

## **THE HASS MOTHER TREE**

### **Report on the Dedication of a Memorial Plaque**

The dedication of the original seedling Hass tree took place September 22, 1973 at the discovery location, 426 West Street in La Habrá Heights.

Ceremonies were co-sponsored by the California Historical Society, the La Habrá Old Settlers Historical Society, and the California Avocado Society. Guy Steele and W. H. Brokaw served as co-chairmen of the event, Jean Bruce Ward, of the California Historical Society gave a talk, and a presentation was made by Frank Bishop. Mrs. Elizabeth Hass, widow of the late Rudolph Hass, and H. H. Brokaw unveiled a permanently mounted bronze plaque supplied by the California Avocado Society.

The late Elwood Trask and Miss Ethel Beck ordered and planned the placement of the plaque; Frank Bishop provided the base. The tree location is now owned by Mr. and Mrs. Keith Wilks. They have recently completed a house which stands behind the tree. As in other Society efforts with regard to this tree, the Wilks have been most gracious, cooperative and tolerant.

This original tree was really a mistake — a lucky chance seedling. In the late 1920's, Mr. Hass, who was a postman, purchased seedling trees from A. R. Rideout of Whittier, for the purpose of developing two acres of budded trees of the Lyon variety. It was Rideout's custom to plant very small seedlings at orchard spacing (12' x 12') at the grove site. The seedlings were grown in 2"x2"x8" tarpaper open-ended tubes of square cross sections. The seedlings were to grow in place for a year, or until well established, and be later budded in the field.

Such an arrangement was a chancey one for a number of reasons. First, Rideout was miles away from the orchard site and his follow-up work was sporadic. Second, the Lyon was a very tough variety to propagate, even under ideal conditions. Due to these reasons and others, Hass ended up with a grove of one or two dozen Lyons and many assorted seedlings. Among the seedlings was the unsuspected Hass.

Hass' children first brought the tree to his attention. They preferred the fruit. Since the quality was high and the tree bore well, Hass patented it in 1935. The same year he ordered 300 trees propagated to this variety by H. H. Brokaw of Whittier. Hass never planted the ordered trees; however, he entered into an agreement that Brokaw grow and promote the variety in consideration for splitting gross tree income 25% for Hass and 75% for Brokaw.

That wasn't an easy decision in those days because the Hass fruit differed so dramatically from the Fuerte, which was the standard of the industry. Nonetheless, Brokaw began to propagate the rough, black Hass exclusively and promote it in favor of the then standard varieties. He and Hass felt justified inasmuch as the Hass was a far better bearer than the Fuerte and matured at a different time of year. Because of the

seasonal advantage Brokaw was successful to the point of yearly sellouts of his nursery crops of 3 to 10,000 trees. Selling price was \$5 per tree as against Fuerte prices varying from \$3.50 in good years down to \$1.25 in poor ones.

The Hass was at first thought to be an upright-growing variety since it was found crowded among other upright growing seedlings. Its season was advertised as being from May to November, even in the La Habrá and Whittier areas. Brokaw maintains that this was so, just as the Fuerte commonly held into June in those days. He blames smog for earlier seasons in all varieties.

Despite speculation to the contrary, nobody knows what variety of seed produced the Hass. Rideout was an innovator and pioneer in avocados and used whatever seeds he could find—many times planting them along streets or in neighbor's yards in the search for new varieties. Ironically, the Hass was one he hadn't intended to leave as a seedling.

The Society wishes to thank the various contributors to this important event. We are most pleased with its completion.



—Courtesy, Register, Orange County

**From left: Harold Brokaw, W. H. Brokaw and Mrs. Rudolph Hass.**