



Carl B. Schmidt with a lot of Fuerte scion wood.

Carl Schmidt of Fuerte Fame Brings Himself Back to California

Thirty-seven years ago F. O. Popenoe, proprietor of the West India Garden nurseries at Altadena, California, was enthusiastic about the possibilities of the then little known fruit, the avocado. Many local seedlings were being selected, named and propagated for sale. Being desirous of adding many new and better kinds to his list, he engaged Carl Schmidt, a young horticulturist, to travel in Mexico and search out and send budwood from the best to be found. Schmidt was engaged because of his experience and because, as a boy, he had lived in Mexico and spoke Spanish fluently.

At that time the avocado existed in Mexico only as seedling trees grown in gardens and pastures. Schmidt scanned the market stalls for fruit of good quality, and when one was found, he attempted the difficult task of tracing it back to the parent tree. When

successful he would cut budwood and send it together with specimens of the fruit by Wells Fargo Express to Altadena. Altogether some 25 kinds were introduced in this way, each being given a number.

Wilson Popenoe, then working for his father, received these shipments, described the fruits, and placed the buds in the nursery. The buds of some kinds were difficult to make grow, but the buds of No. 15 nearly all grew, and grew so strongly that P. O. Popenoe suggested the name "El Fuerte" for No. 15.

The hard freeze of 1913 played havoc with this nursery, and many of the kinds were lost. However the Fuerte withstood the cold and thus early demonstrated its hardiness. Over intervening years the Fuerte has forged far ahead of all other varieties in California, and now constitutes better than 80 per cent of all the plantings in the 16,000 acres of avocados now growing in California.

Carl Schmidt liked Mexico so well that on the completion of his explorations for West India Gardens he returned to Mexico City and went into business. In this he has been quite successful, and gradually built up a large business in the distribution of automobile tires and motor oils.

In 1938, on the occasion of this Society's dedication of a commemorative monument by the original Fuerte tree in the garden of Alejandro Le Blanc at Atlixco, Schmidt took an active part, and was awarded the Aztec emblem of honor by this Society. He has always been most hospitable to our members on their various visits to Mexico, and has been generous with his time and automobile in entertaining them.

But Carl Schmidt had a desire to return to California. His father lives in Santa Monica and his sister, Miss Florence Schmidt is on the Editorial Staff of the Los Angeles Times. In February, 1948 Schmidt visited Southern California and with the active encouragement of Carl Crawford, Owen Murray and others, set about finding a suitable place for a permanent home site and Fuerte avocado orchard.

The site finally decided on and purchased is a 17 acre old Valencia orchard one-half mile west of San Juan Capistrano. The orange trees are in extremely poor condition due to virus diseases and are to be removed and the land planted to avocados. In one corner there are about 30 old Fuerte Avocado trees now in a sad state of neglect but still healthy and in full bearing in spite of long neglect. These are being rejuvenated. A reservoir is being built to store water from the well for domestic use and to permit sprinkler irrigation for the avocados which are to be planted in the spring of 1949. Plans are going ahead for the building of the residence.

At present Carl Schmidt and his wife make frequent trips from his home in Mexico City to his Capistrano property. Later on, after the home is completed, and after he adjusts his business affairs, they plan to reside at Capistrano, with only occasional trips to Mexico.

The California avocado fraternity extends a royal welcome to Mr. and Mrs. Schmidt on their return to California. We hope to see much of them at the various meetings of our Society. Long may they live among trees of such especial interest to them, and enjoy to the full their new home in such a lovely setting.

J. E. C.