

San Diego County Avocado History

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In the writing of all well-regulated histories, first and honorable mention is given to the oldest inhabitant. So shall it be in this case. The oldest avocado tree in San Diego County, so far as my investigation has revealed, is a Mexican seedling on the ranch of W. W. Prior, two miles north of Escondido. It was planted 35 years ago by Mrs. W. D. Bailey, former owner. The seed came from the Department of Agriculture, Washington. The tree is 50 feet high, has a girth of 6 feet 8 inches, 4 feet above the ground, with a top spread of 47 feet each way. It is said to be the second largest avocado tree in California.

While the cradle of avocado growing in San Diego County was the country lying around the city of San Diego, the larger and more extensive development of the industry is now taking place further up the coast. In the region which includes Solano Beach, Encinitas, Rancho Santa Fe, Carlsbad and Vista the younger plantings are extensive. The reason for this is that this northern country contains much good land which, though previously unavailable on account of lack of water, has recently been brought under irrigation by the building of the Lake Hodges and Henshaw dams and the establishment of extensive irrigation districts. Several thousand acres of comparatively frostless land of good quality, and offered at low prices, were thus opened up for horticultural development. The opportunity was at once taken advantage of, land sales became active and development is going on in an excellent manner, with the avocado as the prime favorite. The demand for budded trees has been in excess of the supply, and no less than 1,200 acres have been planted to the avocado, which is probably one-half the acreage of all Southern California. Anticipating a continued demand, nurserymen are increasing their stocks, one nursery having 75,000 Mexican seedlings in process of growth and budding. It is perhaps not saying too much, therefore, to state that for some years to come San Diego County will lead in the planting of avocado orchards and in the production of fruit.

The good work done in testing the different varieties in the various localities offers a relatively safe basis for continued sound development. While the fundamental principle of planting good varieties on carefully selected land is in some instances being violated—and this will always be the case—yet in the main the past and present plantings are destined, I believe, to be largely satisfactory and to advance the general stability of the industry. Nevertheless, it is well to caution prospective planters to be careful. In the selection of land investigation as to its location, quality, depth, drainage and freedom from frost should be thorough. In the selection of varieties guidance by the Variety Committee of the California Avocado Association is the correct procedure.

The oldest orchards were planted in the years 1915 and 1916, and these, as stated, lie

chiefly in the southern end of the county, the few exceptions being principally around Vista. At that time little experience had been gained, the variety question was not so well worked out, and many trees were planted which have since been proven to be of inferior kinds. In consequence, numerous instances of top working have been necessary to bring these orchards into desirable production. In short, the vicissitudes of the pioneer have been undergone, but this has been done cheerfully and with a feeling on the part of the grower that he was assisting in the upbuilding of a worthwhile, industry. Fortunately for the general good, these first plantings were usually made up of numerous varieties, and thus a very considerable amount of experimental work has been carried on. This has inured to the benefit of the present-day planter, who is under a heavy obligation to the pioneers.

It has not been possible in this brief history to record all of the recent plantings, and I do not lay claim to a thorough treatment of the subject. My intention has only been to draw an outline picture of the present status of avocado growing in San Diego County, and to briefly depict its beginnings and some of the influences which have been at work.

The Chula Vista and Bonita District

The oldest and largest planting included in this district is that of William H. Sallmon, who is located southeast of Chula Vista and one mile north of Bonita. Planted in 1916, this five-acre orchard includes 350 trees, made up of 50 Taft, 50 Perfecto, 25 Fuerte, 25 Puebla, 25 Dickinson, with a lesser number of Montezuma, Queen, Knight and Linda, and a scattering of the "Wilson Popenoe varieties." Mr. Sallmon has the largest number of Montezuma trees growing in any one orchard, and these have produced a satisfactory amount of high quality fruit. His three Nabal trees are perhaps the most interesting single feature of his orchard. They have been consistent bearers, and at this date are carrying a maximum yield.

Mr. Sallmon's orchard has during its history produced much fruit of excellent size and quality and has been of great value in determining for San Diego County planters the desirability of about forty varieties.

The planting of A. Ellis Barren, two miles east of Bonita, is limited to the Taft and Blakeman varieties. These are now in full bearing, and the production of much excellent fruit has resulted.

The plantings of A. Ray Palmer, one acre of two-year-old Fuerte, Taft, Dickinson, Pueblo and Queen trees, and of Samuel Sherman, 32 Fuertes, 1 Taft, 1 Dutton, mark the beginning of two young orchards.

