

## THE VIEWS OF JANUS

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*An address given at the California Avocado Society meeting on Oct. 30, 1964.*

First off, let's clear up any questions about this Janus thing. Since this talk was announced, I've been asked a number of questions such as do I plan to make double talk? And am I being two-faced about the whole thing and so on.

Those of you who remember your mythology will—I hope—put a different interpretation on my chosen title. Janus, you will recall, was the doorkeeper of heaven and the patron of the beginning and end of things. He had two faces, one for the rising sun and one for sunset.

If Janus doesn't mind, I'd like to borrow his two faces now to look back from **this** end of the past half century to its beginning—and then to look ahead to estimate what may be in store for this Society.

There is good evidence that the origin of the California avocado industry had its certain beginning in 1858 when Henry Dalton planted avocado seeds on the site of the present city of Azusa.

It was not until the second decade of this century, however, that serious interest developed in avocado culture. And then it developed rapidly—and to some degree, almost frantically. It was obvious to the long-thinkers that things had best be put in order. And so this Society was conceived and born.

What is today the California Avocado Society was organized as the California Ahuacate Association at an advertised meeting held May 15, 1915, at the Alexandria Hotel in Los Angeles. The business of that meeting was the election of directors and the formulation of by-laws. At a subsequent meeting of the directors, officers were elected, committees were appointed, and definite steps were taken to place the association on a sound basis. Offices were established in the old Union Oil Building in downtown Los Angeles. We were alive and kicking!

Five months later—on October 23, 1915—the Association held its first semi-annual meeting, again at the Alexandria Hotel. It was the declared intention of our founding fathers that such meetings would be held regularly, at times giving the best opportunity to acquaint the public with the different varieties of avocados and their value. The meetings were also to afford opportunities to growers to exchange information gained by experiments and to hear papers prepared by experts who were making a deep study of the industry. The "industry"? There were 74 members in the Association in its first year.

At that historic first semi-annual meeting, the record tells that a great variety of thin-skinned avocados were displayed, of which two were of the small, seedless type. Budded nursery trees were on display, too—and so was a box of avocados that had been shipped to Chicago and back in an experimental trial of packing methods. There was also a mid-day display of prepared avocado dishes, and recipe folders were passed out. President Edwin G. Hart announced that 10,000 of the recipe folders would eventually be distributed, largely by the fruit houses handling avocados. He also announced that a printed report of the day's meeting would later be made available to the members—one copy free, additional copies at 35 cents each. That report was our first Yearbook. And I'm sorry to relate that the price was jacked up to \$1.00 soon after its appearance.

In his maiden speech as president of this organization, Mr. Hart quoted from its by-laws that "**The purpose of the Association is the improvement of the culture, production and marketing of the ahuate.**" That is still our purpose. President Hart defined a sub-purpose as the giving of protection to the public against the class of boomers who made the raising of eucalyptus and spineless cactus a craze, and who were bidding fair to exploit the avocado impractically and fraudulently.

Much ado was stirred up during that fateful first meeting—and not a little controversy—over the vexing question of whether to call it the California Avocado, or Ahuate, Association. Following considerable scholarly debate, a motion to adopt the name "avocado" was carried—and an unborn advertising executive breathed easier.

Dr. J. Eliot Coit was present at that initial meeting, and set in motion then a project that still importantly commands our attention. Commenting on the obvious interest being shown in avocado varieties, Dr. Coit said, "There are going to be so many seedlings that look so much alike and so many people who raise a pet seedling in their backyard, who think it like an only child and cannot be convinced but what it is the best thing produced under the sun, that we need some committee on new varieties and nomenclature, whose business it would be to judge the fruit as it is brought in."

There was a fascinating talk given on that October day in 1915 by Mr. E. B. Rivers—a Los Angeles produce dealer. Mr. Rivers reported that he had been marketing avocados as far back as 1899—bringing them in from Honolulu or Haiti. I would guess the volume was small; Mr. Rivers observed that three or four dozen in those days would have overstocked Los Angeles.

Later on, Mr. Rivers imported avocados from a grower in Atlixco, Mexico—large, black-skinned, hard-shelled fruit.

The first shipment was a single basket that carried well, and which encouraged Mr. Rivers to call for the shipment of all the avocados his Mexican supplier could provide. Shipments increased from two baskets to ten to 25. Express charges built up to about \$100 a day; and before the spigot could be turned off, Mr. Rivers suddenly had five or six hundred dozen avocados on his hands—and disaster facing him. With the help of eastern produce houses, he managed to dispose of his burden to customers in Boston, Philadelphia, New York, and Chicago—at \$6.00 per dozen wholesale. Mr. Rivers concluded his talk, however, with the cautious observation that \$2.50 to \$3.00 per dozen was a fair price for choice fruit, and that higher prices were difficult to obtain.

This brings us up to 1916. Please make yourselves comfortable; there are 49 years still to be reviewed.

But be of good cheer. I will skip lightly from here on. The reason for dwelling a bit on that first meeting of our Society is that what then took place so clearly delineated the pattern of what was to come—and to suggest how little has really changed in the years that followed.

