

## **The 1948 Pilgrimage to Mexico**

**Carter Barrett**

This is an attempt to set forth the background and some of the chronological phases of the 1948 Pilgrimage to Mexico of the California Avocado Society. Various phases and episodes of the trip have been presented most capably by others but a broad background for judging what took place does not otherwise exist.

The avocado—the fruit upon which our industry is built—is native to Mexico and Central America. It is, therefore, natural that we should have a great interest in those countries, for much research which has promoted the welfare of the California industry has and will be carried on in those areas. With the high type of personnel engaged in the industry in this state, it is also natural that the debt which we owe those countries should be recognized and acknowledged. This has led to a series of gestures of international gratitude, understanding and goodwill without parallel in the history of any horticultural group. Coming from the hearts of ordinary citizens in a spontaneous manner they have had an effect in promoting international goodwill far beyond that of acts of government.

The first suggestion of this kind came from Dr. J. B. Hurley of La Mesa and eventuated in the 1938 Pilgrimage which honored the Padre Fuerte Tree at Atlixco, Mexico; its owner, Alejandro LeBlanc; and its discoverer, Carl Schmidt. The second was the presentation of a bronze plaque to the Republic of Guatemala in 1946 which attested the gratitude of California growers for the contributions of that republic to their industry. The third was the presentation of the Society's Honor Medal to Dr. Wilson Popenoe before a distinguished gathering in his school at Tegucigalpa, Honduras. The 1948 Pilgrimage is the fourth and probably the culminating gesture of this series. The motive for this trip was expressed in a resolution offered to the Society's annual meeting in 1945 by Carter Barrett, to the following effect: "WHEREAS, the year, 1948, will be the tenth anniversary of the California Avocado Society Pilgrimage to Atlixco, Mexico, to mark the site of the parent Fuerte avocado tree, and

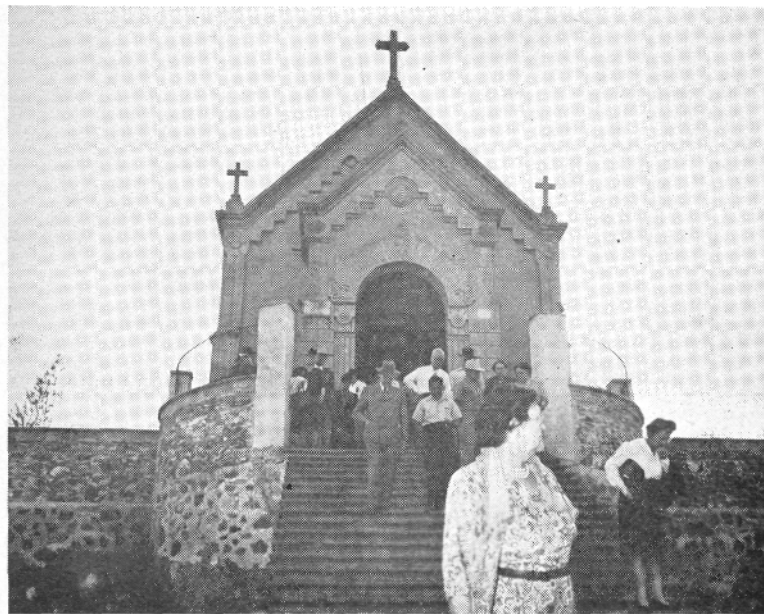
"WHEREAS, the conditions arising from the war should by then be abated making possible another Pilgrimage to Mexico, and "WHEREAS, the parent Fuerte tree is now dead.

"NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that this thirtieth annual meeting tentatively endorse the necessary preliminary steps of investigation and organization by the Board of Directors of another pilgrimage to Atlixco in 1948, at which time this Society as a gesture of good neighborliness would present specimens of the best Fuerte progeny raised in California to replace the original tree from which scions were so graciously given to us by the late Alejandro Le Blanc."

