

A Bit of History

G. L. Taber

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen:

There are times in the lives of many of us, occurring oftener as we grow older, when circumstances and surroundings combine to produce conflicting emotions. This, fellow members, is to me such an occasion. I am glad to meet with you again and to contribute my "Bit of History," but this pleasure is tempered with sadness as memory recalls names, faces, friendships of many departed members, including nearly all of those who were active in the Society's formation, thirty-two years ago in this same city of Ocala.

It was pursuant to an invitation to other horticulturalists, issued by the then existing Florida Nurserymen's Association that a few of us met at the Ocala House on April 10, 1888 and organized the Florida State Horticultural Society. At that meeting there were eighteen who subscribed to the constitution and became members as follows:

Dudley W. Adams, Tangerine; J. B. Anderson, San Mateo; I. J. Brokaw, Anthony; A. Callahan, Melrose; J. P. DePass, Archer; E. DuBois, Tallahassee; R. D. Hoyt, Bay View; L. W. Lipsey, Citra (now of Blanton); A. H. Manville, Jacksonville; W. J. Merrill, Gardenia; James Mott, Orlando; R. W. Pierce, Indian Springs; Rev. Lyman

Phelps, Sanford; P. W. Reasoner, Manatee; O. P. Rooks, Gardenia; G. L. Taber, Glen St. Mary; H. L. Wheatley, Palm Springs; J. N. Whitner, Lake City.

Of the original eighteen but three are now living; namely, L. W. Lipsey, J. B. Anderson and myself.

I should perhaps qualify this by saying that this is in accordance with the only record known to be in existence. Mr. S. H. Gaitskill was present at the meeting but does not remember to have become a member at that time, although he did become a member shortly afterward. The first officers elected were as follows:

President, Dudley W. Adams of Tangerine; Vice-Presidents, W. K. Cessna of Gainesville, E. Dubois of Tallahassee, James P. DePass of Archer; Secretary, Geo. L. Taber of Glen St. Mary; Corresponding Secretary, D. H. Elliott of Sanford; Treasurer, J. B. Anderson of San Mateo; Executive Committee, Lyman Phelps of Sanford, P. W. Reasoner of Manatee, A. H. Manville of Jacksonville.

I would like here to call attention to a coincidence, worthy of note, that our first president was also first in the alphabetical list of members. None of us who knew him will ever forget the strength in leadership that we had in

Dudley W. Adams. He was a man of convictions, which he could forcefully present, and yet ready to extend to others the same right of independent belief that he claimed for himself. No society ever felt more acutely the loss of its leader than we did when he was suddenly taken from us.

One of the men who took a leading part in the organizing of this Society was Arthur H. Manville. While such a Society would doubtless have come into being later on, I think I am safe in saying that it would not have done so at that time but for him. Some of the older members may have a copy of his "Manville's Orange Culture," now out of print. He was also editor for a number of years of the "Florida Dispatch" and the "Farmer and Fruit Grower," and continued to contribute articles to the horticultural press almost up to the time of his death.

Two who were on the Society's first Executive Committee and whose names should be written large are Pliny W. Reasoner and Rev. Lyman Phelps. Both were untiring workers in the Society's organization. Pliny W. Reasoner's early death robbed the Society of a man that no Society or community could afford to lose. He died on Sept. 17, 1888; less than six months after the first meeting. In all that pertains to horticulture he was both an earnest teacher and an ardent pupil. He was universally beloved. He was one of my most intimate personal friends.

Rev. Lyman Phelps contributed valuable and efficient work for many

years. He was continually experimenting in the improvement of fruits and telling his experiences. His diction was precise and his address impressive. Up to the time of his death he left the imprint of his personality upon our Society's records.

Major O. P. Rooks contributed much to the personnel of the Society. He was an inveterate collector and always everywhere, whether on a train, in a hotel lobby, on foot or on horseback, carried a bundle of trees or plants. I am sure that if he were living today a specially deputized plant inspector would have to accompany him on his travels.

I should like to refer specifically to each one of the others of our founders, but time forbids. Sufficient perhaps to say that we were all very much in earnest, as is evinced by the fact that we undertook, at our very first meeting, to have the American Pomological Society and the Georgia State Horticultural Society meet with us in the succeeding year in this same city of Ocala. Invitations were extended and accepted and on February 20, 1889, the three horticultural societies held their joint opening session in a building that also contained the finest display of horticultural and agricultural exhibits that had ever been brought together in the State. I refer to the great building of the Semi-Tropic Exposition at Ocala.

