

**THE BEGINNINGS OF THE I.P.P.S.
IN THE WESTERN REGION**

DONALD F. DILLON, SR.

Four Winds Growers

P.O. Box 3538

Fremont, California 94539

The great attendance we always have at the annual meetings of the Western Region of the International Plant Propagators' Society is glowing testimony to the high regard with which we hold it.

Today we are going to take a look at its origins. . . . who conceived it, who gave it life, energy, direction, and character.

At that first organizational meeting at Asilomar on October 14, 1960, the discussion was lively and sometimes even a bit heated. Fred Real and I remember it well even though we were mere boys at the time.

To better understand the seriousness of the discussions it is necessary to take a look at the origins of the Plant Propagators Society itself. The forward to Volume I of the Proceedings of the first meeting in 1951 reveals the following: that an earlier propagators' society went out of existence back in 1934. The depression and the lack of experienced propagators who were willing to share information caused it to fail. But this need still existed and the thought of reviving the old organization began to flicker again. Attended by about 100 people, an organizational meeting was held November 8-9, 1951, in Cleveland, Ohio. The Plant Propagators' Society was reborn.

Jim Wells of Redbank, New Jersey, was the keynote speaker. He likened plant propagators to the craftsmen of the old world who banded together in trade guilds. The guild was a fraternal organization, one which chose its members carefully. Full membership should be an honor, a prize a person has won, not something handed out on a platter. It established high standards of experience, skill, and ethics. The guild established the number of years of training for an apprentice before he became a journeyman and finally a master of his trade. He should be prepared to improve the craft by demonstrating a willingness to share his experience with others.

Which of these factors should be considered most important? A willingness to share with others would quickly show whether knowledge and experience were there, while the very act of sharing should suggest integrity. Wells thought that this last should be considered of paramount importance. He was adamant that propagators overcome secretive practices and open their greenhouses to fellow members. He also felt strongly that we should take every possible precaution to see that people who are mainly

concerned with what they can get out of the organization, and not one bit concerned with what they might contribute, should be rigorously excluded.

These radical ideas set forth by Jim Wells formed the basis for membership requirements of a resurrected plant propagators society. It was re-established in 1951 with Jim Wells as president. Dr. L. C. Chadwick, Department of Horticulture, Ohio State, vice-president; and Dr. Ed Scanlon as secretary/treasurer.

The organization met annually in the Cleveland area. The membership roster of 1957 lists the following westerners:

- Percy Everett—Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Gardens
- ° Ted Frolich—Subtropical Horticulture, U.C.L.A.
- Ray Hartman—Leonard Coates Nursery, San Jose
- Dr. Hudson Hartmann—Dept. of Pomology, U.C. Davis
- O A. Matkin—Soil and Plant Laboratory, Orange, Calif.
- Dr. George Ryan—Subtropical Horticulture, U.C.L.A.

A junior member was a graduate student of Dr. Chadwick, Phil (now doctor) Barker. Phil came to the University of California, Davis, from Ohio State University in summer 1957. He had interrupted his graduate studies under Dr. Chadwick to take a one-year appointment at UCD to teach identification and ecology of landscape plants. California was new to him as were most of the trees and shrubs about which he would be teaching.

He tells me that it was comforting to dwell on past experiences which were particularly memorable as guideposts to his future. One such experience was attendance at the annual meeting of Plant Propagators Society in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1955. It had been such a stimulating meeting particularly because of the very forceful dialogue among venerable plant propagators. In the belief that there ought to be far more than the twelve plant propagators in western United States who would attend a western meeting rather than make a 2000-mile trip to Cleveland, he went into action and called on Dr. Hudson Hartmann, UC Davis, co-author with Dale Kester of a recently published text on plant propagation. Hudson, in his usual easy-going manner, gave a reassuring and positive response and they immediately became a team in pursuit of a common goal. Together, they wrote a letter to the 12 western members of the Plant Propagators' Society and others, requesting their opinion about the merits of a western organization of plant propagators. The response was wholeheartedly favorable. (1).

