

## California Avocado Association 1932 Yearbook 17: 189-190

### In Retrospect

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*Talk given at Annual Dinner, May 6, 1932.*

In looking back over the seventeen years since the organization of this Association, so many interesting things come to mind that I was hard put to it to select a few items to touch on during the few minutes at my disposal.

One of the first questions to be considered and disposed of at the very first meeting was that of a suitable name. The one thing the members appeared agreed on was that they did not approve of the name "alligator pear". However, many members, including the first president, Mr. Edwin G. Hart, were strongly in favor of the Spanish word "ahuacate". It happened that the United States Department of Agriculture had previously published a bulletin on the fruit entitled "The Avocado; a New Salad Fruit from the Tropics". This had the effect of partly establishing the name "avocado" and that was finally adopted. President Hart reluctantly espoused the name with the following remarks: "Unless we are going to fight for the name we advocate, we had better take our medicine and call it the 'avocado'—not because it is right, but because we have to." Later on, the question arose as to the proper spelling of the plural of the word "avocado". Should it have an "e" as in "potatoes", or not, as in "mangos"? It was decided to drop the "e" and avocados became standard usage for the publications issued by the Association.

From the very beginning, the variety question loomed large. Mr. F. O. Popenoe made the first effort to bring order out of confusion. His paper, published the first year, was of great value. However, differences of opinion were very pronounced and in some cases verging on bitterness. The onus was too great for one person to bear, and, accordingly, a committee was appointed to specialize on the study of varieties and issue a short list of recommended varieties. While the committee was working on this problem, feeling ran high. Many were the arguments pro and con. The thickness of the skin was one of the serious points of contention. For a while those favorable to Mexican varieties were facetiously dubbed "the thin skins" and the group favoring Guatemalans the "thick skin crowd". The list of eight recommended varieties as finally worked out by the committee was approved by the Board of Directors in August, 1917, but it was felt to contain so much dynamite that it was withheld from publication. Apparently there was some danger that it would disrupt the Association. It was finally published in October, 1917, and, while severely criticized by the "thin skin" crowd, it proved a very important milestone in the development of our industry. The first variety committee was composed of Dr. H. J. Webber, Prof. I. J. Condit, Chas. D. Adams, Wm. Hertrich and L. B. Scott. The eight varieties first recommended were Fuerte, Puebla, Taft, Lyon, Spinks, Dickinson, Blakeman and Sharpless.

In subsequent years the recommended lists, though changed from year to year, were the subjects of considerable controversy until after the adoption of the policy of publishing two or more lists, one for commercial plantings and another for amateur collections. Our ideas have also been greatly clarified by the conception of what is now called "marketability".

The meetings of the Board of Directors have always been dignified, exceedingly busy, and usually harmonious. The one subject which I recall which, when discussed, sometimes resulted in an increase in temperature and decrease in equanimity was the question of standardization. It was a not uncommon practice to market large quantities of immature fruit blown off the trees by autumn windstorms. It was felt by some that the sale of this immature fruit for a low price, principally in the Mexican quarter, could do no harm, salvaged some income for the grower, and was not a danger to the health of the consumer. On the other hand, many felt that a deluge of this worthless stuff right at the beginning of the season left the market in poor shape to take good fruit at fair prices. To illustrate the point of view of some growers opposed to standardization, I had one large grower say to me that the fact that any article could be sold was prima facie evidence that it was salable and that he felt that he had a citizen's constitutional right to dispose of a salable commodity. He, of course, was confusing the standardization and pure food laws.

In 1923, the Board of Directors made an effort before the Legislature to have avocados included in the State Fruit and Vegetable Standardization Law. The effort failed. Again in 1925 we appealed to the Legislature; this time with success. The standard of maturity was set at 8% oil content. The law became effective August 25, 1925. Since that time the law has been attacked from many quarters, both in and out of the state. However, we have stood like a rock and allowed no tampering with that most important safeguard to our industry general standardization.