Early in 1947, the Board authorized the preliminary investigation of the project and President Griswold appointed Carter Barrett, Tour Chairman, with Carl Crawford and

himself serving on the committee. The Society assumed full responsibility and direction of the tour, but hired the Hillman Travel Service, Inc. of Santa Ana to handle the mechanical planning and arrangements. The project was officially launched at the annual meeting of 1947 in Santa Ana and soon had a large list of reservations. A promotional party, unique in many ways, was given in Whittier in February, 1948 which was attended by more than three hundred persons.

This tour became a major project and big business. Top policy decisions were handled by President Griswold, the business details, correspondence and personal contacts were handled by Carter Barrett, while Mr. Crawford acted as advance agent in Mexico, where the contacts he had built up over a period of years were invaluable. The total cost ran over \$65,000, which was handled in a special trust account.



At the Chapel for Maximillian in Queretaro.

The special train, the first from California to Mexico since long before the war, consisted of baggage car, dormitory car, diner, lounge car and eight Pullmans. More drawing rooms and compartments were included than on any previous special. The dining car service, furnished by the Southern Pacific for the entire trip, was superb and was enthusiastically commended by all the passengers. There were one hundred and twenty-seven passengers on the train and seven met the party at Mexico City for the balance of the trip, coming by air.

Correspondence, banking and related details took many hours of the committee's time and that of a part time stenographer. Due to the co-operation of Mrs. E. Paniagua, of Whittier, with the Tour Chairman, most of the pre-tour correspondence with officials in Mexico was conducted in the Spanish language, and after our return, over two dozen courtesy letters in that language were sent to the proper persons in that country. Mrs. Paniagua is also responsible for the Spanish versions on our bronze plaques in both

Guatemala and Mexico.

The A. J. Bayer Co. of Los Angeles has given splendid attention to our needs in the case of both plaques, both in the matter of design and the expediting of the tablets under difficult conditions engendered by the war.

Many officials and persons contributed to the success of the tour. Amongst them 'were Don Alejandro Buelna, Jefe de Departamento de Turismo de Mexico; Consul-general Villagran of Los Angeles; Miguel Gallagher, West Coast Tourist Department head for Mexico; Robert Griffith, vice-president of Wells-Pargo in Mexico; Dr. John Hopkins, U.S. Agricultural Attache; Señor Jacobo Olivan, General Chairman of the Committee on Arrangements in Atlixco, Professor Roberto Cuevas and Professor Emilio Mujica of Metepec.

Governor Warren made Mr. Griswold his personal representative and bearer of a message to President Alemán.

The Society was well represented by its officers and directors on the trip. These included President Griswold, Secretary Jack Shepherd, Directors Stanley Shepard, Elwood Trask, Nicholas Thille, and Chaffee Young.

Fifteen progeny trees of the Fuerte variety were contributed by the following nurserymen—Armstrong Nurseries of Ontario; B. M. McDonald, of Fallbrook; A. G. Hazzard of Vista; E. R. Eggers of Fallbrook and Ross Hodson of La Habra. One of these trees was planted in the Plaza at Atlixco with the bronze plaque to explain its mission; one was planted at the residence of President Alemán; one in the National Botanic Gardens at Chapultepec Park and the rest were distributed to Carl Schmidt and members of the Mexican Cabinet. The Atlixco tree has since been given special protective attention by the municipality and it is our hope that it will do well and carry out its mission.

## **The Pilgrimage**

The special train left Los Angeles about 1 P.M. on Wednesday, April 7, which was three to four hours later than scheduled. This was due to a freight train wreck on the Santa Fe at Oceanside which delayed the arrival of the large San Diego County contingent. The delay probably caused more distress to those waiting at Pomona than the others.

The next morning about twelve o'clock, after an uneventful journey across Arizona and New Mexico, the train arrived at El Paso and was switched across the border to Juarez where the customs formalities were reduced to a minimum and we were met by our first mariachi orchestra.

A long, but interesting day was spent on the ninth travelling over the desert regions of northern Mexico and in getting acquainted and settled for the trip.

On the tenth, the party arrived at eight o'clock at San Miguel de Allende, a fascinating town with its colonial architecture and largely unspoiled conditions. Here there is a fine school for the useful and artistic crafts, with many G.I. students from the United States. In this first real stop, the morning was consumed with strolling about the town, enjoying a very different type of life and buildings.