I am a life member of the American Pomological Society and have a full set of its printed records. I think you may be interested in some excerpts from its 1899 report:

Programme, Opening Session

1. Call to order by President Berckmans.
2. Prayer by Rev. C. B. Wilmer.
3. Welcome on behalf of the Florida State Horticultural Society, by President Dudley W. Adams.
4. Welcome to the State by Governor F. P. Fleming.
5. Welcome to Ocala by Mayor Gary.
6. Welcome on behalf of the Semi-tropical Exposition, by President Geo. W. Wilson.
7. Response on behalf of the Society, by W. C. Strong of Massachusetts.
8. Appointment of a committee on Nomination of Officers.

I should like to quote the address of welcome to the visiting societies, delivered by President Adams, but time forbids. Those of you who have full files of our Horticultural Society will find it reprinted in the 1892 report.

For the fruits displayed in this wonderful exhibition, I find that the American Pomological Society awarded Wilder medals to: Lake County Shippers' Union; Marion County; Sumter County; Lee County; Rev. Lyman Phelps; E. H. Hart; Dudley W. Adams. Also bronze medals to Citrus County; Polk County; Volusia County; O. P. Rooks; E. S. Hubbard.

At this 1889 meeting of the American Pomological Society was made the first report of the Sub-Tropical Fruits Committee—a new committee appointed at the previous meeting to report for the first time at the meeting in Ocala. Its report was exhaustive and amongst

the names of those who contributed papers for that meeting are to be found those of the most prominent Southern Horticulturists of the early days.

That 1889 meeting at Ocala wound up in a blaze of glory through the courtesy of the railroads in extending an invitation for a ten days excursion through the State. This was accepted and, quoting again from the record:

"Upon the following day, which was Saturday, the visitors formed parties for various tours through the State, embracing Homosassa, Silver Springs, Tampa, Winter Park, Sanford, DeLand, St. Augustine, Jacksonville, and points as far south as Lake Worth.

"Most of the delegates remained in the State until the following week and then gradually dispersed to their homes."

In passing, I wish to say that the American Pomological Society has been twice entertained by our Florida Horticultural Society, the second time being at Tampa in 1911.

And now for reasons that will soon become apparent I wish to depart from the regular sequence.

I hold in my hand a copy of our first printed proceedings in book form. This was published in 1892 and records the proceedings of our fifth annual meeting held at Ormond, May 3, 4, 5, 1892. It also contains a brief history—all the official records we possess—of our Society up to that time. Let me explain by quoting from Secretary Stephen Powers' report as published in Proceedings of our meeting at St. Augustine in 1901:

"If the members of this Society will come with me I will conduct them through the streets of Jacksonville to the ruins of a certain house. In the middle there is a little heap of yellow ashes, and in places you can still trace the outlines of books and decipher some letters. Take up a handful of them and they have a very soft and velvety feeling. There is a large amount of good brain matter in those ashes, but our enterprising fellow members who manufacture fertilizers would not pay twenty-five cents a hundred for them for use in their goods. That little heap of yellow ashes is all that remains of the voluminous records and reports of this Society.

"I happened to have a few copies of the reports in my office. Mr. W. S. Hart, Mr. E. S. Hubbard and Dr. J. M. Hawks have kindly supplied some missing numbers, and with a little further assistance I can reconstruct the file."

You can thus see that our earlier official records, including those of the Florida Nurserymen's Association, which turned its records over to the Florida State Horticultural Society, went up in smoke in the great Jacksonville fire of May 3, 1901. This was something of a calamity to our Society at that time, and becomes more so year by year. To any of you who think the older members should be able to remember everything of moment, I would like to say, try it, and see how much you can recall with certainty that happened thirty-two, or thirty-one, or thirty or twenty-nine years ago. However, the two annual meetings succeeding the first two held in Ocala

were: 1890 at DeLand, and 1891 at Interlachen; which brings us back again to the 1892 meeting at Ormond and to our first printed report. At that time we had enrolled 238 members; more than thirteen times as many as we started with four years before. At that meeting it was decided that we should incorporate. This was put into effect and we became a corporate body for a term of ninety-nine years from May 20, 1892.

The names of the delegates for the Society who met at Sanford and signed the notice of incorporation were:

Dudley W. Adams, Lyman Phelps, W. S. Hart, E. O. Painter, A. C. Martin, Frederic H. Rand, S. H. Gaitskill, A. M. Thrasher.

