

In Memoriam

George Beauregard Cellon

1862—1945

Florida mourns the passing of George B. Cellon, famous nurseryman and propagator of subtropical fruits. Born near Hague, Florida of French lineage, Cellon spent the last 45 years of his life at Miami.

Cellon was the first person to successfully bud the avocado but in addition to his commercial propagation of avocados and mangos, his name is established in horticultural history for the varieties he selected. Trapp and Pollock were the first avocados ever propagated as varieties and they remained for 40 years, in Florida, without a superior for their season. His Lula variety, said to be a seedling of Taft, is still one of the leaders in commercial plantings in Florida.

Shortly before his death he sent for David Fairchild to whom he gave many items of historic value for deposit in the Palm Museum of the Fairchild Tropical Garden. In Fairchild's "Personal Recollections of Cellon" published in Proceedings of the Florida State Horticultural Society for 1945, the following is of special interest to Californians:

"As he sat in his rocking chair in the little office where for so many years he received his many visitors and watched us pack up the copper plates and note books, he drew sadly from his trowser pocket his little budding knife, ground almost to its back with his sharpening stone. 'This might go with the others,' he said. 'It's the knife I have budded thousands of mangos and avocados with and perhaps someday someone might be interested in seeing it. Keep it with the cuts and books.' These last remains of his work are now safely in the Fairchild Garden Palm Museum.

"But it is as the first man to bud the avocado that Cellon will go down into history, more than as the first one to properly bud the mango, for the mango had been propagated for centuries by graftage, whereas so far as I have been able to ascertain the avocado, a fruit of the western world, although covering with its groves and scattered trees the hillsides and lowlands of Central and parts of South America, had been always grown as seedlings. There did not exist anywhere a named variety of the fruit in the accepted horticultural sense; all the plantings were of seedlings. Popenoe had found no budded or grafted avocados in his travels up and down the West Coast of Central and South America, and in the West Indies and along the lowlands of the South American coast only seedlings were grown. Until Cellon successfully budded these two avocados, the Trapp seedling on Mr. H. R. Trapp's place in Coconut Grove, Florida, and the Pollock seedling on the place of H. S. Pollock in Miami in 1901, it can be said the avocado industry had really not begun. It was not until 7 years later that the first budded avocado was produced in California, the Ganter, and not until 1912 that the famous Taft avocado, which fruited in 1909 at nine years of age, was budded at Orange, California.

Since I had had the pleasure of an acquaintance with Mr. C. P. Taft in 1903 and visited him in 1919 when he was a man of 63 and he told me that a small Chilean avocado which I had sent in from Chile in 1899 was the very first avocado he had ever seen, I have noted with particular interest the beginnings of the avocado industry in both California and Florida. I feel therefore, that in chronicling the passing of George B. Cellon I am giving credit where credit is due to the first man in the history of the world, so far as we can now discover, who budded the avocado commercially and put budded nursery trees on the market, almost a decade before there were any budded avocado trees in California. In 1910 the early varieties like the Fowler, Harmon, Blake, Miller, Walker, and White were first budded. This fact has an historical significance that deserves to be emphasized.

"What could anyone of his modest nature crave more than a niche beside the others in such a hall of fame where there will be many pioneers."