

WILSON POPENOE ... Vaya con Dios

The death of Wilson Popenoe in mid-1975 took from our midst another of the dwindling few pioneers of the California avocado industry. The departure of Dr. Popenoe will be especially felt, because the flow of contributions to the advancement of avocado culture that continued to come from him into his eighty-fourth year now will cease. Others will succeed him, but none can replace him.

Born in Topeka, Kansas, in 1892, Wilson and his family became Southern California residents twelve years later. His career-long fascination with tropical and sub-tropical plants had its beginning during Wilson's youth. While still in high school, he corresponded with authorities in other countries, particularly in the West Indies. Plant materials he introduced during that period were collected in his West India Gardens in Altadena, California — which name his father, F. O. Popenoe, thereafter gave to the nursery developed by the family at their Altadena homesite.

F. O. Popenoe sent Carl Schmidt to Mexico in 1911 to find superior varieties of avocado. Several introductions resulted, including the Fuerte variety—which Wilson propagated for the nursery. Late in his life, Wilson personally declared his role in the development of the Fuerte variety of avocado as his biggest contribution to the world. There are many, it must be said, who would find in his long list of accomplishments a number of greater importance, but his own evaluation is symbolic of the love he had for plant exploration and cultivation.

Among Wilson Popenoe's important contributions, surely, one would have to number his development of the Escuela Agrícola Panamericana at Tegucigalpa, Honduras, from which have come more than a thousand trained Latin American agricultural leaders. Another, surely, is his *Manual of Tropical and Sub-Tropical Fruits*, published in 1920 and still a major reference work in its field.

A lengthy list could indeed be compiled of Wilson Popenoe's great gifts to humanity and the world, but this is not the place for it. Details of Dr. Popenoe's life and accomplishments are to be found in numerous publications, including the 1942 *Yearbook* of this Society. Suffice it to say here that the avocado industry, among others, owes much to the humble, dedicated, and personally delightful great man who walked this earth in the service of mankind.

Wilson Popenoe gave generously of his time, his effort, his standards, his patience, his concern for others. Now he has left us. But we certainly know that he was here.

Goodby, dear friend.

J. S. S.