The orchards of the Sweetwater Fruit Company, R. Callen, and Max H. Cook are among the older plantings of the district. These groves have been well maintained, are in good condition, are bearing well, and have contributed their quota to the demonstration of commercial avocado growing.

But to the orchard—I might well say garden—of 540 trees planted in 1921 by Misses Brundred and Tenney especial attention must be directed. It may well be said that these ladies have furnished the most perfect exhibit of avocado growing in the county. Though planted on a hillside, all of the ground heavy and some of it adobe, the growth has been unusually good and the fruiting record excellent. Care has been given to keeping the

trees in good form, and it is not stating the matter too strongly to say that these ladies have furnished an example of intelligent avocado culture which may be followed by all growers with profit to themselves and the industry.

Lemon Grove-Grossmont District

The oldest and principal planting is that of Mrs. Genetta H. Waters, one-half mile south of Lemon Grove. Planted in 1915 and 1916, her 300 trees include principally the Taft, Fuerte, Queen and Puebla varieties, with lesser plantings of Oro, Dickey A, Knight and some others. This orchard is on heavy adobe soil which, though it requires careful handling, Mrs. Waters feels entirely satisfied with and considers excellent for fruit production. Fifty San Sebastians which were among those originally planted have been worked over to the Queen variety with such satisfactory results that Mrs. Waters believes the San Sebastian to be an unusually excellent base, making especially large and productive trees.

Additional plantings near Lemon Grove include those of Hyde Tingey, six acres recently planted, 50 per cent of which are Fuerte and 10 per cent each of Dickinson, Puebla, Panchoy, Dutton and experimental varieties; and of A. V. Jester, two acres of two-year-old trees, of which 80 per cent are Fuerte and 20 per cent are Taft.

The T. M. Hayden planting at Grossmont includes 200 trees, more than one-half of which are of the Fuerte variety, the others including 15 Dorothea, 6 Queen, 5 Linda, 5 Anaheim, 6 Panchoy, 6 Lyon, Dickinson, Puebla, Itzamna and a few others. Planted three years ago, this orchard produced a worthwhile scattering crop during the second year and a good crop the third year, the Fuertes averaging 15 to 70 fruits per tree, with only one drone out of forty.

Mr. Hayden's location is on a slightly hilltop, with many of his trees scattered picturesquely among huge boulders that were too large to be removed. The presence of the boulders does not seem to have interfered with the prosperity of the trees. This orchard is remarkable for the splendid growth it has made and for its bearing quality. The basin system is used, and while, up to this time, no fertilizer has been applied, the growth is vigorous and abundant, illustrating well the value of good soil and better care. The interest of Mr. Hayden in his trees and the intelligent care he has given them should prove a valuable asset to all growers in that vicinity.

The young planting of H. W. Avery, 50 one-year-old trees, of Dutton, Dickinson, Tumin, Queen and Panchoy varieties, further extends the culture of this section.

Point Loma

The Theosophical University began its planting in 1915 with four trees presented by William A. Spinks, two Harmons and two Tafts.

The orchard now includes 250 trees, 104 of which were planted in 1916, including 26 Harmon, 27 Walker, 40 Challenge, the balance Sharpless, Spinks, Grande, San Sebastian and Queretaro. In 1917 39 Pueblas and a few trees of miscellaneous varieties were planted; and in 1918 about 50 more trees of various sorts were added, including Dickinson, the Knight varieties and 14 Fuertes.

Later, because of non-bearing near the coast, the Pueblas were top worked, as were the Harmon, San Sebastian and Queretaro varieties also.

The production of a large quantity of fruit maturing throughout the entire year, even though the quality was not all of the highest grade, was the initial policy of the University in preference to the growing of varieties not as well proven which might grade higher. On this account the heavy producers were favored; the Walker and Challenge trees were retained, and some of the shy-bearing kinds were budded over to Dickinson and Fuerte. About thirty varieties have been given a trial. Much scientific work has been done that is of value to the industry.

The production of this orchard is not commercial in the sense that it is being marketed for profit, but is intended for and is used by the university staff, students and workers. Fourteen thousand pounds of Challenge fruits were produced the past season by forty trees, or an average of about 350 pounds to the tree (although individual trees produced up to 800 pounds each), most of which was consumed by the university people. Avocado was served in quantity three times a week or oftener to each individual.

From the time the trees were planted this orchard has been under the superintendence of Orange I. Clark and Abbott B. Clark, his brother, they having been in charge of the chief horticultural interests of the university for seventeen years. Their work has been marked by a high degree of faithfulness and intelligence.