Copies of all the replies were referred to the Executive Committee of the Plant Propagators' Society, with a request that approval be given for establishing a western chapter. At its annual meeting in Cleveland in December, 1958, a motion was passed "to establish a West Coast Section of the Plant Propagators Society

which would be under the direct control of the parent body. In March, 1959, the Society's president, Roy M. Nordine, named a Committee for Intersectional Affairs to suggest a revision of the constitution that would allow for a western section. The committee consisted of Richard Fillmore as Chairman, Hugh Steavenson, and Hudson T. Hartmann. At the 1959 annual meeting in Philadelphia, the Society approved a recommendation that a Special Educational Meeting of the Society be held in California. It also authorized \$1,000 for travel and other incidental expenses. Phil Barker and Hudson Hartmann then called a meeting at Davis June 24, 1959. Twenty-two attended. Again real enthusiasm was shown; Dr. Hartmann was asked to chair the organizational committee. He was unable to do so as he was going on sabbatical leave to Australia.

This group was unanimous in wanting a chapter that would be an autonomous part of the Plant Propagators Society. Autonomy was not a lukewarm concept. Hudson, Phil, and the others felt autonomy would be a key element in future efforts to organize western meetings. In this important fundamental issue we see the first seeds of conflict with the Eastern Region.

Don Hartman was elected to chair future meetings, Herman Sandkuhle, vice chairman, and Dick Harris, secretary. Several more meetings were held that summer. Much of the effort was devoted to formulating a program, selecting a meeting site, and announcing the event.

The committee assembled an impressive array of speakers. It was intended to stimulate interest and insure a significant turnout for the founding meeting. It was also intended to impress the Eastern Region with our quality and content.

The first meeting was held the weekend of Oct. 14-16, 1960, at the famous religious conference center at Asilomar on the picturesque Monterey Peninsula of California; 150 plant propagators registered. This was twice the number the organizing committee had hoped to attract.

The information-filled meeting began Friday night with a discussion of grafting techniques using mechanical devices. The Department of Viticulture and Enology of UC Davis sent two of the evening's speakers—Drs. Lloyd Lider and Curtis Alley. Dr. Thomas Terry, and S.J. Novitiate of Los Gatos, described their practical experiences with bench grafting of grapes using the machines, and the advantages of this method over field budding. Gordon Kershaw, Medford, Oregon grower, detailed his firm's efforts with mechanical bench grafting of fruit trees. Registrants were permitted to inspect various types of grafting machines displayed at the meeting.

Chairman Don Hartman opened the Saturday morning session by introducing the Society's first and second president, Jim Wells.

Jim proceeded to tell us how important we were as plant propagators. He told of the early days of the Society and the need for such an organization. He emphasized the importance of the plant propagator, declaring all horticulture and floriculture and the huge garden supply industry is directly dependent upon the ability of the propagator to produce the plants which motivate the business of gardening.

“In our early days, plant propagation was a secretive business, but due the Plant Propagators’ Society, this belief is dying out.” As I looked back in the Proceedings, Jim Wells was quoting from the same speech he had given at the original meeting in Cleveland in 1951! He went on to proclaim “we have established a formula that has proven quite successful.”

Jim Wells was followed by a star-studded symposium on seed propagation techniques. It was moderated by Dr. Verne Stoutmyer, Horticulture Department chairman, U.C.L.A.

Dr. Dale Kester from U.C. Davis discussed seed dormancy.

Dennison Morey, Research Director at Jackson-Perkins Roses, covered seed stratification in roses.

William Stuke, Stuke’s Nursery, dealt with walnuts.

Eastern Region Past President Hugh Steavenson revealed field production techniques. Gerd Schneider of Saratoga Horticultural Foundation dealt with seedling production of liquidambar, pistacia, ginkgo, magnolia, and *Quercus* in containers. In all, it was a pointed fact-filled discussion.

