As a history buff, I usually begin my talks with a quote from President Harry Truman who said “The only thing new in the world is history you haven’t read yet.” It is my belief that only by knowing the past we can understand the present and prepare for the future. For some time I have been concerned that certain aspects of the Society’s history would be lost because it had not been written. Finally I decided that I should write it.

Though each organization has its own unique reason for being, they all have one common concern, membership. Every organization has the discussion of how to increase membership, especially when the numbers are dropping. This discussion has been occurring in our Society ever since the big drop off started in the middle 1990s.

To understand the thinking of many members about what is happening, and what to do about it, read the minutes of the Board of Directors meeting of September 17, 2004. As a member since 1956, I have observed some additional things which I think will help to understand the change, which is the first step in charting a course for the Society’s future.

For my discussion I have divided the history of the Society into three periods which I call the grower period, the knowledge period, and the researcher’s period. While I will mention certain years, the changes have occurred gradually over many years.

The grower period started when the Society was founded in 1888 and lasted until about 1950. As far as I could find there are no records indicating the number of members in each section as suggested in the September 17, 2004 board meeting. This might be worth establishing in the future to help understand membership numbers and who benefits by joining. I will use the Citrus Section as the basis for the rest of my discussion. The Citrus Section is the one I can accurately outline, it historically has been the biggest section, and a lot of the things happening to it in the knowledge period, such as new pesticides, also happened in the other sections.

During this period most of the members were growers and industry employees. Most officer positions were occupied by growers. Growers used their experience to give most of the papers and as late as 1931 there were 8 grower papers out of 16 in the citrus section. By 1950 there were only 2 grower papers out of 20 given and they have been rare since. More importantly, growers were the beneficiary of the information dispersed. Membership during this time varied from about 200 in 1900 to about 700 in 1950.

The researchers who gave papers during the early part of this period did so in a conversational tone to pass on the information they had obtained in their scientific research. I have read original USDA publications by some of these researchers and I can assure you they were scientific, and will make you appreciate your computer even more than you do now. Research done many years ago isn’t out of date because a lot of it is the foundation of what we know today.

When I decided to divide my talk into the three sections mentioned, I tried to think of descriptive terms for each one. For the second period I first thought of “the glorious period”. This was because the membership climbed to about 1,900 in 1977 and remained in the 1,800s until about 1988 when it started to decline slightly. While I could find no record of attendance at the annual meeting I remember that when I was chairman of the site selection committee in 1972 that it was necessary to consider sites that could handle 1,000 plus people. In evaluating what drove the membership numbers I decided it was knowledge, so I will use that term for the second period.

With all of the written information available today it is difficult for younger members to realize how information deficient we were during this period. In the citrus industry we tried to overcome this problem four ways. The two largest growers decided to establish their own research departments. Libby, McNeil, and Libby had a one person department and Minute Maid had three people, two PhDs plus another college graduate.

To exchange ideas citrus production managers formed four small informal groups in different parts of the state. In 1937 the Florida Citrus Production Managers was formed. This organization meets quarterly and is still in existence today.

The first educational meeting for the industry as a whole started in the early 1950s. It was planned mainly by University of Florida Citrus Extension agent Fred Lawrence and nationally recognized Lake County Extension agent Bob Norris, Uncle of Jack Norris. It was held at the 4-H camp in the Ocala National Forest called Camp McQuarrie. This location was used for many years and the idea has grown into the several meetings of this type over the state today.

The fourth and most important source of information at the time was our Society. This was because World War II veterans
came home, completed their education, and went to work for research organizations. For example, shortly after receiving his PhD from Ohio State the late Dr. Herman Reitz went to work for the Lake Alfred Citrus Experiment Station. He was first listed as a member of the Society in 1949 and the same year published his first paper in its proceedings. I worked for Dr. Reitz the summer of 1950 at the Fort Pierce station when he was the horticulturist in charge.

Up until 1957 the pesticides used on citrus had stayed constant for many years. Since my first year working full time was in 1955 I often compare it to a doctor starting to practice medicine before the days of antibiotics. We had 6 pesticides to work with compared to over 70 today. After that, new pesticides and growing information began to pour out of the chemical industry and university research organizations. Growers attended our annual meeting to get information useful in their daily operations. The citrus section would have 500 or more attending. At the start of each section session copies of the abstracts of the talks to be given would be available with room on the paper to make notes as you listened. After attending an annual meeting I, as a manager, could go home with several ideas to use in the immediate future plus some things to think about using later. Again, it was growers who benefited from the information dispersed by the society and they responded by supporting it.

While the drop in citrus acreage has had some influence on citrus membership it is necessary to look at the industry’s membership makeup to find a better reason. Today the citrus acreage is about two-thirds of its peak in 1970. However, Florida Citrus Mutual membership is only a little over half of its peak, 8,000 now compared to 15,000 in the 1970s. This verifies what we have all seen. Small growers are disappearing.

During the society’s membership highs small growers were supported by grove caretakers and co-operative organizations whose managers were society members. There were a lot of medium sized growers who managed their own groves and were society members. Large growers’ managers and some assistants were also members.

Today we have numerous large growers whose acreage is managed by only one person who is probably a member of the society. Example: Peter McClure, your past president, told me when he started with Evans Properties he worked with 12,514 tree acres and he was, and still is, the only member from Evans. However, large growers are not new. When I met Peter’s father, George, in 1955 he was the manager for Libby McNeil and Libby who operated about 7,500 acres of groves in central Florida. At the time only George and his research manager, Bill West, were members. When he went to work for Minute Maid in 1959 Jack Norris tells me they owned and leased about 30,000 acres. Between managers and researchers there were five to six members from the Minute Maid organization.

When I took my graduate citrus courses under the late Louis Ziegler he recommended 1,200 to 1,400 acres as ideal for a manager. Dr. Ziegler had worked as the grove manager for Auburndale Citrus Growers Association prior to teaching so he was familiar with grove management problems. At that time a lot of groves were in the 10- to 100-acre range and had two to four varieties, which increased management time. They were also scattered over a large area with many managers working with properties in two and sometimes three counties. In this situation management time was not efficiently spent. If we use Dr. Ziegler’s standard, the 12,000 plus acres managed by Peter McClure would have 8 to 10 FSHS members from Evans Properties instead of just one.

Today we are in what I call the researcher’s period. Most of the members and officers are researchers. While the information in the papers published needs to be recorded, it is not something a grove manager can use immediately. It is the type of information researchers can refer to in future research so they are the beneficiaries.

In summary, the beneficiaries of the information published by the society have changed from growers to researchers. Society membership in the future depends on determining who can benefit from information published by the society and making sure they know it exists.