

IN MEMORIAM

CARL B. SCHMIDT

February, 1892 November, 1970



Carl B. Schmidt was born in Denver, Colorado February 18, 1892.

He came to Aguas Calientes, Mexico in 1899 with his family, left for Kemper Military Academy in Boonville, Missouri in 1906, transferred to El Paso Military Academy and graduated in 1908.

Carl entered Cornell University in Ithaca, N.Y. in 1909, but left after two years, as the revolution in Mexico left his father unable to finance further education.

As he had been studying agriculture at Cornell, he applied for a job with West India Gardens, whose owner, F. O. Popenoe, was a friend of the Schmidt family. He was sent to Mexico by West India Gardens in 1911.

After his job with the West India Gardens, he alternately worked with and owned various construction companies.

In 1916, he went to Ft. Riley, Kansas and joined the Kansas National Guard. He was discharged with rank of Captain, Regular Army, in 1919.

In 1920, Carl went to Maracaibo, Venezuela, with Mercantile Overseas Corp. The following year he went to Mexico as Distributor for Sun Oil Co., of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and Firestone Tire Co., Akron, Ohio. He was one of the pioneer fliers in Mexico, having flown the first private plane from Mexico to Havana, Cuba in 1932.

In 1938 he was awarded an honor medal for his discovery of the Fuerte aguacate in a

ceremony at Atlixco, Puebla, Mexico.

Carl has been compelled to tell and re-tell the story of his fortuitous discovery of the Fuerte.

"Popenoe was a nut — an imaginative, idealistic nut without which our nation would suffer and certainly make little progress. In 1911, his current nutty idea was that California would be a good place to grow avocados — and that people would like them.

"So he sent me to Mexico to hunt for and bring back some avocado stock. I was a practicing horticulturist at the time, but the reason I was chosen was because I was the only one at hand who could speak Spanish . . .

"Mexico then had no commercial avocado production. In almost every dooryard is an avocado tree or two and they are to be found growing wild on the mountain-sides of areas climatically favorable to them. It is from these scattered growths that the few avocados reaching Mexico City come.

"So the hunter for avocado budwood goes first to the market place. The assortment of fruit is large. Much is inferior. Occasionally there is a fruit that is sharply superior.

"That is how I found the Fuerte. Fortunately I was able to learn where this pear-shaped, green, medium-size, oil-heavy, nutty-flavored specimen hidden away in a stall in the market place came from. It was from Atlixco, a village not far distant. There in the backyard of a villager I found the tree which is the parent of the California industry.

"The rest is known pretty well—how California growers first ceremoniously put a plaque on the tree and when it died, replaced it last spring with some of its offspring brought back from California.

"It was that twist of weather which is so disastrous to fruit in general in Southern California, a heavy freeze that established the Fuerte as the avocado for Southern California. It was in 1911 that the budwood was grafted onto rootstock in the Popenoe nursery in Pasadena. It took.

"Two years later came the big freeze. In the spring, when we began to take stock of damage, it was the Fuerte that came through and it was the only avocado that survived. It thus proved itself adaptable to our temperatures."

In 1948, he bought 17 acres near San Juan Capistrano, Calif. Two freezes in five years forced the Schmidts to give up several happy years in the Schmidt Grove and return to his importing business in Mexico.

But he satisfied his longing to continue to raise avocados by bringing trees from the Armstrong Nurseries which were planted on his property in Cuernavaca, Morelos, Mexico. He planted some ten varieties hoping to have fruit to give to his friends twelve months of the year.

Due to an unsuccessful fight with glaucoma his activities were limited the last few years, but he continued to be interested in his business and his friends and was so happy to have had Don and Mary Gustafson and three of their friends for dinner shortly before his last illness.