

THE CALIFORNIA AVOCADO ASSOCIATION: ITS HISTORY AND PROGRESS

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

WILLIAM H. SALLMON,

SAN DIEGO

All arrangements had been made for holding the Seventh Semiannual Meeting of the California Avocado Association on October 19th, 1918 in connection with the Liberty Fair at Los Angeles. The program committee, consisting of our indefatigable secretary, Dr. W. L. Hardin, and our energetic vice-president, Mr. J. M. Elliott, had completed their work, having arranged for us a feast of fat things, both as to eating and speaking, at a Get-together dinner and two public sessions filled with promise. The committee on exhibits headed by Dr. Lester Keller had assembled fruit and trees with which to satisfy the palate and the eye, and all was in a state of readiness, when suddenly, out of a clear sky, came the imperative order of the Health Board prohibiting public gatherings on account of the prevalence of influenza. Your president immediately telegraphed the secretary stating that in his judgment, patriotic duty and the public welfare demanded postponement of our meetings and requesting that ' such notice be sent to the membership. The other officers concurred and notices of postponement were mailed. When the epidemic seemed to be on the wane assurance was given that the Association could go ahead with its dinner and meetings on Nov. 21st and 22nd, but as the time approached conditions again became uncertain, and the secretary issued another notice of postponement. It did not seem wise to convene our gathering when the Liberty Fair was finally held in December, but an exhibit of fruit and trees was then staged under the guidance of Dr. Keller in the space which we had rented in the Exposition building, much literature was distributed and more than a thousand persons tasted samples of avocados which were furnished to them by our Committee. The officers planned to hold a midwinter meeting at Pasadena in January, but the "Flu" still lingered, and at a meeting of the Board of Directors held at Whittier in February, 1919, it was decided not to hold any general meeting of the Association until the regular annual meeting in May. I feel sure that our members uphold these actions. Inconvenience, disappointment and expense weigh lightly in the balance as compared with the welfare of the nation and the cause of liberty.

While our plans have been upset and the year has been an abnormal one, yet the business of the Association has not been at a standstill. At the beginning of the year the bona fide membership numbered 161. There have been added, chiefly through the untiring and tactful work of our Secretary 55, making a total membership of 216. The Treasurer's report shows that the financial affairs of the Association are in sound condition. Receipts have amounted to \$1,854.63, expenditures including bills amounting

to \$536.68 turned over by previous administration \$1,046.49, leaving a balance on hand of \$808.14.

Your directors, who serve without compensation, and pay their own traveling expenses, have held five meetings, three at Los Angeles, one at the Chamber of Commerce in Whittier as guests of Mr. A. R. Rideout, and one at Pasadena as guests of the California Hotel Company. They have continued their studies of marketing problems, classification and registration of varieties, damage due to frosts, and have transacted considerable miscellaneous business. They have continued the advertising and educational campaign by issuing about 20,000 pieces of printed matter. Among them are leaflets entitled "Are you interested in Avocado Growing?" designed to secure memberships; "The Avocado, Your Questions Answered" covering the inquiries of those who know little or nothing about the fruit, and "The Avocado" a concise and comprehensive epitome by Prof. Condit on the fruit, the tree, climatic requirements, propagation, soils and sites for the orchard, varieties, yields, pests, food value, methods of serving and by-products. This circular, with footnotes referring to the annual reports of the Association where the topics are treated more extensively, will be of value to every inquirer for years to come.

The Board consists of nine members, three of whom are elected by ballot at each annual meeting of the Association and serve for a term of three years. During the past year the board has consisted of the following members, W. L. Hardin of Los Angeles, B. H. Sharpless of Santa Ana, and Thos. H. Shedden of Monrovia, term expiring in 1919; C. D. Adams of Upland, T. U. Barber of Puente and H. J. Webber of Riverside, term expiring in 1920; J. M. Elliott of Los Angeles, Lester Keller of Yorba Linda and Wm. H. Sallmon of San Diego, term expiring in 1921. Of these nine men six were charter members of the Association and all have been students of the avocado for years. What manner of men they are and the extent and depth of their interest in the business you have committed to them will become apparent at this evening's session when each is to speak for himself.

I now propose to review briefly the history and progress of this Association with some comments and suggestions in order to "stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance," to stimulate the interest of new members, and to inform others about the scope and purpose of our work.

