

# CRFG cofounder Paul Thomson Pioneer Rare Fruit Grower

From interviews with the co-founder of the California Rare Fruit Growers, shown here at 91

Story by Robert Chambers

*My late wife, Clytia, and I first met Paul Thomson over 30 years ago. We were interested in growing unusual fruits and on a number of occasions Paul helped us with grafting. Beyond that, however, he was a great source of relevant information and advice on a wide spectrum of fruit species and often told us about fruit growing in the San Diego County area on an individual tree-by-tree basis. And, not the least of it, he has been just a wonderful friend.*

EMORY WALTON

Often my contacts with Paul seemed to produce references to an interesting background, including a boyhood in India and a long service in the U.S. Marine Corps. He also left me wondering how he managed to get so much done and acquire so much information. My curiosity about such things was sharpened when Ron Couch, the *Fruit Gardener* editor, suggested that Clytia write a short piece on Paul for the thirty-fifth anniversary of the founding of CRFG. I thought this would be a good excuse to interview Paul and to put into the record some biographical material on him that would interest CRFG members and others involved in the field of fruit growing.

Clytia and I talked to Paul at his home in Bonsall, Calif., during the summer of 2003. Paul was 87 years old and lived in his house on a hill near Highway 76 with his wife, Helen, who was 93 at the time. He could no longer drive a car, but he was still actively gardening, although limited by various disabilities which

accumulate as one gets older. His mind and memory were quite clear and active.

## The Thomson Family in India

Paul's parents were Clinton Harris Thomson, born in West Side, Iowa, and Bertha Evelyn Mangon, born in Brock, Neb. (The Thomson name is Scottish) They attended Cotner College in Bethany, Neb., a small town which was later annexed (in 1940) by Lincoln, Neb. Clinton graduated with a B.A. and Bertha with an M.D. Bertha practiced medicine in North Platte, Neb., for a year. After their marriage Clinton and Bertha decided to become missionaries to India and were sponsored by the Christian Church—Disciples of Christ.

India in those days was a dominion of the British Empire and was administered by the British in accordance with their colonial principles. Clinton and Bertha arrived in India in 1915 and spent the first year studying the Hindi language. They were then assigned

to the Mission Station at Mahoba, United Provinces, in north central India for their first term of seven years. Clinton was a minister and evangelist. Bertha practiced medicine and was responsible for a hospital, assisted by a registered nurse from the United States who was also a missionary, and six or seven native nurses.

In March it was the practice to send the women and children to “the hills”—which is to say to towns at elevations of 6,000 to 7,000 feet in the foothills of the Himalaya Mountains where the temperatures are moderated by the elevation. Bertha went to Landaur, Mussoorie, United Provinces, India, which is at 7,000 feet. Paul Harris Thomson was born there on June 29, 1916.

Just to round out the picture of Paul's family, Bertha had four more children, all girls. All of Paul's sisters are still living. They are: Margaret Greiber, Orlando, Fla.; Catharine Kingsolver, Casper, Wyo.; Alice Hasenyager, DeLand, Fla.; Ellen Hanly, Kirkland, Wash.

The schools were located in the hill towns where the children spent the summers. The school year started in mid-March and ended in mid-December so that everyone could be back home for Christmas. Since the men remained at the Mission Stations out on the plains throughout the year, the three-month period from mid-December to mid-March was often the only time the whole family got together.

In subsequent years, Bertha and the children stayed in Naini Tal, United Provinces, a town at 6,000 feet elevation. Paul started first grade in Philander Smith College, which was a private Methodist boys' school. He walked the two miles to school.

Paul's family returned to the United States at the end of seven years for a one-year furlough in Bethany, Neb. While there Paul went to Bethany School, a public school.

The family then returned to India and the parents were assigned to the Mission Station at Hatta, Damoh, Central Provinces, India.

The missionaries from several church denominations pooled their resources and established a Missionary School in Naini Tal for missionary children grades one through six. After completing the sixth grade, Paul was sent for his seventh-grade schooling to Woodstock School in Mussoorie, a boarding school. Woodstock was a private school (there were no free public schools in India), but not a missionary school, and was run primarily for the children of British government officials. There were also a few high-caste Hindu children whose parents could afford the tuition, and a few missionary children. The school work in all these schools was conducted in English. The rest of Paul's family, except for his father, stayed in Naini Tal.

