

OUR ASSOCIATION

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Eleven years ago the California Avocado Association came into existence. A few, but not many, of those here tonight, were present at that historical meeting. Well do I remember the event. Interest in growing the avocado had already before quite keen among a number of us, and the idea of forming an association was somewhat in our minds. But no steps had been taken. At this juncture we received by mail a call for a meeting to organize an avocado association. The call was signed by two names which had not been associated with avocado activities. This created an atmosphere of mystery, and we speculated among ourselves as to what might be on foot. The day rolled around. About eighty persons gathered in Parlor A of the Alexandria Hotel, —a rather surprisingly large number. One of the signers of the call made an opening statement, advocating the formation of an organisation to conduct an educational campaign. He explained that he was writing a book on avocado culture, and that his friend, the other signer to the call, was ready to go forth as the official lecturer of the association if funds were satisfactorily provided.

At this point a motion was made nominating D. W. Coolidge as chairman of the meeting, which carried. Thereupon, Mr. Coolidge appointed a committee of three, composed of Mr. Hart, Mr. Messenger and myself, to nominate a permanent board of directors and outline a plan of procedure. The committee retired to the California Club, where it had an excellent luncheon at Mr. Hart's expense. We duly returned, made our report, the board nominated was elected, and the California Avocado Association was an official body. I believe that neither one of those gentlemen who signed the original call ever attended another meeting,—like a meteor passing through the sky, they came and went. While of course the association would sooner or later have been formed anyway, to them must be given the credit for its actual beginning

Since then, what has happened? What have we achieved, and what are the things we ought to have done but have not done?

Well, I want to say for the first thing that we have built up an organization that as an institution is an unusual one, and one that has great influence and power. We can be, and we are, proud of the California Avocado Association. It is composed of men and women who have brains and character. I have always felt that it was an honor to belong to it. And our various boards of directors! They have been composed of men and women with ability enough, had it been centered on a manufacturing business, to make Henry Ford look like the proverbial thirty cents.

So, with such a membership, and with such boards, of course this institution has done much. It has accomplished more than we realise, living as we do day by day, engrossed in details, and not thinking about the great forces that are at work.

The California Avocado Association has established the status of the avocado and avocado growing in a wonderful manner. It has brought a new horticultural product and food of the highest value, and the industry, nearer to perfection in a remarkably short time. It has done this quietly and without noise, just as all great work is done. And the sane and conservative character of our membership has prevented any stampede or boom or wildcatting in connection with the industry,—an unusual achievement. Usually a new industry is made the vehicle of unscrupulous promoters, as a get-rich-quick business. We have a clean record. We prevented the avocado from being misused, and we guided the growing industry safely, and we have produced fruits superior to those grown anywhere else in the world.

Consider next, the educational work we have done for this fruit. In the face of old and well entrenched opposition and prejudice we have changed the misleading name of 'alligator pear' to 'avocado.' This is an accomplishment to be commended when we see how other movements to change mistakes have failed,—for example, 'grape-fruit' has stuck, and 'pomelo' gone out. Mr. Shedden, who was our committeeman to bring about the change from alligator pear, was laughed at and told by well informed people that it could not be done. Today, on the Pacific Coast at least, we grow avocados, and not alligator pears.

Many thousands of people who knew neither an alligator pear nor an avocado a few years ago, and whose faces would look blank if either name was mentioned, will now smile beamingly when the word avocado is mentioned. There are many more, it is true, who are yet to be informed, but the good work is going on.

The marketing of the avocado at proper and profitable prices has been the natural and inevitable result of the work of our Association. A few short years ago the only buyers of our product were some of the large hotels and half a dozen leading grocers who had patrons that were 'rich and nutty.' I remember when Mr. Walker, of Hollywood, pondered long before selling me budwood of the Challenge, on the ground that the raising of more trees might prevent him from marketing the fruit from his own trees. Note the condition today; every little fruit seller, every vegetable stand, every way-side booth, has its supply of fruits and proudly displays the sign 'Avocados.' Our marketing organisation, the Exchange, is functioning successfully, and the demand is growing which will absorb the yield as rapidly as it is increased.

But probably the most definite evidence of our success and achievement is in the increase in the price and value of land suitable for avocado growing. Merely say 'avocado land' and you have doubled the price of your real estate.

I was down at Carlsbad the other day, and saw some wonderful things. And by the way, if this Association does not step lively, Carlsbad will be the dog and we will be the tail. They mean business down there, and are getting results. I saw the best young avocado trees I have seen, and they were full of fruit. Well, as to Carlsbad, a few years ago I saw land there at \$500 and \$600 per acre. It looked like high priced land to me. In another year or so they were asking \$800 and \$900 an acre for that land. Now, the other day I

asked about the price, and it was \$2000 per acre. What has done this? The avocado has done it, and the California Avocado Association, by its conservative work and careful management, has made it all possible. Nothing but the avocado could have made that vacant land worth \$2000 an acre, and the avocado could only have done it because of the wise and intelligent work of this association. Of course I am using Carlsbad as an illustration. The avocado is increasing the value of land in all that region,— Vista, Santa Fe Rancho, Encinitas and the other suitable sections down there, and up here. Land that is suitable for avocado growing is in demand at much higher prices than it would have been if there had been no California Avocado Association. If you will get out your pencil and figure up the real wealth that has thus been added to Southern California, you will be astonished, and you will realise something of the power of our society.