The California Avocado Association came into being on May 15th, 1915, at an advertised meeting held at the Alexandria Hotel in Los Angeles. A board of nine directors was named, tentative by-laws were formulated, and at a later meeting the directors elected officers with Mr. Edwin G. Hart as President and Mr. F. O. Popenoe as chairman of the Executive Committee.

The first semi-annual meeting was held at the same place on October 23, 1915. That the audience was largely composed of seekers after knowledge was evidenced by the number who were armed with note-books and pencils. This studious aspect which was noted at the first gathering, has characterized all the subsequent public meetings of the Association. We are students and pioneers of a new and promising industry. There is a marked absence of cranks and faddists among us. The quality of the leaders and their downright serious attention to the business of improving the culture, production and

marketing of the avocado, has saved the industry from the danger of degenerating into a fad, and is placing it upon a dignified basis.

The first public meeting was notable for the contributions made by men of scientific standing. Prof. M. E. Jaffa, head of the division of Nutrition of the University of California, gave the benefit of original research on the food value of the avocado. He stated as a result of chemical analysis, that the avocado should not be considered merely as a relish, but as a food which builds tissue and yields energy. In this respect, the avocado, as a fruit, stands in a class by itself, ranking higher in fat or oil than the olive and so outranking even that fruit with respect to its total food values. The importance of this announcement can not be overestimated. It shows that we are dealing with the most valuable fruit known to man. The claim is not made that the avocado combines in itself all the elements of a perfect food, but that it contains more of the essential elements yielding on the average a far higher caloric value than any other fresh fruit. It should be our business to make this fact known, especially to medical journals and physicians, for it is evident that we are producing and developing a food of high nutritive value which is likely to find its place in the diet, not only of healthy adults, but also of invalids and of the young.

So important has this matter appeared to your directors that they have appointed a committee to prepare a circular on "The Avocado as a Food," and another committee to negotiate with the Rockefeller Institute with a view of having the institute investigate the use of the avocado for medicinal purposes.

Other scientific leaders who contributed to the success of this first meeting were Professor Ira J. Condit and Dr. J. Eliot Coit of the University of California, Dr. H. J. Webber, Director of the Citrus Experiment Station, and Professor A. D. Shamel and Mr. Wilson Popenoe of the U. S. Department of Agriculture. Prof. Condit gave some news items of interest on the avocado in Central and Northern California. Prof. Coit reported on some experiments with shipments, Dr. Webber told of the experimental work with avocados which he expected would be undertaken by the Citrus Experiment Station, Prof. Shamel made a plea for the keeping of individual tree records, and Mr. Wilson Popenoe gave an interesting account of the Avocado in Florida and other lands. The information and inspiration imparted by these men of science was the outstanding feature of this first meeting. At this meeting also Mr. F. O. Popenoe gave a careful study of varieties, listing more than eighty which had been planted in California. An exhibit of thin-skinned avocados, some budded nursery trees of different varieties, and a mid-day luncheon and display of avocado dishes commanded the attention of large numbers of visitors and served to advertise the avocado in first class style. The important step was taken of adopting the name "Avocado" as against the popular misnomer "Alligator pear" and the unpronounceable Spanish "Ahuacate." It was found that the word "avocado" of pleasant sound has long been identified with the fruit and has been adopted by the U. S. Dept. of Agriculture and horticultural societies. Another important step which bore fruit later was the passage of a resolution urging upon the Secretary of Agriculture, the importance of sending a special agricultural explorer to Central America, Mexico and South America to secure and import into the United States all varieties of the avocado obtainable.

The Report of the first semi-annual meeting giving the names of 74 charter members,

the papers and actions which have been enumerated, the experience of growers and others in handling trees and fruit, and directions for selecting ripe and satisfactory avocados and preparing the same for the table embraces initial history of which any infant industry might well be proud. The foundations were well and truly laid and we gladly bring our meed of honor to the pioneers, nurserymen, scientists and growers, the great majority of whom are still our fellow laborers in this fascinating field.