In the afternoon, the party went on by train to Querétaro where the customary tourist sights were viewed and the growers saw the Mexican type avocado trees in the canyada from which the first seeds for commercial plantings in California probably came. These trees had been in very poor condition in 1938 as the result of very heavy rains the previous season, but now looked well recovered and healthy.

Sunday witnessed our arrival in Mexico City, where we received a royal welcome. The stay at Hotel La Reforma was comfortable and enjoyed. Customary tourist sights were taken care of by a fine fleet of cars. These included the Floating Gardens, the Pyramids, Chapultepec Park and other points. There was a reception at President Aleman's home in connection with a tree planting ceremony and another informal ceremony was held in the National Botanic Garden where another Fuerte was placed. Both Mr. Griswold and the Tour Chairman had to make special trips to Puebla on Monday to effect the arrangement of final details of the ceremonies for the following Sunday.

Wednesday evening the party left on the special train for Vera Cruz. This was the first time that the newly broad-gauged road had been travelled with such a heavy train. The curves had not been eased from the engineering of the old narrow gauge and progress was necessarily slow. We were late in arriving at Vera Cruz but were the better able to enjoy the lovely tropical scenery about and beyond Jalapa by daylight. We were in the city two or three hours, being greeted at the station with some remarkable dancing typical of the country. This was followed by a fast trip around the city and along the ocean front. Arriving at the tail end of a Norther, we found the temperatures quite comfortable but the water too rough to visit the old fort by launch.



San Miguel de Allende.



Mr. Gerry, Mrs. Foster, Mrs. Castorena and Mrs. Danker at the Hotel at San Miguel de Allende.

Mid afternoon found the party en route to Fortín de las Flores, which being at an elevation of three thousand feet, offered more promise of a comfortable night. The approach to Fortín by train is through one of the loveliest tropical valleys in the world. Lush vegetation everywhere, intriguing red-tile roofed houses set in plantations of bananas, pineapple, papayas and sugar cane. A rushing mountain stream, with women in colorful garments washing clothes on its banks and just as the cars made the last turn to climb the rugged slopes, a tremendous dashing, jewel-like waterfall in a perfect setting of tropical verdure.

Arrival at Fortin, which is a tropical paradise, is unforgettable to the northerner. Gardenias are pressed upon one at every turn by the plump, happy little girls at the station, at the hotels and in the streets. Garlands of gardenias are placed about your neck, pressed in your hands and sold in princely quantities everywhere. Each morning the swimming pool of the Hotel Ruiz Galindo has bushels of these perfumed flowers thrown into it for swimmers to disport themselves among.

A sight never to be forgotten is the snowy crown of the Pico de Orizaba seen from one of the hotel balconies across the tiled pool, the red roofs and the tropical vegetation. It is altogether the fulfillment of the dreams which everyone has of a tropical paradise.

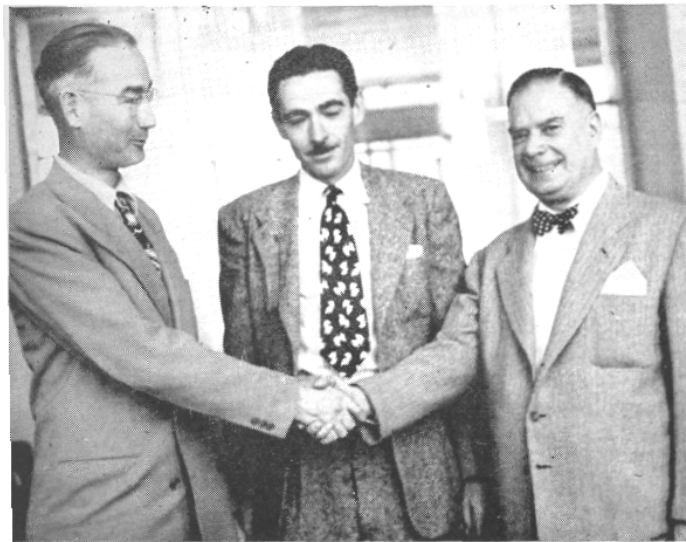
The food was excellent at Fortin and we helped the George Kelloggs celebrate a wedding anniversary in the dining room, with a very fine cake made for the occasion by the chef. Most of the party saw the adjoining sights at Cordoba and Orizaba during the day. These are typical tropical towns.

