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**IN MEMORIAM**

**MARVIN ROUNDS**



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Marvin Rounds, the California avocado industry's quiet, unassuming, "Mr. Avocado," died February 27, 1964.

Not one of that tiny group of historical figures in the very swaddling days of the California avocado, Marvin Rounds, nonetheless, would have to be numbered among the industry's true pioneers because of the many trails he blazed for the commercial avocado farmer of today.

Born in Piano, Illinois, in 1879, Marvin Rounds received a degree in Pharmacy from the University of Illinois at the turn of the century, practiced this profession for nine years in the Chicago area and then came to California.

Attracted to citrus culture, he had an orange grove of his own in Duarte until 1915, when he became horticultural inspector for the County of Los Angeles and later entomologist with Foothill Citrus of Azusa. His first brush with avocado came in 1924, when he entered the University of California's Extension Service as Assistant Farm Advisor for Los Angeles County. A year later he had succeeded to the office of Farm Advisor.

This was a time when avocado growing was little more than a happy experiment. While some 350 avocado varieties had been individually named, total California production amounted to less than a half million pounds.

Perhaps due to his citrus background, certainly as a consequence of orchard cost-and-production studies made in conjunction with Farm Advisor Harold Wahlberg of Orange County, Marvin Rounds was one of the first to recognize that production per acre rather than fantastic per pound prices, would be the key to successful avocado farming of the future.

His numerous articles in the Avocado Society Yearbooks and elsewhere during the 1930's and '40's indicate that he was fascinated by those occasional plantings where production averages exceeded by three or four times those of the industry as a whole. In a 1936 report, he calculated that under some circumstances an average yearly production of 14,000 pounds per acre might be needed to mount an entirely successful avocado operation.

A great deal of his work in behalf of the avocado was spent in an effort to fathom the riddle of exceptional production. Certainly, it had a great deal to do with his preoccupation with avocado varieties.

By 1939 Marvin Rounds had made the change from the Farm Advisor's office to a position on the staff of the University of California's Riverside Citrus Experiment Station.

Long active as a member of the "Avocado Variety Committee," when he became its chairman in 1946, he had already compiled his "monumental" variety catalogue, replete with information on virtually every variety grown or under trial in California as well as many grown in Florida.

His affection for variety investigation would never flag. He was to crisscross every growing area numberless times. Along with his many other avocado chores, he was to hold this Chairmanship for 17 years.

It was during this time and because of the nature of his work, that he earned the happy appellation, "Mr. Avocado." As one of his contemporaries noted in citing him for the

Avocado Society's Award of Merit; "No one is personally acquainted with a larger number of growers, certainly no one is better liked or more universally respected."

Except that it was a "labor of love," the continuing search for new varieties which were to solve all our avocado problems," seemed to be a singularly unrewarding one for the variety investigator and the grower experimenter alike.

These were years when literally hundreds of promising seedlings were to undergo seasons of trial only to end up in the discard.

Yet, with the passage of time and the accumulation of evidence both in the field and in the market, it was slowly becoming apparent that there was at least one exception to the long run of disappointments.

For after better than fifteen years of trial and more than its share of detractors, the black-skinned Hass had begun to give indication of becoming California's most important summertime avocado.

While he was not one of the variety's developers, Marvin Rounds was one of its most enduring partisans. There is little doubt but what the Hass variety owes him a very special debt for his inquiring mind, his early and continuing excitement over its bearing habit and most of all for his tireless effort to secure its widest trial in all avocado districts. In a measure, the success of the Hass was also his success.

As for his many years of work with other trial varieties, the cold resistant Bacon, for example, time alone will apprise us of the extent of our debt to Marvin Rounds.

Retiring by nature, the recent years found a less agile Marvin Rounds moving more into the background of avocado affairs; content for the most part, to engage in his "first love," variety studies and his editorial work as a leading member of the Avocado Society's Yearbook staff. As a result, it is likely that his earlier contributions to almost every phase of the emerging California industry have become obscured.

During the years as Farm Advisor, as well as during the time from 1945 on, working as a busy avocado and citrus consultant in private practice, his published works ranged the field of avocado research from new methods in grove management, to rootstock and even early root rot investigation—this in addition to a body of work relating to citrus culture.

In 1948 he was elected to the first of two terms as President of the California Avocado Society and in the same year became Chairman of the newly formed and significant Avocado Research Committee.

Among the many honors accorded this industry's kindly, modest, "Mr. Avocado," was a Fellowship in the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the Award of Honor from the Lemon Men's Club. The California Avocado Society first cited him with its Award of Merit in 1943, extended this to a page "In Appreciation" in the 1945 Yearbook and a Special Award of Merit again in 1956. Three months prior to his death, he had been made a permanent Director Emeritus of the Society.

He is survived by his widow, the former Grace Rector to whom he was married at Batavia, Illinois, in 1900, and by two sons, Dr. J. S. Rounds of Los Angeles and Donald Rounds of Palm Springs, California.

During those pleasant, transitional years while avocado growing was slowly evolving from the invigorating hobby of the 20's, to the serious agricultural business of the 1960's, there was no one more intricately involved in establishing the course the avocado was to take than Marvin Rounds.

It could be said of him, more than anyone of his times, that in his quiet, unobtrusive way, he had presided over "the growing up" of the California avocado industry.

And now, the hour late, the books and implements put aside, this gentle man, his work done, has taken leave on a journey to "the place where the avocado abounds."

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