At the second semi-annual meeting held at Blanchard Hall, Los Angeles, April 29th, 1916, fewer papers were presented, and more time left for general discussion. There was a fine exhibit of trees and fruit, the thick-skinned varieties being more in evidence than at the preceding meeting. Prof. Jaffa and his assistants submitted the results of laboratory investigation of the mineral elements of the avocado and avocado byproducts, the latter contemplating over-production and the use of waste avocados. Mr. C. P. Taft presented a readable and witty paper on the market value of the avocado, defending present high prices on the basis of the law of supply and demand. Under the caption "From Seedtime to Harvest" Mr. T. U. Barber presented the results of his experience in selection of seed, seed-planting, transplanting seedlings, budding, cultivation, fertilization and pruning. This paper is so full of valuable information and suggestion that it might well be printed as a primer for beginners. Marketing problems were discussed by Mr. Ira C. King of the California Fruit Growers' Exchange. This important subject has been on the program of most of our meetings and has been frequently considered by your Board of Directors. With the increase of fruit it will soon call for some definite co-operative action. Our marketing problem is large and complex. It will require for its solution the best brains we can command. And we are fortunate in having among our number some experienced shippers of fruit who are acquainted with the ways and means which have brought the California Fruit Growers' Exchange to such a high state of efficiency. We must extend our campaign of advertising in order to introduce this little-known fruit to the people and create an appetite for it. We must teach the hotels, restaurants and public how to select good fruit and how to prepare it attractively. We must discourage producers and sellers from offering inferior stuff which may be of temporary benefit to the producer or seller and of lasting injury to the industry. We must study the best methods of packing and shipping so that the fruit may be put upon the market in sound and attractive condition. It is none too early to get busy—far more busy than we have been—upon these problems, for appeals have begun to reach the Association this year from producers who seek our assistance in the marketing of their crop. The revised By-Laws provide that "It shall be the duty of the Board of Directors when the development of the industry makes it desirable and necessary, to provide for the cooperative marketing and distribution of the avocado crop." Barring excessive heat or cold, or other unfavorable dispensation of nature, the time is fast approaching when we shall need a co-operative organization to care for this important matter.

The third semi-annual meeting held at the Maryland Hotel, San Diego, October 30th and 31 st, 1916, was all that a convention should be. For the first time we gathered in a meeting place free from noise where the words of the speakers and the ensuing discussions could all be heard and be heard by all. The exhibit of fruit and nursery stock was staged in a separate room which was locked to prevent distraction during the meeting and on the ground floor where it attracted the attention of the public and

contained the largest and finest display yet seen of both the thin-skinned and thick-skinned varieties. The food demonstration was an event remembered with pleasure. During the noon hour, under the guidance of Mr. T. U. Barber, assisted by the ladies of the San Diego Floral Association, more than six hundred people tested the avocado served in sandwiches and salads. The merits of the fruit were thus advertised to many who had never tasted it before. The educational value of such a demonstration in the early stages of our industry should encourage the Board of Directors to provide the necessary expenses for similar advertising projects. For a long time to come the public will need education on such elemental matters as how to tell when the fruit is in prime condition to eat and how to prepare and serve it in such palatable and attractive fashion that an appetite will be created for more. Twenty-six papers were presented at this meeting, all of which were printed in the Annual Report, fourteen of them being read to the gathering. Most of the papers consisted of the personal experiences of growers and of the history of the avocado in other regions. The program was concluded by two lectures with lantern slides by Prof. Condit and Dr. Webber, many of the illustrations being reproduced in the Annual Report. From the wealth of information spread before us at this time, it is difficult to select the papers which call for special comment. From the history of the avocado in other parts of California, in Florida and in distant lands, we glean information of value to ourselves, and from the experience of growers we learn how to avoid mistakes, how to propagate, plant in orchard form, cultivate, irrigate, detect disease, extend the season of ripening and the like. The paper by Mr. F. O. Popenoe on "Growing an Avocado Tree" is a compendium on the subject. Prof. Condit's "History of the Avocado and its Varieties in California" with a check list of all named varieties numbering at that time 143, gave point to the ringing appeal of Prof. L. B. Scott that it was high time to take definite action on the elimination of varieties.