One car load made a trip to a typical Indian village—Coscometepec, where they had the opportunity of seeing some of the large old avocado and other fruit trees growing in the huertos of the villagers. One of the rare sights seen here was a cow being led up the

steps and into the city hall because of trespass. One of the most interested persons who experienced this special side trip was Mrs. W. J. Krome, of the famous pioneer avocado family of Florida, who had joined us at El Paso.

The trip by automobile from Fortín to Puebla includes some striking features, but probably the most remembered impression is the climb from the tropical valley at Maltrata to the Cumbre of Atcotzingo over a magnificently engineered road which lifts one eight thousand feet and gives a view like that seen from a plane and completely changes the character of the vegetation and country

In Puebla, a fine, clean, rapidly modernizing city of almost a hundred thousand, the party was taken care of at the Hotels Lastra and Colonial for the two days of their stay during the ceremonies at Atlixco, which is about twenty miles distant. Most of Saturday was spent in sightseeing and shopping by those of the party not included in the personal invitation of Mr. Gilly to be his guests at the hacienda Xahuentla, which lies just beyond Atlixco. It is here that Carl Crawford has assisted Mr. Gilly in the development of typical California style avocado grove and nursery. Mr. Gilly also has the only herd of the beautiful white Charoláis cattle—a beef breed, which were being extensively crossed with Brahmas and others for better stock in Mexico and Texas. This party first saw a typical Indian village, Trinidad, which is nearby and avocados of great size growing under normal conditions in the courtyards. After an extensive showing of the Xahuentla avocado plantings and royal entertainment by the host, the group went back to Puebla.



President Griswold is greeted by Sr. Alejandro Buelna Jr.  
at Mexico City as Don Hillman looks on.



Plaque is Exhibited at Mexico City.  
President Griswold, Director Thille, Mrs. Hillman, and Director Young.



Hotel La Reforma, Mexico City. President Griswold exhibits Furr's Avocado trees from California to Carl Schmidt and Sr. A. Buelna.

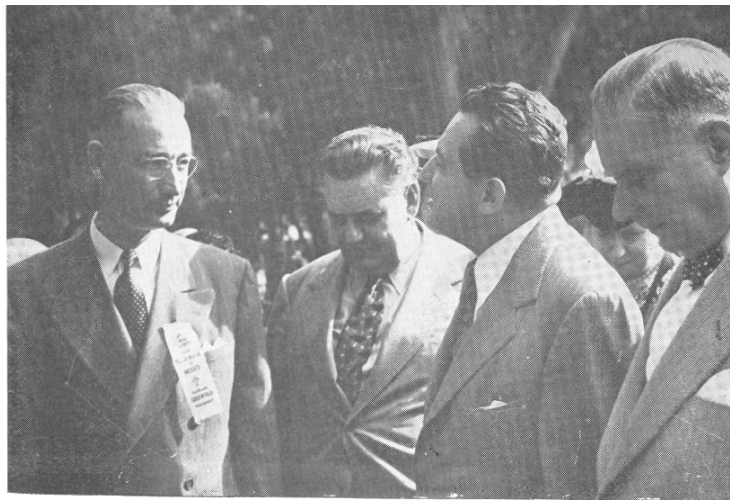
Sunday, April 18, was a beautiful day and the whole group went to Atlixco for 'the ceremonies. We were met at the city hall by the Mayor, General Antonio Portas, and many other dignitaries, who formally extended the freedom of the city to us and accorded other evidences of their hospitable pleasure in having us as their guests. We all then moved over into the Plaza, for the unveiling of the plaque and the official tree planting.





Unveiling the Plaque at Atlixco Ceremonies.