"What is the one outstanding thought you have in connection with your experience in avocado growing?" I asked Orange I. Clark.

"The growing of avocados," he replied, "is a highly specialised business, requiring and rewarding a greater degree of intelligence on the part of the grower than is required for any other fruit. As the result of a lifelong experience in horticulture I am convinced that successful avocado culture calls for a sounder judgment, a deeper knowledge, greater skill and care than any other orchard proposition in the world. It requires more real ability to be a successful avocado grower than is demanded by any other line of tree growing. There seems to be no other branch of orcharding in which so much knowledge and good judgment are needed. The satisfaction of working at such an occupation is correspondingly great.

"A clear understanding of the fundamental principals of horticulture," Mr. Clark continued, "must be combined with a natural foresight and good business judgment. Thus, it may be stated, avocado growing, to be highly successful, must be carried on by men of superior intelligence. It is fortunate indeed that the future of the avocado industry lies in the hands of the people of Southern California. We have here many scientific horticulturists and experienced business men to develop this new industry. These are the men who make up the California Avocado Association and who are devoting their time and ability to avocado culture. Nowhere, I think, could the same degree of interest and intelligence be brought to bear on the subject. These fortunate conditions, coupled with our favorable climate, good lands and abundant water supply, offer a guaranty of the highest possible development of this industry. It cannot be doubted that a large and successful industry is to be the outcome."

Encinitas

The principal planting is that of Rancho Leucadia, two miles north of the village. It includes thirty-three acres with 2450 three-year-old trees, of which 1800 are of the Fuerte variety, 200 Spinks and 100 Perfectos (both of which are to be top-worked at once) 60 Nabal, several trees each of Queen, Dickinson, Linda and Puebla, and an interspersed set of 100 trees, making an experimental garden of one tree each of about that many varieties. The interest of the owners, Messrs. Geo. D. Hoffman, James D. Hoffman and J. Eliot Coit, and of the superintendent, W. H. Rippey, is centered on the building up of a model commercial orchard with a side-line of variety testing and experimental work for the benefit of themselves and the public at large that will make of the orchard a future avocado Mecca of the highest value. It is such thoroughly intelligent work and unselfish motives as are evidenced at this orchard and by these gentlemen that have made the avocado industry and its sponsors a marked thing in the history of horticulture. This grove is in excellent condition throughout, and though only three years old, made an enviable bearing record the past season.

Antone Van Amersfoort planted eleven acres eight years ago. Because of the scarcity of water for the first four years, his orchard was maintained by the dry farming method. About one-half of the orchard is planted to the Fuerte variety, with perhaps ten per cent each of Queen, Dickinson, Anaheim and miscellaneous for the others. That Mr. Van Amersfoort could bring this orchard through four years of dry farming and now have it in such excellent condition is a tribute to his understanding of tree growing. He is a strong advocate of the excellence of the Fuerte variety.

Dirk Dolman, ten acres, one-half of which were planted three and a-half years ago, the balance being one year old. The Fuerte and Spinks varieties predominate, with Puebla, Dickinson, Anaheim and Mayapan in lesser numbers.

Mr. Bullock, seven acres three and one-half years old; 60 per cent Fuerte, 3.5 per cent Puebla, 5 per cent miscellaneous varieties.

A. Barfoot, two acres two years old, of which 80 per cent are Fuerte, 18 per cent Dickinson, 2 per cent miscellaneous varieties.

P. C. Mays, two acres of one-year-old Fuertes.

E. H. McDermont, two acres of one-year-old Fuertes.

H. Hartman, two acres of two-year-old trees, of which, 60 per cent are Fuertes, 20 per cent Dickinsons, 10 per cent Pueblas, 10 per cent Tafts.

E. H. Depew, two acres of two-year-old trees, of which about 60 per cent are Fuertes, 10 per cent each of Dickinson and Puebla, the balance Anaheim and Dutton; one of the finest groves of its size and age in the county.

Dr. H. N. Potter, two acres two years old, given over entirely to a miscellaneous collection of experimental varieties.

Mrs. E. de Caldwell, two acres one year old; 80 per cent Fuertes, 10 per cent Dickinsons, 5 per cent Pueblas, 5 per cent Tafts.

Mr. Carr, six acres two years old, including Fuerte, Dutton, Puebla and miscellaneous varieties.

Ed Fletcher, fifteen acres one year old; 70 per cent Fuerte, the balance Anaheim, Queen, Dickinson and experimental varieties.

Richardson Brothers, two acres of Fuerte and Dickinson, planted three years and one and one-half years ago.