In true Plant Propagator Society fashion, the afternoon session concentrated on one plant, *Pistacia chinensis*. The panel was moderated by Louis LeValley from Fresno State University. Lloyd Joley, Director of the U.S.D.A. Research Station, Chico, California, and Dwight Long from the City of Modesto, California dealt with budding, grafting, and root training. Dwight was a real character. His uninhibited and witty presentation made his remarks memorable.

Bob Weidner, Buena Park Greenhouses, finished off the session with a hard-hitting talk. He believed you made money propagating plants that were healthy. He was a total believer in the U.C. System: clean greenhouse practices, healthy mother plants, mist propagation, and light weight UC soil mixes. This was radical, exciting new ideas at that time.

It was completely logical that the final papers on Sunday morning should deal with mist propagation and the thoughts of a group of horticultural heavyweights. The question? How to bring plants out of the comfortable womb of the mist-filled propagation house to the hard realities of life in a greenhouse or, worse yet, the field.

It was a real privilege to be allowed to share the thoughts and experiences of such propagational All-Stars as Bob Tichnor, North Willamette, Oregon, Experiment Station; Martin Usrey, Monrovia Nursery; Will Curtis of Wil-Cris Acres, Sherwood, Oregon; and those of one of the Society's Founding Fathers, Jim Wells.

At the Saturday night meeting in the chapel at Asilomar, Phil Barker introduced members of the inter-regional affairs committee composed of leaders from the Eastern Region. Each spoke on the philosophies, practices, and rules of the Plant Propagators' Society that were unique, sometimes even radical. These set this organization apart from all others.

The first was Dr. John Mahlstedt from Iowa State, Editor of the Proceedings. This is a unique organization. It integrates science with practical commercial know-how. Here you have research men that are doing the actual experimentation. They report to you; many growers go home and try these ideas. The next year they come back and tell him he is crazy; it doesn't work. Now you can get down and actually get out a good workable solution.

Phil Barker introduced Mr. Hugh Steavenson who graduated from Iowa State University. During the last decade, he has been running Forrest Keeling Nursery at Elsberry, Missouri, and was president of Plant Propagators in 1957-58. "I was not one of the originators, but I am indebted to those who set up this excellent organization. I attended the second meeting. I wanted to get going on a vegetative propagation program, which we had not yet set up very well. I thought I would stop in and see if I could pick up a little dope. The thing that amazed me at the time and always has since, is the intense participation in the meetings. All of us go to various other nursery meetings. There may be more people out in the corridors or in the bars than at the sessions. But there was not a soul in the corridor, nobody was in the bars; everybody was at the meeting, paying keen attention to what was going on. That is the way it has been at every meeting. I know of no similar meetings of nursery people that have been so enthusiastically attended or received."

We have a wide spectrum of members, we have Ph.D's and we have the horny-handed propagators that never set foot in a school of higher learning. The man who has grown up with the propagating knife in his hand can be just as valuable as the one who has his training in the academic hall.

Mr. Barker introduced Richard Fillmore. He received a Masters Degree in Ornamental Horticulture from Cornell. He was third president of the Plant Propagators Society. He is the Aristotle of the organization. "I was the plant propagator at the Arnold Arboretum at Jamaica Plains, Massachusetts, an institution that has 6,500 to 7,000 species and cultivars of woody plants. It was my

business to put roots on them if they didn't have roots. I was very much interested in the formation of a Plant Propagators Society.

"I have experienced considerable professional loneliness. The diamond cutters all congregate in New York City and in Brussels, but the plant propagators are spread out. In smaller institutions and in smaller nursery firms, it is common for the propagator to work pretty much alone. Now, when I have problems, I can freely write to any one of a half-dozen persons who are obligated to me through mutual membership in the Plant Propagators' Society to give me a prompt and thorough answer."

Fillmore continued, answering questions from the floor: What is the policy if two or three members of the same firm apply? "Membership of any category is strictly a personal matter between one individual and this organization. A member may bring two guests each year. This means a manager may bring two of his people as guests. If these two people decide to apply for membership, they start on the same footing as their boss. In the meeting they are his complete and entire equal. They are not obligated to him in the meeting; they are only obligated to the organization. This has had a tightening effect on the self-respect of the plant propagator as a craftsman and as an individual in his own right."