Now, as to varieties: we can realize that we have made a great advance since the time Mr. Taft's tree at Orange and Mr. Walker's tree at Hollywood were the shrines at which we enthusiasts were wont to worship, and since the day Mr. Spinks advertised he was budding over all his trees to two varieties, the Spinks and Val de Flor. We have all had some lessons to learn, and many of these lessons were hard and expensive ones. Mr. Spinks, by the way, has done, all in all, a great deal for the industry. He spent his money freely and like a gentleman to produce a model orchard. Sometimes he did not agree with the rest of us, which was his privilege, but he backed his own convictions, and that was just what a man ought to do. In many ways he has been exceedingly helpful. At our exhibits, he usually took the lead. For the past two or three years we have missed him from our meetings. I wish he were here this evening.

But in this matter of varieties the association has done splendid work; and still greater and more important work lies ahead of it. We have not reached the standardisation of the avocado. We should be grateful, and we are grateful, to many of the members of our society for the work they are doing. At the same time, I fear we do not always give them the credit that is their due. For instance, consider Mr. Elliott's orchard of 1200 trees at North Whittier Heights. It is not a commercial plantation. It is an experimental garden, where he is spending liberally of his money and his time and his talent in an endeavor to help the association in its work. Do we often enough think of it in that light, and appreciate his generosity, and the nobility of his spirit?

The same may be said of Mr. Shedden and his orchard of seven acres at Monrovia, where he started in with 57 varieties, and now has almost doubled that number. Mr. Shedden has never regarded his orchard as a commercial proposition. It is his contribution to the development of the avocado industry. The same may be said of the work of other members of the association.

And while I do not agree in all things with Mr. Rideout, especially where he makes the Lyon jump out of its cage and eat up the Fuerte, I do respect and admire him for the open handed manner in which he is carrying forward a large amount of expensive experimental work. He has a thousand hybrid trees, and among them may be the tree to bear the perfect fruit we are looking for. And I have also to take off my hat to Mr. Thompson, at Carlsbad, who, on his 8 acre tract is working along the same line, helping this association solve the problems, and in doing it he is getting a big kick out of the job.

The work of our varieties committee has always been marked by a high degree of intelligence and industry, but there remains yet a still larger field for their efforts. The increasing number of new seedling and hybrid trees is a sufficient reason for this, but in addition thereto—and this is a matter which has not yet had our or their serious consideration—arrangement should be made to have the promising 'prospects' planted in many different sections of the avocado belt. The committee should take up as a part of its work, it seems to me, the matter of getting these new worthy varieties budded by the nurserymen in limited numbers, and then a campaign should be entered into with our members to secure their co-operation by planting them in one's and two's and three's in many localities. The work of the committee on varieties may be said to be just getting fairly well under way. That committee has in its hands a large measure of the future welfare of the industry.

Should we not have more papers read at our meetings, and more discussion of them? Some of our meetings have been too short. I like these two full day meetings, one whole day or two forenoons given over to papers and discussion, one-half day for the fruit exhibit and social greetings, and one-half day for the business meeting. To me the opportunity and time for social greetings is one of the prized features of every gathering. And if we devote two full half-days to the reading of papers, we will be able to publish a larger and more valuable annual report. This will satisfy our non-resident members, especially, and make them feel it is worth while to continue their memberships. These books should be increasing in size and importance and value as the years go by. Instead they have shrunk from 146 pages in 1917 to 80 pages in 1925'. The records of our association are the world's best literature on all phases of the industry and its history, and should be worthy of the cause they represent.

Should we not, by this time, have competitive exhibits of fruits, and prizes therefor—just as they have in nearly all other fruit and flower shows. This would stimulate interest in the exhibits, make them more representative, and double them in size and value. At one time we gave prizes for the best variety or best new seedling, but that did not work out well. There were too many things to be taken into consideration to enable the judges to decide such contests fairly,—they had to turn those matters over to the varieties committee. But a competition for the best fruits of any variety, or of the best exhibit, would be worth while.

Instead of selling fruits at the highest possible prices at our exhibitions, the association should, even if in a subsidized way give liberally to the public, serving avocados not in tiny bits on a toothpick, but in more generous fashion and in various forms. It is within the experience of each one of us that all fairs and exhibits are occasions for giving liberally to the public of their products, for educational purposes.

A valuable opportunity to increase the sale of avocados lies in teaching the public to buy the fruit while yet hard, and to ripen it, and how to retard or hasten the ripening, and to know just when it is ripe. This knowledge will remove a large part of the losses now sustained by the dealer in having fruits spoil on his hands, which makes him timid in carrying stock. It will also give confidence to the purchaser, who often fears that in buying ripe fruits he is buying over-ripe ones. It is absolutely true that those who have learned to soften avocados use more of them.

Every now and then will appear in publications a good avocado item. The association should pounce upon it, and secure its publication in as many parts of the country as possible. The Exchange did a splendid publicity act in broadcasting and republishing Dr. Lovell's talk. Increased demand for fruits was immediately evident from many sources. I believe we are yet lacking much in teaching the public how to buy, ripen and use the avocado, which is yet a strange and unknown fruit to millions of our people.

In conclusion, I believe the time has come to broaden out this association.

There ought not to be a Carlsbad Avocado Growers Society, or a separate Whittier group or an avocado committee of the Santa Barbara Farm Bureau, or any similar branch or separate organisation. In union there is strength.

Each of these should be a local branch of the California Avocado Association.

Instead of 500 members for this association, which is the goal we have always had in mind, let us now lay our plans for one thousand members. We can get them! And to this end, let the directors smooth out every wrinkle, allay every bit of ill-feeling, remove all friction, placate every ex-member who has left the fold, and require of each one of us that we bring in at least one new member within the next sixty days.

So let us join the association, and continue our memberships in it, and get the other fellow to come in, and all work for its success; this whether we have a thousand trees, or only one, or none at all. Indeed, the greatest pleasure is to boost along something good in which we have no financial interest. The real satisfaction in life comes from doing something for the good of mankind. Every dime we put into this association will help to build up this great industry, for which future generations will rise up and call us blessed.