Even to this: In reviewing the first year's accomplishments and the position of the Association, President Webber reported that the membership had grown to 141—by no means, he said, as many members as the Association should have. He said the advancement of the industry must come through cooperation, and all growers of California interested in the avocado should become members—as a duty to the industry, and to assist in the great work ahead. Certainly on this score there has been little discernable change from then to now.

As the Association wended down the path of history during its early years, it served well as the focal point for all of the industry's problems and achievements. It was at once the industry's Wailing Wall, its counselor, its oracle of Delphi. Not the least in importance, the Association in those early years was the instrument of marketing for its members.

In that connection, it is interesting to re-read the 1916 address to our membership by Dana King. Let me toss you a couple of quotations from his talk.

Said Mr. Dana: "You should standardize your varieties ... do not get into your commercial varieties types that may be of temporary benefit to the producer, but may be of lasting injury to the industry."

Said Mr. Dana: "...if you standardize your produce, you should adopt something in the nature of a brand that would stand for your Association, and which would mean a certain thing to the consumer."

I cannot resist passing by the year 1917 without extracting two nuggets from its historical ore.

One is from the annual report of President Webber, who reported that the Association's net resources had grown to \$647.91—and then went on to say, "The Association is thus on a good financial footing, but it must be admitted that the Association has not reached the magnitude that will enable it to take up an advertising campaign such as will soon be needed as our new plantings come into bearing."

The second nugget is a song, offered by incoming President Thomas Shedden. It goes like this:

Hail avocado! When through all the states of our dear native land,

This fruit, with our orange, shall go hand in hand, May lips that with pleasure its praises proclaim

Be graced by the use of its soft sounding name.

Avocado's the name, Avocado's the name Avocado, Avocado, Avocado its name.

According to President Shedden, this can be sung to the tune of "Happy New Year to

All"—and I shall hope to hear you all singing it as we leave this room.

No, I can't leave 1917 yet—not until I report that in that year a recipe for avocado tea was presented to an eagerly waiting world by Mrs. G. W. Beck—Walter's Mother.

On the occasion of the Association's fifth annual meeting, President William Sallmon presented a program of goals for 1919-20. He listed as "some of the things to be aimed at:"

1. Increase membership to 300
2. Study marketing problems:
  - (a) Steps to assist members in sale of fruit
  - (b) Steps toward elimination of marketing unfit fruit
  - (c) Study how to pack for shipment
  - (d) Standardize sale prices of varieties
3. Continue study of varieties
4. Cooperation of Rockefeller Institute in investigating uses of avocado for medicinal purposes
5. Extend educational campaign
  - (a) Leaflet on "Avocado as Food"
  - (b) Leaflet on "How to Select a Good Avocado and Prepare for the table"
  - (c) Prepared article in press
  - (d) Reprint, "The Avocado From Seed-time to Harvest"
6. Directors' Field Day for visits to groves
7. Exhibit of fruit at best season
8. Encourage keeping of individual tree records
9. Steps toward securing qualified man for sub-tropical fruit investigations.

The problems of marketing were increasingly occupying the minds of growers at this period in the Association's history, and much thought was being given to the formation of a formal marketing organization. Director Arthur Yaggy put it straight to the members: "It seems to me that with the same energy and the same spirit of cooperation that the members of this Association have shown in the past, we can form a marketing organization that will be a credit to the Association and that will assure its permanence."

Three years later, when it became clear that wisdom called for the organization of a marketing cooperative in advance of disaster, the Association did indeed sponsor and bring into being the California Avocado Growers Exchange—now known as Calavo Growers of California. The Association's secretary, George Hodgkin—later to become Calavo's General Manager—declared that, "It is true that most of the older cooperatives were forced into existence by a long period of ruinous prices, but their early experiences would have been far happier if they had come into being for the purpose of maintaining

profitable prices."

The story of Calavo is another story than what we are concerned with today. It can be told—indeed, it should be told—at another time, another place. Suffice it to say now that the Association—our Society— had at once made a major contribution toward its proclaimed objectives, and at the same time had removed itself from the performance of marketing functions—forever. There was plenty of work to be done without taling on the problems of marketing and market development.

In the interest of time, let me try to compress the 40 years of our Society's history we still have to cover into some comprehensive chunks. In that way, we can see the picture in good perspective and still leave here before nightfall.

To start with, the California Avocado Association, having no connection with marketing activities, became the California Avocado Society —to avoid confusion and better suggest the true nature of the organization.

One of the major, continuing functions of our society has been the publication of its yearbooks—from 1915 to the present. The result is an invaluable, comprehensive treasury of historical, scientific, and practical knowledge. If the Society had never accomplished another thing, its existence would be fully justified by this one great contribution. It is only sad that the value and usefulness of the yearbooks is minimized by the relatively small size of our membership.

Another important contribution the Society has made is the publication of two editions of Ira Condit's "Bibliography on the Avocado," and more recently of a supplementary bibliography. These publications have scant popular appeal, but their value to research workers and other technical people is incalculable.