Mr. Eckert, two acres one year old; 60 per cent Fuerte, 40 per cent Taft.

Rancho Santa Fe

The development of 9,000 acres in northern San Diego County belonging to the Santa Fe Railroad, known as Rancho Santa Fe, watered by the Lake Hodges reservoir supply, which is distributed through eighty miles of steel and concrete pipe, has been the spectacular land subdivision project of this region. The land lies back of the crest of a low range of hills six miles from the ocean. Fifty miles of good roads have been built and 136 orchard units planted. These plantings include 30,000 avocado trees one and two years old. The establishment of these orchards is in keeping with the splendid character of the entire development, and here may be found the largest number of small orchards reflecting intelligent care and exhibiting splendid growth of any region in Southern California. The character of this achievement seems destined to continue, and today's development is only an indication of what the future will lead to. It is a great pleasure to note the uniform growth of these plantings and the very satisfactory conditions which prevail.

Carlsbad

Carlsbad has become so identified with avocado growing as to have taken its place in the front rank and to have warranted the adoption by its residents of the slogan "Home of the Avocado." Pioneered in 1916 by Sam Thompson, a veteran nurseryman, its expansion has been rapid since 1920. As to climate, lay of land and natural endowment, little is left to be desired or possible of addition. Avocado growing is the principal industry and asset of the community. In 1923 the Carlsbad Avocado Growers Club was formed with an initial membership of seventeen. The society now includes about 100 of the leading citizens of the district in its membership. Avocado Day, in early October, has become an annual event, and each year is widely advertised and largely attended. In 1926 a careful check revealed the fact that the club had fed and entertained 5000 persons. A spirit of cordial co-operation among the growers of this community has been in evidence at all times, the result of which, in conjunction with a wise and conservative publicity campaign, has been to place Carlsbad in an enviable position, and to increase real estate values to an unusual and marked degree.

The oldest grove, as stated, is that of Sam Thompson. This consists of eight acres given over largely to experimental work. The "try out" which Mr. Thompson has given numerous varieties has proven, and will continue to prove, of inestimable value to the district, and to avocado growing in the entire county. The number of varieties under observation runs up to something over 100, with as many more trees grown from selected seeds, and Mr. Thompson is constantly adding new advocates for public favor. His largest variety planting consists of 216 Fuerte trees, from which he harvested an eight thousand dollar crop the past season. Next in number come fifty Buttons, followed by lesser plantings of Panchoy, Mayapan, Benik, Itzamna and several others. Mr.

Thompson is entitled to and is indeed receiving credit for his splendid work as an experimentalist. His generous nature has enabled him to realize much satisfaction in sharing the knowledge gained from his labors with all earnest seekers for avocado facts.

A committee appointed to make a survey of the number and varieties of avocados in the Carlsbad district has reported to the Carlsbad Chamber of Commerce. This committee, consisting of C. J. Fernal, W. K. Knapp, and Gus Palmer, made a careful survey of the district, and their report shows the following interesting facts:

There were 130 separate reports returned—most of them accurate in detail—showing a total of 28,135 trees. There were twenty-five principal varieties listed. The average number of trees owned by each individual grower was 216. The number of trees of each variety was as follows: Fuerte, 7176; Dickinson, 1904; Button, 819; Panchoy, 1056; Mayapan, 318; Spinks, 546; Puebla, 398; Queen, 64; Linda, 144; Carlsbad, 66; Dickey A, 139; Sharpless, 16; Lyon, 232; Anaheim, 774; Sinaloa, 71; Dorothea, 40; Premier, 37; Gottfried, 44; Itzamna, 202; Taft, 2; Prince, 10; Perfecto, 72; seedlings, 2143; miscellaneous, 10,593.

The large number returned as miscellaneous is due to the fact that when owners were not at home all trees were counted and listed as miscellaneous.

Vista

The earliest and largest plantings in northern San Diego County were those established at Vista in 1915 and 1916. In connection with the subdivision of a tract of land by the Vista Land Company, an avocado nursery was established by the West India Gardens. The immediate result was the planting of several orchards at Vista. The supply of water anticipated by the originators of the district failed of realization and results were in proportion. For eight years following the planting of these orchards a very limited supply of water resulted in checked growth and poor production, and it has only been since the formation of the Vista Irrigation District, including 15,000 acres of splendid land adequately provided with water from the Henshaw dam, that avocado growing in this locality has assumed a safe and prosperous condition.

