Notes: Orange Culture [Florida]

Tarbell, Ida M.

http://hdl.handle.net/10456/39420

©Allegheny College. All rights reserved.

All materials in the Allegheny College DSpace Repository are subject to college policies and Title 17 of the U.S. Code.
The Critchlaws and Holts of Titusville are at Lake Alfred. The property came to C. in a way I imagine is not uncommon in Florida. About 1912 C. was helping Milton Stewart settle his estate, there was an interest in a Florida property. C. says that he had $150 to collect for S. and having difficulty he made up his mind he would get it any way. When he got through with the transaction he, C., had 8000 acres of land. It cost him about $45,000. The concern had taken the land to lumber, had become involved, failed to pay taxes and debts and generally mismanaged, according to C. Think there is something shady about the transaction. C. came down to look at the property about 1912, I think, made up his mind that he would put some of it into oranges. He sold some and interested a Scotchman with whom he had had dealings in oil. I think the name is Reid and the Ca have great respect for the family - have visited them. The orange groves have turned out well. We drove up one stretch a mile in length, many thousand trees, but the care and cultivation is evidently expensive. Holts gives his time to supervising the groves. Labor is not efficient, mostly colored - there is pruning, cultivating and spraying. Complains of cost of labor and materials. C. is connected with everything in Lake Alfred. The Citrus Grove Association has built there a $150,000. plant, which he says is the second best in the orange district. The fruit is washed, scrubbed, dried, wiped and sorted by an endless chain, automatic machine of great efficiency. They can handle 4000 boxes a day. He says that it takes 350 boxes to fill a car, so that a day's output of the packing house will fill something over ten cars. These orange growers sell through their association as a rule. Agents sometimes buy the crop on the trees. C. has sold some that way this year. A few men have customers with whom they have long dealt and sell direct.
To my remark that I thought it a pity that groves should be destroyed to make town lots, C. said, not at all that there were too many groves, that if there were not so many oranges the price would be better. He is for destroying all but the perfect fruit in order to keep the price high.

I talked this over with Henning at Orlando who thinks it a wrong policy, that the cheaper the fruit can be made by large production the more money there will be in it for the growers in the long run. It is by cheaper fruit, he says, that the market will be considerably extended. Gives example of a man taking a great load of cheap fruit, selling it on a siding at lower prices to people who had never been able to afford oranges. Says this is the way a large market will be built up.

This is the Ford idea. Much of the help in the packing house at Lake Alfred is from the tourist class. Men, women and boys and girls who stop a few weeks in a place and earn money evidently to enable them to go on. C. says it is poor help because unreliable - they are not interested.

Henning at Orlando is a smaller orange grower, more liberal minded, more enthusiastic and I think more scientific. He says that you can always tell good orange land, that if, the coppers throw up their little mounds it is all right; certain species of pine indicate good orange land. It costs around $10.00 per acre to get this land ready for the groves. The trees, if bought from a nursery (many growers have their own nurseries) cost from ten to seventy-five cents apiece according to size. The groves are planted and sold to be delivered in five years, that is, when they first begin to bear. This is the same procedure as in the Yakima apple orchards. The chief pest that they complain of now is a white fly resembling the rose fly, but more prolific. Henning is strong for rolling land gives what he calls air drainage. Many of the groves have sub-soil irrigation. He wants me to look up the story of the Temple orange. I gathered
from what he told me that in the grove of a Mrs. Temple an entirely new variety orange was found, so they paid $60,000 for the tree, and nobody knows how it came in her grove, but it is a valuable new variety. Henning tells me up and down the hills of Orange and Lake County there are many groves of 4 or 500 acres. They are of all ages. One of the most interesting undertakings is in Lake County where 60,000 acres is being put in groves to sell in multiples of ten. The land is high here for Florida being 250 or 300 feet. Henning showed me a point from which you can see from 25 to 30 miles in three directions. This big tract is being handled very much, as I understand Penny is handling his tract. The growers are making about $1,000 an acre this year, it is believed. Henning has a 40 acre tract just coming into fruit out of which he expects to get $6 to $7,000.