The plaque had been set up in the park on a permanent concrete base and draped in the flags of our two countries and a welcome banner. The spot had been carefully selected on the preceding Monday to give the young tree the best possible chance. The officials and citizens gathered about this spot. In front was a fine native orchestra and to the rear a trumpet detachment from the garrison. The national anthems were played, Mr. Griswold spoke in English, which was translated by Srta. Rosa M. Maurer. Mr. Barrett spoke in Spanish and then the Mayor and Mr. Griswold jointly unveiled the plaque. The tree was properly planted, Señor Buelna said a few words on behalf of the Federal government of Mexico and we adjourned to the Lázaro Cárdenas primary school where we were beautifully entertained with mariachi music, regional dances in costume by the children, and a remarkable reading by Srta. Beatriz Angeles. The kindergarten children were never to be forgotten.



At the Mexican White House, President Griswold is greeted by Sr. Lic. Rogerio de la Selva, private secretary to President Aleman.



Planting the Fuerte tree at President Aleman's Home.



Crowd attending the Ceremonies in the Plaza at Atlixco.

At one o'clock we left Atlixco for Metepec, a village three miles away, which is the seat of a great cotton mill. Here we had luncheon in the beautiful and extensive glazed tile school which belongs to the union. A very great amount of work must have been done to prepare for us, as the great assembly room had been cleared and two tables had been set out the full length of the hall for more than a hundred feet. These tables were well decorated and laden with very attractive cold luncheon dishes. At one end of the hall was a fine stage on which students of the High School presented regional dances in costumes, an attractive local torch singer quite captivated the gentlemen, and the finest mariachi orchestra which we heard in Mexico played exceptional music. Two highlights

of the luncheon activities were the impromptu dances staged by Mrs. Hoelscher with General Portas and Señor Buelna and the remarkable speech in English by Professor Mujica, who not only eloquently expressed the community appreciation of our gesture but quoted Longfellow in doing so.

In the afternoon, we were treated to an interesting exhibition, which seemed to be a cross between traditional bull fighting and the tricks of our rodeos. One of the drivers was severely gored when he tried his hand in the arena.

The trip from Puebla to Cuernavaca and on to Taxco followed the customary pattern, was greatly enjoyed by all and brought the travellers back to Mexico City on the evening of Tuesday, April 20 to board the train for the last stop at Guanajuato en route home.

Guanajuato was a very fitting experience to close an off the beaten path tour of Mexico. In itself, a quaintly intriguing town, it offered one of the finest bits of cordial hospitality encountered on the whole trip. Everywhere are vistas to charm the soul of the artist and photographer, but unfortunately, modern improvements, electricity and telephones, with their wires and poles have spoiled all too many of them. Everything is well kept and clean and narrow streets and hillside homes are a never ending source of wonder to Americans. The town is dominated by a gigantic and unusual statue of an early patriot situated on a commanding pinnacle. Most of the party were taken to see the famous mummies and given a rough ride up to the statue. The governor received the guests in his official chambers at the state house. This room is furnished with lovely carved seats and railings and dominated with a dais as royal as any throne. In the afternoon a sumptuous luncheon was served in the nearly finished new grand tourist hotel and a lovely programme of music and entertainment made a profound impression on all of the charm of Mexico at her best.

Midway towards the border on the next day everyone had to debark from the train and walk through chemically treated troughs of sawdust, while soldiers sprayed the floors of the cars as a preventive against our bringing the Foot and Mouth Disease home with us. It was simple, courteous and presumably effective judging by results.

Friday saw us arriving in El Paso. Passing through the American customs was no't so simple or perfunctory as the procedure in the other direction, but was performed efficiently, courteously and with due regard for the comfort and welfare of both the passenger and the government. It was here that we lost our good friend Mrs. Krome, who left for the Middle West. Most of us are anxious to visit her in Florida and have a real mentor show us the interesting factors in the growth of our sister state across the continent.

It had been a magnificent experience, we had enjoyed strange sights and sounds, had learned much of the life and problems of our sister republic and had a new point of view on many things, but it was wonderful to be again speeding back to California and home and the customs of a lifetime.