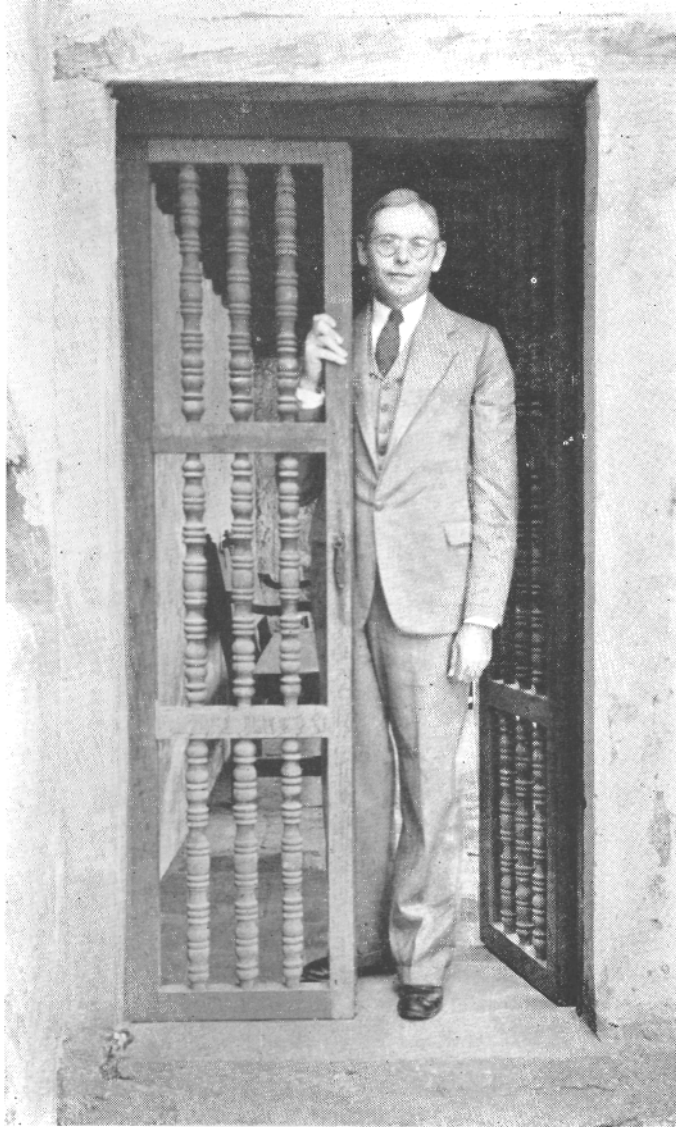


## Wilson Popenoe

*In Appreciation*



WILSON POPENOE

Wilson Popenoe was born in Topeka, Kansas, on March 9, 1892, and attended the public schools there. In 1904 his parents moved to Southern California where he attended Occidental Academy and Pasadena High School, afterward going to Pomona College as a special student under Dr. C. P. Baker. His interests were conspicuously

horticultural from childhood and after his removal to California he became fascinated with tropical and subtropical plants. While still a high school student he began correspondence with authorities in the English colonies and elsewhere, but particularly in the West Indies and (about 1908) gave to his experimental introductions at the Popenoe home in Altadena the name of West India Gardens. A little later his father, F. O. Popenoe, took over this name for the nursery which he started there. At this early age Wilson also became a Fellow of the Royal Horticultural Society of London. He and his father became particularly interested in the avocado, with which they had become acquainted when the Popenoe family lived during the year of 1901 in Costa Rica, and they visited nearly all the known trees in Southern California and talked with the growers. In 1911 F. O. Popenoe sent Carl B. Schmidt to Mexico for avocados—a journey which resulted in the introduction of the Fuerte, Puebla and other varieties—and sent his oldest son Paul Popenoe to North Africa for date palm offshoots, since date growing showed great promise in the desert regions of the southwest. The following year, 1912, he sent his two older boys, Paul and Wilson, around the world on a voyage of horticultural exploration, which covered a whole year, the main purpose being to get date palm offshoots in Arabia and Iraq as well as in North Africa. On this trip Wilson paid special attention to the fruits in South China, the Malay Peninsula, and Northern India as well as in Iraq and Algeria. On his return he immediately joined Mr. David Fairchild in the Office of Seed and Plant Introduction of the Bureau of Plant Industry at Washington and within a few months started to Brazil with A. D. Shamel and P. H. Dorsett to study the navel orange in its native home and to investigate all other horticultural possibilities there. This was the beginning of his explorations in Latin America which have continued until the present time—a span of 30 years.