Over the years, the Society has carefully observed, appraised, catalogued, and registered countless seedling varieties of avocado. Most of them proved commercially unsatisfactory, and the Society's work has helped immeasurably in keeping the varietal cluttering of the market at minimum. Particularly has this been the case since a formal variety improvement program was instituted in the mid-fifties. Looking back, it is interesting to note the swing in the Society's emphasis in the variety situation. Early in our history, the emphasis was on the search for new and better varieties —almost on a job lot basis. Today, a more mature emphasis is on reducing the number of varieties to a bare minimum of high quality, long season, dependably productive ones. The goal has not yet been fully achieved, but progress has surely been made.

Less well known, but of definite importance, is this Society's interest in other subtropical fruits. Much the same type of observation, supervision of experimental plots, and compilation of knowledge has had the Society's attention in this field as in the avocado field itself.

Tied in with both of these programs has been our foreign exploration program. Foreign exploration under the Society's banner has been largely done at the personal expense of the individual explorers. There have been some exceptions, and your research funds have been granted to professionals in foreign exploration in a few instances. From these explorations have come collections of Avocado varieties and propagation materials for the study of avocado relatives. Hopefully, there will come from these

explorations, in time, the answers to some of our plant disease and plant pest problems.

Another aspect of foreign travel is prominent in the Society's history —our good will tours in the Society's name. These have been numerous— and I should quickly add, individually financed—during our half century history. Most of the tours have had multiple purposes, but at least three had good will between peoples as their prime objective. Two were the 1938 and 1948 tours to Mexico (128 tourists made the 1948 trip) to commemorate Mexico's gift of the Fuerte to California's avocado industry. The third tour was made to Guatemala, again to give thanks for that country's contribution of varieties on which to found our industry.

Surely among the highest accomplishments of our Society is its direct and indirect support of all kinds of research in the industry's behalf. Over the years, this support has been given to individual researchers, to private institutions, and to our state institutions—notably, the University of California. The support has been both intangible and tangible. It has included the contribution of human intellect and energy, of materials, and of money—for this small Society, quite a lot of money.

Perhaps our most spectacular research project in 1944 was the collection from the industry of voluntary contributions approximating \$6,000 for donation to the University to help finance an intensive program of root rot research. Additional thousands of dollars have since been donated for use in that and several other research programs. There is no question about one thing, at least. The continuing research being done by the University on avocado problems would long since have terminated without the Society's support—largely moral, it is true, but laced with money at strategic times.

There is much more that should be said to review the Society's past decades in full panoply and to appraise past efforts and achievements. Someone else can say it—will say it—at some other time. Let me add just one more item that shouldn't be overlooked. Through this Society, there was established at the Citrus Experiment Station in Riverside, the William T. Home Memorial Library. In it, eventually, if not already, there will be filed for appropriate use the largest, most comprehensive collection of avocado literature that will exist anywhere. Few indeed are the agricultural industries that have sponsored and partially financed such a library. You can be very proud of this score.

Now then—enough of Janus's rear view observations. What does he see in the other direction—in the future?

There are those, unfortunately, who do not see a real future for this Society. We have seen the marketing function ably taken over by cooperative and commercial agencies, as was proper and desirable. We have seen the programs of consumer education and product promotion taken over by the growers themselves through an industry-wide program. We have seen programs of research undertaken by professionals.

What is left to do?

In my opinion—lots! Through the forward viewing eyes of Janus I can see the Society in a continuing role as the industry's counselor, its educator, its spokesman on many fronts, and its stimulator of progress. I can see it in those roles, that is, if sound programs are conceived and planned by your directors—and well supported by the people who make up this industry. That is not now the case, and I'm warning you that

the useful life of this Society will not be much longer unless you individually undertake active interest and leadership roles. These are not pleasant words for me to say—but let's not kid ourselves.

What are the things that can be done—that should be done? Let's look at a few—a very few—as possibilities.

1. There is need for a manual for avocado growers—a compendium of basic information on avocado culture of permanent value to growers.
2. There is need of a journal for the industry, issued at frequent intervals, to aid the improvement of avocado culture. This is a current project.
3. There should be an intensification of the industry's knowledge and supervision of research activities. I have already proposed to your directors the establishment of a revolving committee with this objective.
4. There should be methods found and put to use to distribute broadly the knowledge we already have—but which is not now easily available.
5. We should take back from the extension service some part of the burden we have sloughed off on them. For example, we can undertake to develop a meaningful program of regular field meetings—in cooperation with the extension service, if you will. If this seems to be a criticism of our fine farm advisors, be assured it is not. I suspect they would welcome our cooperation and participation.
6. There should be developed a new bibliography—or perhaps two: one, comprehensive, for technical purposes; one, abstracted, for grower use.
7. We should consider setting up a foreign department and the appointment of foreign representatives. Our membership already includes numerous growers in many other lands. We can learn from them, as well as they from us.
8. We should broaden our interests to encompass anything and everything that can be investigated and developed for the benefit of the industry—and then we should do something about it or make sure that someone else does something about it.

Ladies and gentlemen: I believe this Society has a place—that it is needed—and that it should, can, and I fervently hope will, continue to be the academic, cultural leader and stimulator of our industry.

That's how it looks to Janus and me. How does it look to you?