Question from the floor: Fillmore: "How widely do you interpret plant propagation?" It is often widely interpreted. In many organizations, many people function as executives. If they draw up production schedules, are a good host when visitors come, do not have locked greenhouses and phony secrets, if they have executive authority extending over five years and directly or indirectly supervise propagation, they would be eligible for membership."

Mr. Wells: "Membership is by invitation. We do reserve the right to 'not invite' some. This is not a Society where one applies in the usual sense. You must recognize that a few individuals do not understand fully the implications of membership in relation to the exchange of information. Any individual who receives a request for information from another member should immediately reply in full. if he does not, he should be *drummed out*."

At the business meeting Philip Barker introduced the proposed re-organization plan to incorporate the Western Group into the Plant Propagators' Society. Revision of the present Constitution will be considered at the annual meeting in Cleveland.

In general the plan provides that:

1. There shall be *one* Plant Propagators Society.
2. It shall be organized with two major groups, one comprising the Eastern Region and another the Western Region.
3. The activities of each Region shall be governed by bylaws adopted individually by each regional group.

4. The Society shall be under the direction of an International Board with representation from both regions.

The Board of Directors are to meet annually, alternating the meeting place between the two regions.

These proposals were set up in the hope that the Eastern group, which is already an organization, will modify their Constitution so that we can be part of their organization.

Mr. Herman Sandkuhle emphasized that the object of this plan is that we will have our own *autonomy*, but within a master organization.

Mr. Richard Fillmore: "We Eastern folks have hesitated to interfere or unduly influence your meeting out west. As committee members, we will present and support a proposal for the inclusion of the Western group. However, if we are to get the Constitution modified to admit the Western group, work and effort will be required. Our job at Cleveland will be easier after your Region is established and is contributing funds and ideas to the central organization."

Mr. Morey: "I move that the name be the Western Region Plant Propagators' Society." The motion was seconded.

Mr. Wells: I feel strongly that the original name of the Society be retained and suggest that it be known as the Plant Propagators Society, Western Region. This change was accepted by Mr. Morey and the second of the original motion. The motion was passed unanimously.

With this official action the Western Region was ready to request the Eastern Region to include them into the plant Propagators' Society.

The Tenth Annual Meeting of the Plant Propagators Society convened on December 1, 1960, in Cleveland, Ohio, President Harvey M. Templeton Jr., Winchester, Tennessee, presiding. The registration fee for the meeting was set at \$11.00!

The Society was reminded that arrangements were made last year to promote a Western Regional organization of the Plant Propagators Society. Dick Fillmore was the chairman of the committee sent to Asilomar to help organize the Western Region.

Mr. Richard Fillmore: "I believe that in our Western Regional endeavors we were very successful. I made a statement to the Western Regional Joint Committee at Asilomar that while it is true that we can give the Western Regional group an honorable name, one well recognized throughout this country and even throughout the world, we can also give them the benefit of ten years of very successful experience in operating an organization of this kind. They, however, can do more for the Society than we can do for them."

At their organizational meeting at Asilomar they had some 150 persons in attendance. These numbers reflect interest and enthusiasm on the part of the western group. There was a very great deal of spontaneity and ingenuity in evidence. These people have the incentive to go ahead, organize a meeting, and to do things.

The Eastern committee all feel also that these people are willing to learn. They were respectful of our eastern experience and anxious to profit by it. Jim Wells was the keynote speaker at the Conference and concurs with the western group's enthusiasm and the respect."

A motion was proposed to approve the constitutional re-organization plan. This provides for a single Plant Propagators' Society with Eastern and Western Regional organizations and creates an International Board of Directors.