During the decade following the Brazilian trip he explored the West Indies, Central and South America, systematically for the Bureau of Plant Industry and in addition to many other fruits and plants he introduced numerous strains of hardy avocados of which some of those from the highlands of Guatemala, particularly the Nabal, have become best known. Following these trips he succeeded Dr. Fairchild as head of the Office of Seed and Plant Introduction in Washington, but left government service in 1925 to become director of tropical agricultural research for the United Fruit Company.

In this capacity he established an experiment station at Tela on the Atlantic Coast of Honduras. In addition to his work for the banana industry, he has during the last 15 years been frequently detached for special missions, either to Latin American governments as expert consultant, or to the United States Department of Agriculture. In the latter connection he assisted in an agricultural survey of Cuba, and has during the last few years spent much of his time in projects for the development of "hemispherical self-sufficiency", particularly in promoting such cultures as quinine and rubber.

President Samuel Zemurray of the United Fruit Company decided in 1941 to establish a school of agriculture in which young men from all countries, but particularly those of Central America, might learn scientific methods and thereby improve the economic and agricultural position of their countries. This school was established on a large tract of land at an elevation of about 2500 feet near Tegucigalpa, the capital of Honduras, and Wilson Popenoe was made director of this Escuela Agricola Panamericana, which will probably claim most of his time in the future.

During his period of activity in Central and South America he has been a delegate of the American government to most of the important scientific congresses, including the 3d Panamerican Scientific Congress at Lima, Peru, in 1924, at which time he was given the honorary degree of **Doctor en Ciencias** by the University of San Marcos in that city, which claims to be the oldest university in the western hemisphere. Among other distinctions have been the order "Al Merito" conferred by the Chilean government in 1924, and the Ecuadorean order of the same name in 1925. He has been a member of the California Avocado Society from its origin, and holds membership in numerous other national and international scientific organizations. He is the author of a **Manual of Tropical and Subtropical Fruits** (New York, Macmillan, 1920) which is still a standard work of reference in that field; has contributed many articles on subtropicals to the **Standard Cyclopedia of Horticulture**, and has been a prolific writer of articles in both technical and popular journals on new or little known subtropical fruits, on the undeveloped agricultural resources of Latin America, and on agricultural exploration. No less than eighteen articles have been contributed to the Yearbooks of the California Avocado Society.

Avocados flourish conspicuously around the ancient capital of Guatemala, now known as Antigua, at an elevation of a mile above sea level. E. E. Knight had found there, in 1914, varieties which he brought to California as Linda and Queen and in succeeding years Wilson Popenoe explored the area thoroughly, bringing from it many varieties of which Nabal, Benik, and Panchoy are probably the best known. In the old town he was struck by the vast ruins of a magnificent colonial home known as the **Casa del Oidor** which one Don Luis de las Infantas Mendoza y Venegas had built some time prior to 1634. At that time it had been one of the finest private homes in Guatemala, but was ruined in the great earthquake of 1773—that terrible earthquake which led to the removal of the capital to the present site of the City of Guatemala, some 20 miles away. Struck by the possibilities, Wilson bought the old ruin and has had much of it restored as his own home, and furnished with almost priceless relics of the colonial period. It is a favorite attraction for visitors to the country, and thousands who will never see it yet feel well acquainted with it through reading a book by the well known author, Louis Adamic. In 1937, Mr. Adamic visited Guatemala and was so much struck by the romance of this house and its restoration that he wrote a 300 page book called **The House in Antigua** (N. Y., Harper, 1937).

While Wilson Popenoe has been able to spend little time in California during the past 30 years, he still considers it his home and maintains a legal residence at 2503 North Marengo Ave., Altadena, where one of the two California "Parent Fuerte" trees is still in existence as a link between antique Guatemala and California.