The fourth semi-annual meeting held in the auditorium of Normal Hill Center, Los Angeles, May 18th and 19th, 1917, was devoted almost entirely to a discussion of varieties. The history and propagation of the Sharpless and Monroe, the Wagner, Lambert and Surprise and the Taft were presented in papers by the men who had most to do with originating and propagating these varieties. Personal experiences with these and many other varieties were detailed by growers, culminating in a paper by Mr. W. A. Spinks on "Interplanting and Changing Varieties," in which is a tribute to the nurserymen which deserves to be re-read—and crowned by a masterly recital by Prof. L. B. Scott on the "Comparative Merits of the California Avocado Varieties," which those who heard will not soon forget. The effect of cold periods of weather upon different varieties of avocado trees obtained in statements from fifty members of the Association, was presented by Dr. Webber. The evidence seemed to connect the degree of injury with the water conditions in the soil, the maximum injury, according to reports, accruing to those trees which were suffering for lack of irrigation. Mr. Thos. H. Shedden, ex-president, "poet laureate" and committee of one on what he terms "that animal-vegetable conglomeration 'Alligator pear'," stirred the meeting to risibility with a "partial report of incomplete work" on his "effort to familiarize the public with that gentle and euphonious word 'Avocado'." The program was enriched by three lectures with lantern slides on "The Avocado in California" by Dr. Webber; "Avocado Varieties" by Prof. Condit, and "Methods of Pruning" by Mr. B. K. Marvin, all of which were of such educational value as to call for repetition when reviewed in the light of new information.

The program of the fifth semi-annual meeting held in the Glenwood Mission Inn at Riverside, October 26th and 27th, 1917, was arranged with reference to a general demand for more time than was ordinarily allowed for discussion. Few papers were presented, two symposia, one on "Irrigation" and the other on "Heat Injury," occupying the bulk of the time. The symposium on "Irrigation" led by Dr. Lester Keller, brought out the fact that he stands, almost, if not quite, alone in his advocacy of the constant drip irrigation which he practices on his nine acre avocado grove. The symposium on "Heat Injury" occasioned by the excessive heat wave of June 14th to 17th, was carefully planned by Mr. F. O. Popenoe and established the fact of relationship between the injury done to avocado trees due to heat and the lack of timely irrigation. Strong young trees shielded from the sun during the first summer, provided with a generous mulch of straw and adequate moisture, are, other things being equal, the most heat resistant. Other cultural problems might profitably be treated in this way at our meetings as the symposium and discussion bring out a great deal of valuable personal experience and suggestion.

A special report of the Board of Directors on Avocado Varieties was presented at this meeting. From the beginning your directors have felt that this was the most important problem confronting the new industry. With the number of varieties increasing until some 180 were listed, there would naturally arise hesitation with respect to planting. It was apparent that some action was necessary to stabilize the industry and standardize the fruit. The first president of the Association, Mr. Edwin G. Hart, appointed a committee on the Classification and Registration of Varieties. After thorough investigation of fruit and trees the committee met with the Board of Directors and the whole question was carefully considered, with the result that a list of eight varieties was approved as the best and most reliable for commercial planting in California. The report of the committee as modified and adopted by the Board of Directors is included in the Annual Report for 1917, and was published as a circular. The action of the directors was almost unanimously acclaimed and was immediately productive of beneficial effects. Planters began top-working and rebudding and nurserymen discontinued carrying many varieties for which there was only an occasional demand. To apply the pruning knife to such a formidable list of varieties as existed was a delicate task courageously performed. It was the most singular contribution which has yet been made toward the standardization of fruit and the stabilization of the industry. But the list of varieties adopted must not be considered as final. It was the recommendation of the committee and the opinion of the directors that the list should be revised periodically and brought down to date to keep pace with advancing knowledge. The directors have therefore provided for the continuance of the committee giving the President power to make such changes in its personnel as may seem desirable.

The three published annual reports for 1915, 1916 and 1917, which we have briefly reviewed, contain a great deal more than has been mentioned. There are suggestions of pioneers in the industry which the seeker after knowledge can not afford to pass by. There are articles of general interest and permanent value not read at any meeting of the Association, such as that on "Exploring Guatemala for Desirable New Avocados" by Mr. Wilson Popenoe, Agricultural Explorer of the U. S. Department of Agriculture. There are charts for orchard planting and photographs of fruit and trees admirably reproduced. These reports, with the forthcoming Volume for 1918-1919, which will contain the record

of the sixth semiannual meeting held at Los Angeles May 17th and 18th, and this, the seventh semi-annual or fourth annual meeting, are the storehouse of knowledge about our industry. They show how very far we have traveled within a short compass of time, and are prophetic of the day hailed by our "poet laureate."

"When thru all the states of our dear Native land. This fruit, with our orange, shall go hand in hand."