Past president Ed Scanlon spoke on the motion as follows: "I question seriously the wisdom of organizing this Western Region. It seems to me that for a period of two to three, or maybe five years, it should be strictly on a chapter basis, and that other considerations should be given along that line rather than taking this group in. I am not questioning any of their integrity or anything of that sort, but I think that our organization has been established for a period of ten years, and it has established itself very firmly, and that we consider a trial period of three to five years before establishing the thing.

Mr. Chairman, "I would like to add a few remarks about the addition of the word "International." I think that in ten years the name "Plant Propagators Society" has become quite an honored name in the profession of horticulture, and I see nothing to be gained by the addition of a 13-letter word that would mean absolutely nothing."

President Templeton recognized Jim Wells, who said,

"I think the name of International Organization is splendid and I would be tickled to death to accept a European region and Australian region, and any others that might crop up. I was very fortunate, indeed, to go to California, and have the most wonderful three days I have had in a long time. I met a lot of splendid people who, except for the color of their hair or the shape of their nose, could be any one of you, the people that have met together for ten years. They think the same, they act the same, they look the same, they are the same. Therefore, I would like to make a motion that we accept the report of the Executive Committee with all that it implies with relation to the incoming western group."

Mr. Richard Fillmore: "While I know that Ed Scanlon certainly has the best interests of the Plant Propagators' Society at heart, and out of all respect for him, I believe personally that the Executive Committee has exercised good judgment in the presentation of this motion as you have it before you on the floor "

The question was called, the motion was adopted to approve the organization plan for the International Plant Propagators Society.

President Templeton then introduced Mr. Don Hartman, President of the Western Regional group as follows. "Don Hartman is a partner with his brother and father in the Leonard Coates Nursery of San Jose, California. His father, Mr. Ray D. Hartman was one of the original 65 who came to the first Plant Propagators' Society meeting here in Cleveland."

Mr. Don Hartman then spoke saying, "This is certainly a momentous afternoon, and this I do not feel is only for the Western Region of this new Plant Propagators' Society, but it is certainly for the good of the International Organization

"We had what we felt was an excellent meeting on the West Coast. We patterned it after the ten years' experience that you gentlemen have had here in your own meetings. It was made a better meeting by having your Eastern Region representatives attend our meeting.

"Our attendance figures show that we had 150 at the first meeting, and I know that it will not be but one or two years before we will have a membership of over 300.

"I would like to assure Ed Scanlon that the states beyond the Rocky Mountains are still within the borders of the United States and if we continue to follow what you have done in the past you will be proud of the Western Region, not only in five years but in the very near future.

"I would like to thank you again for your solid support. I know from this standpoint that we will not only go ahead from here in the Eastern Region but in the Western Region and in all parts of our International scope."

They appointed Bill Snyder to work up a new Constitution that would take in both areas and still be able to give each area its autonomy. They called it the Constitution of the *International Plant Propagators Society, Inc.*

Hopefully, now we can understand more clearly how and why our energetic, creative predecessors fashioned such a dynamic organization—one that advocates such radical ideas. Ideas such as: seek and share, open greenhouses, boss and employee are equal, were almost revolutionary in those days.

One of our Past Presidents, the irrepressible late Stan Sorenson asked me to give the invocation at the I.P.P.S. banquet in Hawaii

in 1982. It seems to sum up a lot of the principles of I.P.P.S. Here it is for the record.

Dear Lord,

We are grateful to be alive and we thank you, Lord, for the gift of life that you have given to each of us. We are grateful for these, your beautiful islands, which we have been allowed to share. We have seen your wonderful work in the mountains, the sea, the shore, and the forests of your islands. We thank you for allowing us to be together tonight to share this food and the friendship that spans so many years.

We thank you for this fellowship of International Plant Propagators who are pledged to seek and share. We know that you have all the answers, Lord. Please help us to find the wisdom to ask the right questions about plants and the ways to make them grow. And as you reveal the answers to us through our hard work, research, and good luck, remind us to share your revelations with one another, in your name. Amen.

LITERATURE CITED

- 1 Anon. 1960. Western propagators form new Regional Society. *Pacific Coast, Nurseryman and Garden Center Supply Dealer*. November pp 18-31.