The first officers of the incorporated body were: Dudley W. Adams, president; T. L. Mead, first vice-president; G. L. Taber, second vice-president; George H. Wright, third vice-president; W. S. Hart, Secretary; E. O. Painter, corresponding secretary; J. B. Anderson, Treasurer; executive committee, Lyman Phelps, C. F. A. Bielby, A. H. Manville; ex officio members of executive committee, president, secretary and treasurer of the Society.

The points at which the Society has held its regular annual meetings are as follows:

1888, organized at Ocala; 1889, Ocala; 1890, DeLand; 1891, Interlachen; 1892, Ormond (incorporated later in same year); 1893, Pensacola; 1894, Jacksonville; 1895, Jacksonville; 1896, Jacksonville; 1897, Orlando; 1898, Orlando; 1899, Jacksonville; 1900, Jacksonville; 1901, St. Augustine; 1902,

Tampa; 1903, Miami; 1904, Jacksonville; 1905, Jacksonville; 1906, Jacksonville; 1907, St. Petersburg; 1908, Gainesville; 1909, Daytona; 1910, Orlando; 1911, Jacksonville; 1912, Miami; 1913, DeLand; 1914, Palatka; 1915, Tampa; 1916, Arcadia; 1917, West Palm Beach; 1918, Ft. Myers; 1919, Orlando; 1920, Ocala; this meeting.

In addition to these annual meetings, there was one other meeting, held in Orlando in 1889.

I have a complete file of our records from the year we commenced publishing them in 1892 up till now. They contain about five thousand pages. If all bound into one book they would make a volume about eight inches by nine inches and sixteen inches thick. In addition to page after page of illustrations, equally valuable in their way with the printed page, they contain, at conservative estimate, 2,500,000 words. Some of these words may be superfluous; but, admitting that, in them are to be found the best horticultural thought, investigations, suggestions, recommendations and accomplished arts of this Society during the twenty-eight years that our reports have been published; as well as a summary of the first four years before we commenced publishing.

Not only are those volumes valuable in themselves, but the first seventeen have been made doubly so by a complete index of their contents. On the cover of this index appearing in our 1919 report is printed: "Index of the Proceedings of the Florida State Horticultural Society from the fifth

meeting in 1892 to the twenty-first meeting in 1908, by John Belling."

This index occupies thirty-four double columned pages and enables one to refer with certainty and dispatch to any contributor or any subject contained in the indexed volumes. To those who are fortunate enough to possess the volumes this index readily unlocks a very mine of horticultural wealth. If I may be allowed to make the suggestion here, I think it would be a good idea for the Society to consider having another index compiled at some time in the near future, making the valuable contents of our reports since 1908 equally available for ready reference.

The Society has had six presidents who have served in the order named:

Dudley W. Adams, G. L. Taber, C. T. McCarty, Prof. P. H. Rolfs, Dr. Wm. C. Richardson, H. Harold Hume.

Both Dudley W. Adams and C. T. McCarty were filling the presidential office at time of death. Both died suddenly without warning.

The other offices within the gift of the Society have been ably filled, and amongst those who are still with us and have not become weary in well doing, I wish to mention W. S. Hart, Treasurer, and E. S. Hubbard of the Executive Committee. They are two of the Society's wheel horses that have pulled together for lo these many years, and are still going strong.

And now a word in relation to deceased members: You will notice that I have mentioned only a few and that all, with the exception of C. T. McCarty, were of the Society's originators. I

had in mind, when I promised to make these historical remarks, to make up a list of our departed members and to devote a portion of the time allotted me to as suitable a remembrance of *them as I could find words and strength to command*. I did in fact have such a list made up, alphabetically arranged, with the date of death of each as taken from the necrological reports of our Society records. Although I knew we had suffered heavily, yet when I saw the list I was appalled. That list gives dates of death of ninety members of the Society and is still incomplete in that our records for the first four years were destroyed by fire, and also to the fact that at the time the list was made the committee to report at this meeting had not finished the compilation of its report.

The Society started with eighteen members and has since lost more than five times that number. Some were prominent officers; all were valuable members. Many were my close per-

sonal friends. Do you wonder that at this time I can only say of them: They did their work nobly and well. Peace to their ashes.

I must bring this "Bit of History" to a close. No one recognizes more than I how very incomplete it is; what a very little bit it is. I have dealt for the most part with the earlier days; which as I understand it is what was expected when I was asked to talk to you. He should be both a stronger man and better historian than I, who should undertake to write a complete history of this Society, and give exact weight and proper shading of color to each fact and factor that has contributed to the Society's growth and worth.

I am proud to have been one of the founders, and, during some of its earlier years, president, of a society that under its present able administration, stands as the largest, healthiest and most powerful for good of any similar society in America; and when I have said America I have said the world.