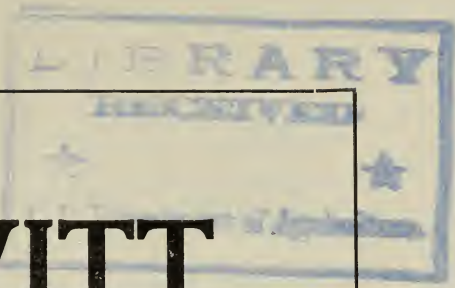


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DE WITT

Pioneer Pecan Point

A Reprint from The Nut-Grower, October, 1915

A Story of Constructive
Development



1915



Compliments of
The G. M. Bacon Pecan Company
DeWitt, Ga.



DeWitt—Pecan Pioneer Point

WENTY seven years ago, to be exact, in October 1888, the writer began his horticultural operations in South Georgia. The growing of nursery stock in a small way, which included seedling pecans and in turn the planting of various fruits in an experimental way was followed up for several years, until the commercial prospects with pecans led to his special work in this line which has since been continuously followed. In the early 90's his place at Poulan, Ga. known as Piney Park Nursery, which was later a part of the Keystone Fruit Company, was visited by Mr. G. M. Bacon, of DeWitt, Ga., who made a purchase of several hundred grape vines. This was our first meeting, and was brought about by a mutual business acquaintance, Mr. R. H. Warren, of Albany, Ga., if memory serves me right, although the name of Nelson F. Tift comes to mind in this connection. While the writer's location was twenty-two miles east of Albany, Mr. Bacon's place was at DeWitt, thirteen miles south of the same railroad center. However, Albany was the touch point, and the years which followed this meeting led to the closer relations which proved fruitful in the founding of a new industry.

At this initial meeting, the pecan was the link which connected these men in a way that subsequently produced history. While the nursery at Poulan

was producing general nursery stock, that at DeWitt which had been established two or three years earlier, was specializing in pecans. Pecan orchards were planted at both places as soon as trees were large enough to transplant. At Poulan, one year seedlings were used, and the first nuts were gathered six years later. During this period, and for several years previous, the planting of seedling pecans had been attracting considerable attention and orchards had been started at several other points. This was the time when attention was being directed to choice varieties and when the first budded and grafted trees were being introduced into Georgia territory. It was also the time when the fake pecan dealer was gathering in his harvest of dollars, for which he exchanged inferior seedlings with a guarantee that they would produce nuts like the elegant sample he displayed.

This brings the story up to the organization of the National Nut Growers Association and the founding of the Nut Grower, which has been previously recorded.

With this introduction we reach the objective point of this sketch, DeWitt, the home place of Mr. Bacon and the location of his orchards and nurseries as they now appear after thirty years of pioneer work.

There is a peculiar fitness in our giving at this time a brief story of this place, since it will be visited on one of the convention days by the members and friends of the National Nut Growers Association. We make no claim to writing a history of this interest-

ing place, or to recording all the labors and achievements of Mr. Bacon and his associates. We simply intend to weave a simple story, and that entirely from our observation and memory, which will help the visitors at the convention to appreciate and enjoy the occasion of their visit to DeWitt. Other orchards included in the day's itinerary may be more extensive in area, more modern in the selection of varieties, but it is from DeWitt that the inspiration comes. This is where all of the best known varieties were subjected to the severe test which showed their comparative value; where the demonstration of cultural methods was made and where the early fights on insect foes and bacterial troubles were made; the place where many of the now popular varieties were first fruited in Georgia.

Nuts grown at DeWitt supplied the demands for specimens of pecans, which were effectively used to further the subsequent development work which has since given the Albany pecan district such wide publicity. The seedling nuts produced here were used largely in growing the thousands of nursery trees which were then budded with wood grown on the earlier planted trees of the choice varieties, and again, these budded trees were used to plant other orchards in the neighborhood which will be visited by the delegates to the convention. Many of these seedling trees were sold and shipped to other localities in Georgia and other states.

While all this is important, other vital features of the industry were worked out at DeWitt. The modern orchards, where the gathering, grading and

shipping of the nuts will be seen, profit by the results of these earlier operations. Defects in promising varieties were nere detected and in consequence they have not been planted in recent years. Experience in cultivation, fertilization treatment of trees and inter-cropping of land worked out here through years of labor and observation and at no small outlay in cash have been largely available for the benefit of others.

