

HISTORY OF HORTICULTURE IN DADE COUNTY

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In looking over some of my notes I find that the Horticultural Society met in Miami April 15 and 16th and on April 17th, 1931, it met in Homestead. I remember working with Mr. Bayard F. Floyd of Davenport, Florida, who was Secretary for the association. in making arrangements for this meeting and having the pleasure of appearing on the program.

In the short time allotted for this subject and the space provided in the Annual Report for this article would not be sufficient to cover in detail all the history concerning Horticulture in Dade County. I shall try however, to cover the most important subjects that played an important part in the development of Horticulture in Dade County.

This article would not be complete without mentioning those pioneers of horticulture who believed in the future of this county and its horticulture possibilities and the mention of places that played an important part in the development of horticulture in Dade County.

In 1898 Dr. H. G. Weber cleared six acres of land on Brickell Avenue, leased to the United States Department of Agriculture at one dollar per year, by Mrs. Mary Brickell. This property, at the intersection of S.E. 15th Street and Brickell Avenue is now built up to large apartment houses.

Across the street from this property the same year, on then the shores of Biscayne Bay, Dr. Weber built the first field laboratory ever established outside of Washington, D. C., with funds provided by the late Henry M. Flagler. Thus was established the first Experiment Station and laboratory in Dade County.

In 1926 the hurricane destroyed many plants in this garden as well as the house and laboratory that Dr. Weber had built in 1898.

However, from this garden many plants were propagated which found their way to the door yards of the pioneer settlers of Dade County, and to commercial plantings. Many new varieties of mangos from the Far East, avocados and other tropical plants fruited for the first time in this garden.

I can remember a large lath house that was built where pineapples were planted, and in between, mangos, avocados, annonas and papayas were planted and were pushing through the top. The pineapple investigation work was giving way for the mango and avocado plantings.

The pineapple industry had developed however, for about 1906 Mr. T. V. Moore and a number of others had large plantations in what is now the Little River section of Dade County. Mr. Moore had 200 acres under lath shade with a small, narrow track running through the center where small flat cars were pushed through the pineapple field for

loading as the fruit was harvested. This pineapple industry flourished until the so-called land boom of the middle twenties gave way to real estate developments.

In 1915 twenty-five acres of land leased from Charles Deering at Buena Vista to the U.S. Department of Agriculture was cleared, roadways were constructed where tropical shade trees were planted for testing their value for street planting. Test nurseries of tropical fruit and ornamental plants, mangos, avocados, garcinias and many other tropical plants were established for observation.

In 1922 Chapman Field Plant Introduction was established, where more than 100 acres were cleared, glass houses and lath houses were built. This garden has been instrumental in supplying new plants for horticulture in Dade County over a period of years.

In 1930 the Sub-Tropical Experiment Station at Homestead was established. This station has made a great contribution to the horticultural development of Dade County, especially in the development of the avocado, mango, lime and other tropical fruits, in addition to the vegetable industry, and will no doubt continue in the future to play an important part in the development of Dade County horticulture.

In late years the Fairchild Tropical Garden at Coconut Grove has been the means of stimulating interest in garden clubs by making large plantings of tropical ornamentals and creating interest whereby in the door yards of homes in Dade County are found many tropical plants. In recent years the University of Miami has developed a research horticultural grounds where they have ten acre blocks of mangos, avocados, guavas, litchis, white sapotes and many other tropical fruits that I am sure will play an important part in the future horticultural development of Dade County.

Certainly these experiment stations and gardens have played an important part in the horticultural development of Dade County, both in the past and the future. But let us keep in mind that the men who pioneered these early developments also must have had a great inspiration in the county's future, and in fear I may leave some one out, I am omitting names in so far as possible, although many I have known personally.

One of the first Valencia orange groves planted in Dade County at Kendall, Florida was 20 acres planted by Henry M. Flagler. He not only had faith in the county by building a railroad, he was interested in planting groves so that his railroad could be supplied with material for transportation to market. Although this section is now built to homes some trees still stand in the door yards of these homes in good condition.

In 1898 Dr. Walter Swigle of the U.S. Department of Agriculture shipped the Tahiti lime from Algeria, and in 1901 Mr. William Hull planted the first trees on the Florida Keys. In 1914 Barney Waldin budded a row of this lime on his homestead in the Redland District, from budwood secured from the Florida Keys, and in 1928 Mr. J. J. Phillips topworked a 13 acre Valencia orange grove to these limes. This was the beginning of the Persian lime industry in Dade County which now has more than 5,000 acres and two frozen juice plants.

The earliest plantings of mangos, avocados and other tropical fruits in Dade County was made by Dr. Henry Perrine in 1833. History records however, that after Henry Perrine was massacred by the Indians on Indian Key, due to neglect and other factors the

plantings all died. History records that in 1861-62 mangos were planted south of the Miami River and several trees fruited in 1910.