Among the initial plantings the largest was that of the West India Gardens, 25 acres interspersed with loquats. While the loquats did fairly well with the limited water supply, the avocados did not, and the property became in reality a loquat grove, the avocados assuming minor importance. Later, with the orchard leased on the basis of loquat production, the avocado trees were further neglected, and to an extent that commercial results have never been realized.

The experience of the other early plantings was somewhat less disastrous and they are now yielding their owners substantial returns. These include the orchards of J. W. Treat, A. W. Martin, H. C. Bowman and D. W. Ewing. The varieties planted were Taft, Harmon, Northrop, Challenge and a few miscellaneous kinds. The Harmons and Northrops have since been topworked to Fuerte, Dorothea and Challenge.

The 1926-7 plantings have been extensive and include the following:

Vista Development Association, 5,000 trees for various land purchasers, with 4,000 more contracted for and to be planted at once. The varieties are Fuerte, 88 per cent;

Puebla, 10 per cent; miscellaneous, 2 per cent.

Phillips-Hambaugh Realty Company, 50 acres planted, 250 acres contracted to be planted, 90 per cent Fuertes.

P. Blackwell, ten acres; 90 per cent Fuerte, 10 per cent miscellaneous.

A. B. Ormsby, eighteen acres; Fuerte.

Frotheringham & Ormsby, fifteen acres; Fuerte.

Ben Needham, ten acres; Fuerte.

Witman Sisters, five acres; Fuerte.

W. B. Pechstein, 460 Fuertes, 15 Pueblas, 25 of miscellaneous varieties.

F. G. Billings, ten acres; 800 Fuertes, 200 miscellaneous varieties.

Edgar Keller, four acres; 200 Fuertes, 50 experimental varieties.

Charles Victor Hall, 600 Fuertes, 400 miscellaneous.

Frank Meline Company, 200 Fuertes.

Mr. Whetstone, 50 Fuertes, 40 miscellaneous.

Mr. Ober, 50 Fuertes, 10 miscellaneous.

Mr. Anderson, 100 Fuertes.

Solano Beach

James M. Reynolds, five acres five years old, one acre two years old, of Fuerte, Dickinson, Dickey A, Spinks and experimental varieties.

C. R. McBride, seven acres of three-year-old Fuertes.

Mrs. T. J. Walker, two groves, one of 20 acres and one of 12 acres, two and three years old.

F. W. Armour, 20 acres purchased from Mrs. Walker, two years old.

J. M. Wilson, two acres of Fuerte, Taft, Dutton, Anaheim and Puebla, three years old.

Julius Volck, four acres; Mr. Peterson, two acres; Mr. Donnesberger, four acres.

Escondido

The plantings in this region are young. They include the following orchards, which are in good condition:

Billy Sevan, four acres; 60 per cent Fuerte, 20 per cent Puebla, 20 per cent Dickinson, one year old.

Dr. N. Matson, 700 trees one year old, of which 65 per cent are Fuerte and 10 per cent each of Dickinson, Puebla and Dutton, the remaining 5 per cent a collection of experimental varieties, including all of the Wilson Popenoe introductions.

L. B. Shaver, one and one-half acres of one-year-old trees, of which 80 per cent are Fuerte, 10 per cent Dickinson, 10 per cent Puebla.

Dick Reese, four acres one year old; 70 per cent Fuerte, 10 per cent each of Dickinson, Taft and Pueblo.

Willis Maple, five acres one year old; 60 per cent Fuerte, 10 per cent each Dutton, Puebla, Dickinson and Queen.

Fallbrook

In 1914 P. A. Lord planted 50 Taft trees on his ranch two miles southeast of the village of Fallbrook. These were followed by 240 Fuertes and four Dickinsons planted in 1918. Though having experienced some vicissitudes, the orchard is today in good condition, with a creditable production performance.

On the Moore ranch avocado growing was established by the planting of about 50 trees of the Harmon variety. These have been worked over to the Queen and some other kinds.

The orchard of B. M. McDonald, five acres one year old, is made up of 60 per cent Fuertes and 20 per cent each of Dickinson's and Pueblas.

In conclusion and in brief, it may be said the while the early history of Avocado growing in California makes little mention of San Diego County, the tardiness of that region to appreciate and grow the aristocrat of fruits is now being made up for. And due to the wise guidance of this Association, the work of extending commercial avocado growing there (as, indeed, everywhere) is being carried forward along intelligent and conservative lines. So that it is not stating the matter too optimistically to say that the future of the industry in that county is bright, and that within her boundaries will come, at least for many years, a healthy and large increase in acreage and fruit production—probably the largest in the entire state.