With such a past, the present aspect of this place becomes doubly interesting and the visitor will on this account find the DeWitt orchards and nursery have a distinct and dominant attraction. They are in reality a field for study where days and weeks could be advantageously spent by the student and practical grower. However, this prospective visit will be in the nature of a hurried sight-seeing tour in which a fixed schedule must be adhered to, so no time will be available for detailed observation. Consequently it will be in the nature of a moving picture scene, where stately trees with the dignity of thirty years growth alternate with acres and acres of the earlier successes of top-working, which was here first put into extensive practical operation; then solid blocks of variety after variety of the well known kinds, spreading over hundreds of acres of commercial groves, where the brown beauties are now being gathered and prepared for market.

The scene changes to the nursery, which has all these years been growing pecans, and pecans only, with its stock, ranging from this year's seedlings up to the great masses of budded trees now ready for

the approaching planting season, all showing the systematic and clean cultivation so essential at this period of the tree's existence. Then another change. The long rows of nursery stock, the extensive blocks of orchard give place to individual trees of historic interest. The original Georgia Giant tree, despite its susceptibility to scab continues to grow and spread its branches and abide the time when this weakness can be removed, when it will surely resume a commanding position in the list of regular and abundant bearing varieties. Centennial, Russell and other fine nuts which are not now in popular favor can here be seen under actual orchard conditions.

While such splendid growers as Mobile and Van Deman are familiar to many, it requires trees of a mature age—such as can here be seen—to show their grandeur. Georgia's oldest tree of the Alley variety, which by the way is steadily growing in favor, is on these grounds.

To mention all the things which might be seen would be to write the story of the development of the pecan. It should be written in full some day, and it will make a fascinating book of many pages.

The special significance of this place lies in the fact of its being the scene of the initial commercial operations in the pecan development movement. This was the work of Mr. G. M. Bacon, who is now and has been through all these years at the head of the DeWitt business. His initiative made the start; his vision of the future gave activity and perseverance to his efforts. Then the same elements were put into the organization of the National Nut Growers Association in the fall of 1901.

Early in 1902, Mr. Herbert C. White, as horticulturist, became a member of the company which bears Mr. Bacon's name, and at once became a prominent factor in the subsequent progress which marked the advent of budded trees. It was during Mr. White's connection with the company that the top-working of seedling trees was done and carried on extensively. It was largely through his agency that the accomplished results obtained here were given publicity through *The Nut-Grower* and other publications, while his contributions of scientific and practical papers to the association at various conventions have been very valuable and have exerted a wide influence.

For a number of years the G. M. Bacon Pecan Co., has not only been prominent, but has been the leading nursery firm in this line. Their annual catalogs have always carried much practical data and timely suggestions, which made it a source of standard information and gave it a wide circulation. During recent years this company has also been solving the problems incident to the successful marketing of the increasing crops. In fact, all the difficulties, trials, problems and obstacles which pioneers encounter have come to them, entailing labor, expense and even disappointments, but the same initiative, perseverance and energy which characterized the start has always been brought to bear in overcoming difficulties and has pointed out the way in which so many are now successfully traveling.

It is no easy task to measure the value of the work performed by Mr. Bacon and the various other laborers in this field, or the importance of their

achievements. Whether or not they receive due recognition or praise it is certain that "their works do follow them" and succeeding generations will be better fitted to take their true measure.

One of the distinctive characteristics of Mr. Bacon individually is his uniform optimism. This trait necessarily belongs to the pioneer in every line of endeavor, and the early pecan growers were all naturally optimists. While timid or pesimistically inclined people were frightened when rosette appeared in the orchards and nursery he kept evenly on his way or possibly gave better attention to his trees and now he does not regard it as a serious menace. In reference to scab and insect foes his policy is simply to fight and overcome the difficulties as they are encountered.

His vision of ultimate success gave courage to await the results with complacency and confidence. With such a combination of human traits the result now seen at DeWitt materialize to many the vision of the few pioneers and is a tribute to the initiative and labor which produced results far beyond the commercial measure of the undertaking.