In a shipment from India made by the Department of Agriculture in 1889 was the Mulgoba mango, shipped to Professor Gale at Lake Worth, Florida. It must be remembered that Lake Worth was part of Dade County at that time, and the County seat was at Juno, Florida, both of which are now in Palm Beach County. When this tree fruited a fruit was obtained by Captain Haden of Coconut Grove, who planted the seed that produced a strong healthy tree that fruited for the first time in 1910, and has been known since as the Haden mango, and has been planted commercially for many years.

In 1899 a shipment of mangos was made to the Plant Introduction Garden on Brickell Avenue by Dr. David Fairchild from Trinidad, B.W.I., named after the Governor of Trinidad, Arthur Gordon. In 1902 Dr. Fairchild made his first trip to the Far East in search of plants for South Florida, and made the first shipment of mangos to Dade County from the Far East. From this shipment many varieties were budded, and distributed throughout Dade County.

From the above started the mango industry of Dade County. George B. Cellon was the first commercial nurseryman to propagate mangos, Haden being the most popular. Plantings were made on the sand lands of what is a now residential and business area of Miami, north to Little River and west to Coral Gables. J. L. Hickson and George Merrick planted mango groves in what was then Orange Glade Road and is now the Tamiami Trail, and the City of Coral Gables. In the south end of the county one of the early Homestead pioneers, Mr. W. J. Krome made plantings of Haden mangos and other Indian varieties. Recent years have seen ancestors from seed of these immigrants develop into large, commercial plantings here in Dade County that only the future can record.

As early as 1903 grove plantings were made in what is now Miami. Many avocado groves just west of the Florida East Coast Railroad to what is now Coral Gables, and from where Sears-Roebuck is on the Boulevard to Little River, Pollock and Trapp were the two principal varieties, although new West Indian varieties were brought in from Cuba and other countries. Very few large plantings were made except Pollock and Trapp.

The first avocado grove in Miami Beach was planted on a sand bar by Mr. John S. Collins in 1908 where 200 acres were developed. In 1905 Mr. W. J. Krome at Homestead started the first avocado plantings in that area, which is now the principal avocado area in Dade County, although up to 1925 there were then 1800 acres of Trapps and Pollocks in what is now Miami and have now disappeared. Both of these varieties were from seedlings originating in Coconut Grove.

In 1916 Wilson Popenoe went to South and Central America to spend a year collecting new varieties of avocados, none of which proved of any great value to the avocado industry, except that from those that fruited sparingly, seed were planted, some of which are now our commercial varieties of today and have played an important part in the avocado industry of Dade County.

The Lula avocado that represents about fifty percent of the avocado plantings of Dade

County is a product of one of these seed planted by George B. Cellon and named after his wife.

In 1906 Mr. G. W. Collins of the United States Department of Agriculture sent some seed to the Plant Introduction on Brickell Avenue. Several were planted in the garden. Two came into bearing and showed promise at that time. One was called Collins, and the other, Taylor after the Director of the Bureau of Plant Industry at that time. This variety was later propagated and planted commercially here in Dade County. The Collins was a small round, hard shelled fruit with a small seed. When the avocado test nursery was planted at the Buena Vista garden a number of seedlings from the Collins were planted. In 1920 some fruited. One especially, produced a good crop, was propagated by nurserymen and planted commercially, and is known as the Collinson avocado.

The avocado and mango industry up until 1925 was in the area that is now Miami, and other municipalities surrounding Miami. All are now a thing of the past. Many groves during the so-called boom days of 1922 to 1926 were bulldozed out to make way for the development of streets and houses. Although some plantings already were made in South Dade County in 1927, new plantings commenced to develop. A good many orange and grapefruit groves lay idle. A series of hurricanes from 1926 to 1931 each year retarded development. Many of these citrus groves were badly neglected, due to the fact that many were in litigation, and between the hurricanes and adjustment they were in bad shape and could not be brought back into production. During the thirties many of these groves were bulldozed out and avocados, limes and mangos were planted so that the horticulture industry moved to South Dade County, and in the past 20 years the avocado industry has increased until we now have 9,000 acres of avocados. 3,000 acres of mangos and 5,000 acres of Persian limes.

In passing, two men who came to Florida to retire and settled here in Dade County were Charles Torrey Simpson, who settled in Little River, and Mr. H. W. Johnstone, who settled in Homestead. Both of these men took to horticulture as a hobby and contributed much to the development of horticulture, for in their gardens were established more than a thousand different specimens of tropical plants. Many plant lovers visited these gardens and were inspired by their enthusiasm to develop gardens of their own.

In this short space of time I have covered more than 50 years of gardens and some factors in the development of horticulture in Dade County without going too much into detail and eliminating many things and experiences I have observed in the 40 years or more that I have lived in Dade County. Many of you, in the next 40 years, will perhaps live to see the horticultural development today make way for streets and homes for the new generation that will come to South Dade County.