They all are raising grapefruit and declare that it is the only state in the union in which grapefruit is successfully raised, that the Californians have given it up. A new tangerine sent me at Orlando is one of the most delicious citrus fruits that I have ever tasted; could not find out its name.

Henning was particularly interested in what he calls the "cukes", the name here for cucumbers. The cucumber man is P. H. Marshall, as I understand, popularly known as "Cucumber Pat". We visited the Sanford celery fields. You drive for five miles out from Sanford on what is known as Celery Avenue with fields of 40 to 60 and possibly more acres on each side of the road. Here you have sub-surfaced irrigation everywhere, as you do with the cucumbers. Deep artisan wells are drilled 150 to 200 feet giving an abundance of water the year round. They were cutting and packing the celery—negroes do the work as a rule. They are paid 15 cents a crate for cutting and packing. The cutting knife is an ingenious curved arrangement mounted on wheels and is run by hand. This Sanford
development Henning says has come from home capital. The growers have financed themselves. They make easily $1,000 an acre and there are few poor years. What the enemies of the celery are I did not find out from Henning, do not think that he knows of any. The celery is chilled in an ice plant which is an co-operative affair. I see that in the list of the ten greatest men of Florida the inventor of artificial ice is included. His story should go in. The chilling soon after packing is said to preserve the celery. Inquire at Gainesville if this is practiced with lettuce, cucumbers, etc.

It is interesting that these communities each have their specialties. There is a bean section, a lettuce section, cucumber and celery. The celery fields are built from swampy, jungle lands which cost some $200. to put them in shape. Jungle land adjacent to the present cultivated fields sells from $100. to $200. per acre. Just as good land can be had at $25.00 to $30. and even for $20. an acre several miles away. Obviously, however, it is better to make the larger investment and have the advantage of the markets, the ice plant, the transportation, etc. The celery growers have an advantage over many in transportation. The Clyde Line comes up the St. John's River to Sanford and freight to Jacksonville are one and a half what they are from Orlando which has to use rail. There is great dissatisfaction in Orlando at this disadvantage though they are not celery raisers.

Henning, who handles sand from his own quarry or mine, complains bitterly about the railroad discriminations. I take it this is an old theme in Florida. The Atlantic Coast Line, according to what I hear, from the first practiced the standard methods. Flagler wanted to control all profitable interests. The east coast says that he put the pineapple growers around Palm Beach out of business by extortionate rates. Judge Massey of Orlando was, I gather, interested in fighting the railroad for many years. Think this can be verified at Tallahasses. The shipping
of fruit and vegetables is always exciting. At Plant City I saw the
shipping of strawberries. They were unloaded on the platform of the
freight station. When I was there in the afternoon the Forda passing
along this platform were four deep. They told me that they had been
coming steadily in that number since 10 o'clock in the morning and it
probably would be 5 before they stopped. The buyers take one or one
thousand boxes. Many of the cars were piled high with crates. The
berries are very large and arranged in perfect order on the top of the
basket, but they tell me that there is no inspection of the lower layers
and that frequently the fruit is small and defective. The buyer
passes among the many cars, names the price, the man unloads his car and
receives a check on the spot. It is the most expeditious transaction
I have ever seen. The day I was there the price had begun in the
morning at 28 cents and it was down to 26 cents at 3 o'clock in the
afternoon. This was because there was an unusual quantity that day.
Last December they sold their berries at $1.10. Their market lasts
into April when competition in Louisiana and Texas berries begins. I
saw many fields of 50 to 100 acres of berries. They are cultivated,
irrigated and sprayed. These berries must always be washed before
being used. I attempted to buy a box to eat at the bus station where
I was waiting. The man refused to sell them to me, said it was
dangerous to eat them before they had been cleaned. The growers, who
bring in the berries themselves, are of a great variety of types. Men
of the peasant type and men who look as though they were college
graduates, perhaps professional men who had broken down and taken to
fruit culture. The growing of any of these vegetables or fruits re-
quires intelligence, knowledge, patience and energy. A man cannot
come into any one of these established fields without considerable money
and hope to do anything. A man who has little or no money will find
his opportunity in the small tracts that are being made ready by
philanthropists like Howey and Fenny.

