gradually being heard from by greater numbers, while his work in promoting the Vista Irrigation District in San Diego County was but another outlet for a mind as robust as the body was frail.

Vision Rewarded

The story of the date importation is a romance of sheer brains. Fred Popenoe visioned the opportunity for such fruit in the Imperial Valley, if only the jealousies of the Arabs could be overcome. He took his brilliant son, Dr. Paul Popenoe, and between them, and with the aid of Mrs. Fred Popenoe, Paul learned to speak Arabic.

Brings Rare Dates

Thus equipped in 1911, 1912 and 1913, Paul Popenoe by himself or with his brother, Dr. Wilson Popenoe, cruised the oases in Arabia and his ability to speak the language enabled him to bring back from Arabia, Persia, Iraq and North Africa some 16,000 rare date palms, the parents of much of the Coachella Valley stock.

The senior Popenoe was born on April 1, 1863, at Towanda, 111. At the age of 6 he moved with his parents to Topeka, Kan., where he lived for the next thirty-five years. He took up stenography and was at various times associated with the general offices of the Santa Fe Railway, was a court reporter, and was secretary to Gov. John P. St. John. He then went into the field of real estate and investments, first as a partner in the firm of T. E. Bowman & Company and then as president of the Accounting Trust Company which he organized. He was also for a time owner and publisher of the Topeka Daily Capital.

Goes West For Health

In 1904, considerations of health brought him to Los Angeles, where he became southwest representative of the Pacific Monthly, a magazine later consolidated with

Sunset. In 1907, he moved to Altadena, which was thenceforth his home to the end of his life.

The necessity of leading an outdoor life led him a few years later to establish a sub-tropical nursery called the West India Gardens. This played an important part in the introduction and spread of sub-tropical fruits in California. The popularity of a number of minor fruits such as the feijoa is almost wholly due, in the first instance, to this source, but the greatest achievement was the introduction from Mexico of the principal varieties of avocado now grown in California.

Introduced Fuerte

The Fuerte, which is the most important of the local varieties, was brought in and distributed by him. With the Puebla, another of his introductions, it makes up probably 80 per cent of all the commercial plantings of the last decade. Other varieties of his introduction are Grande, Perfecto, Sinaloa, Verde, San Sebastian besides a great many others.

Under Mr. Popenoe's able tutelage and that of Mr. T. U. Barber, who was at that time a partner in West India Gardens, the place became a horticultural training ground for a number of men who have since become prominent. Among these were Carter Barrett, R. D. Cornell, Wilson Popenoe, Elmer Aul and Knowles Ryerson besides many men who were given training in budding and sub-tropical nursery work. At that time Miss Agnes McNally who was prominently identified with the early years of the Avocado Association was in charge of the office of West India Gardens.

Mr. Popenoe published a monograph of avocado varieties in the first issue of the Avocado Association Yearbook which was the foundation work for all varietal study since then.

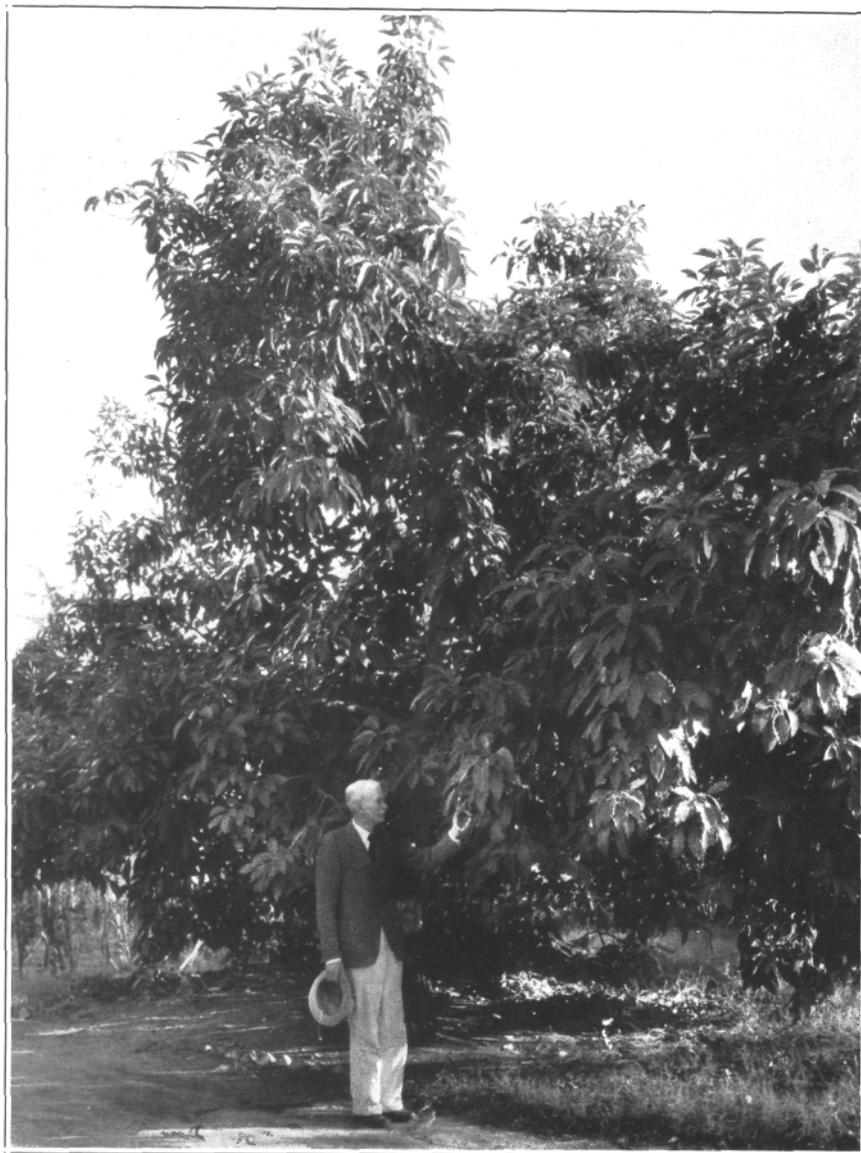
After selling his nursery business and retiring from active life in 1919, Mr. Popenoe gave much of his time to an orchard of avocados and loquats which he had established at Vista. Shortage of water was a handicap to this territory, and after the building of the Henshaw Dam he undertook to organize an irrigation district which gave the northern end of San Diego County an abundant water supply.

Three Sons Survive

In 1887, Mr. Popenoe married Miss Marion A. Bowman of Topeka, who died in 1920. They had three sons, who survive them: Dr. Paul Popenoe of Pasadena, secretary of the Human Betterment Foundation; Dr. Wilson Popenoe, who is associated with the United Fruit Company and has his headquarters in Honduras; Dr. Herbert Popenoe of Palo Alto, who is director of research at the Menlo Junior College. There are also eleven grandchildren.

(See frontispiece for photograph of Mr. Popenoe beside original Fuerte Avocado tree.)

Frontpiece



FREDERICK O. POPENOE

Director California Avocado Association, 1915-1923

President, 1922

Photographed in 1933 at 2495 N. Marengo Ave., Altadena, Calif., beside the original Fuerte Avocado tree which he introduced from Atlixco, Mexico, in 1911. The California progeny of this tree is producing about six thousand tons of fruit in 1934-5. (See page 54.)