The pride, even affection of some of these growers for their fields is shown by the way they decorate the borders. I passed many celery fields yesterday which had a hedge of sweet peas, a bed of daisies, some a couple of rows of strawberry plants along the edge of the street. Henning has just planted all around his "pet" 40 acre orange grove oleanders and poinsettias alternating. The poinsettias bloom about Christmas time, the oleanders in the spring.

The narcissus bulb has become a profitable article of commerce. It is the result of the embargo on European roots. I saw several fields of 40 to 50 acres. Boys and women sell the blossoms by the roadside. The most successful narcissus grower is Marshall (think he is the cucumber man). Apropos of the love of their trees one must not forget the cultivation of shade and other trees in the towns. In Orlando I saw a bronze tablet on a unusual tree to Mayor Markes, mayor during 1889 and 1890. He had an ordinance passed (passed it himself, they think) offering to remit one-half of a man's taxes at the rate of $1.00 for every tree that he would plant. Many people took advantage of this, so that today Orlando is thick with trees which run out into the country almost to the city limits. Winder Garden is supposed to be the vegetable head of Orange County. It has a large number of very rich farmers. These farmers are one class of the population that is supporting the town in development. They have come to a point where they can build a good home in a good suburb and drive back and forth from their work. A point in regard to the oranges that I omitted is that you have three chances at a crop. There is a bloom in February, April and June.

Must not forget the ferneries. We visited two or three. There is one covering 65 acres near Zellwood. Rose in Orlando speaks
with considerable indignation about the idea that nobody gets rich in Florida except those who deal in real estate. He tells me that one of the richest men in town started with $7500 in oranges. He makes as much as $200,000 out of his fruit by the year and has never speculated or done anything but grow oranges. Rose declares that most of the Orlando people are home people, that is, live in Orlando.

Celery - The point that Henning makes about celery is that it is never troubled by drought. Sanford's chief competitor in the United States is Kalamazoo. (See what time that crop comes into the market.) They use tar paper to blanch the celery and they speak of it as "racked up".

Judge Massey - Mr. Shutts gave me a letter to Judge Massey in Orlando. I did not present it until just before I left. He came to Orlando forty years ago, evidently is somewhat amused by the recent boom. He says the bar has felt it seriously. At the last session of the legislature they passed a law requiring all applicants from outside of the state to pass an examination no matter what their experience or credentials at home. He says that this was necessary because they were getting a crop of shyster lawyers. Men discredited at home or incompetent slipped into the state and opened offices hoping not to attract attention in the general confusion last year. Some of them had been disbarred at home. The result was that a law was passed not unlike that which created the real estate commission. Massey says that, while there used to be but thirty lawyers in Orlando, there are now some sixty-five, that these men came from outside, have no traditions and that they are not acquainted with the personnel or the practices in Florida. Says it is a common thing to see in a legal advertisement a summons for some well known men "if living or his heirs, if dead," to appear. A member of the state legislature well known was so summoned recently. He says that these men assume that nobody was here before they came. The pressure on the bar in the state has been so great that last February 500 lawyers took
the examination. He says that I can learn all about this if I will apply
to G. T. Whitfield, the Clerk of the Supreme Court at Tallahassee.

Massey knew Disston, was counsel for him for several years.
Thank he has no high opinion of Captain Rose, whom I am to see.

He says that he is glad the speculation is subsiding in the
state, but does not believe that values will greatly decrease. Says
that they have been too low for some years and that the people themselves
did not realize this. He says that some of his friends called him
crazy when four or five years ago he prophesied that Orange Avenue, the
chief street in Orlando, would soon be turned into business houses - that
had largely come about. Massey is a type of a man that you find in all
these Florida towns; cultivated, able, serene. He is conscious of how
much had been done before the present invasion, but he takes the dis-
turbance philosophically. I can see how every profession and business
had been disrupted.