Thus Paul considers India as his native land. He had no particular focus on fruits at that stage of life, although he was accustomed to eating the fruits that were available in the local bazaars. There was not a wide variety of fruits available year round in the sense we are used to now. In general the diet was limited, spicy

and somewhat seasonal. Paul's recollection is that he liked the food there at the time. He commented that Indian food in the U.S. is quite different from what he experienced as a child. Paul grew up in north central India and most of the Indian restaurants in the U.S. feature southern India ethnic cuisines. The food he grew up eating was mostly ethnic, but there were many ethnic groups in India, and many kinds of food.

This period of growing up in India came to an end with a very traumatic incident the day before Christmas in 1927. The family had gathered back in their home at Hatta. His father went forth with a shotgun to get a couple of wild ducks for Christmas dinner, taking along Paul, who was 11. They found some ducks at a lake and his father shot two of them, both of which fell into the lake. As Paul watched from the bank, his father removed his clothes and entered the lake to retrieve the ducks. The lake was filled with reeds and perhaps mats of aquatic vegetation. In wading and swimming out to the ducks, Paul's father became entangled in the vegetation and drowned.

## Nebraska

The church decided it could not support Bertha running the mission by herself with five children to raise, so it sent the family home. Bertha returned to Bethany and set up her medical practice there. She was joined by her half-sister Lizzy Cope who took care of her own daughter and Bertha's children while Bertha practiced medicine. Paul continued school there, entering Bethany High School on schedule. He said that he was not a particularly good athlete, although he tried out for the football team. Weighing only 140 pounds, he was unable to contribute much at center, his assigned position. Paul concedes that the only sport he ever excelled in was handball, some years later.

Growing up as the man in the family in Bethany involved chores that pretty much characterize earlier times. There was a vacant acre next to his house and he planted this to potatoes, which were duly harvested

and stored. He also bought mail order chicks and raised chickens for sale. He remembers fondly the Jersey Black Giant chickens. Roosters of that breed could reach 14 pounds, enough to feed their family of eight well. The hens were often saved for laying eggs, which were sold. The family owned a Guernsey cow that produced four gallons of milk daily. Paul carried milk around to other houses nearby and sold it for ten cents a gallon. However, he also operated a two-gallon Daisy churn with which he made butter.

Another aspect of Paul's life during these formative years, and on throughout his life, has been music. Audiences judged that he had a fine voice, and his first solo was sung at a convention of the missionaries in India at age 5. He continued learning music in Bethany, when at 12 his mother signed him up for violin lessons on a program where he would receive the violin if he completed the two-year program. He completed the program in 1931, became the proud owner of the instrument, remembers it as a fine violin, and played it in the school orchestra. In college he played both violin and viola. He also played bass in a small band that gave concerts in the Bethany park. Later, in the Marine Corps at Camp Elliott, quite separate from the band participation which constituted his assignment for several years, he organized a male quartet which sang for church functions. In the ensuing years in Bonsall he directed the choir for his church for 25 years and was a soloist in an oratorio society for many years. Even at 87 years of age he was still singing solos for his church.

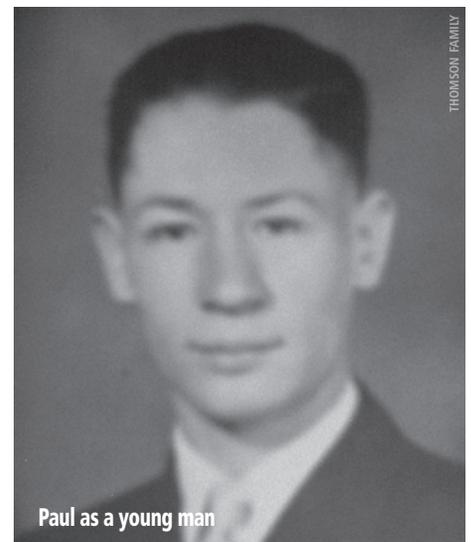
Paul graduated from Bethany High School in 1934 at the depth of the depression, and immediately joined the Nebraska National Guard. He matriculated at Nebraska Wesleyan University in the fall of 1934. He completed his first two years in good form. During the summers he made the rounds of the farms, working to save money for the next year. In the fall of 1936 he did not have enough money to go back to university, and stayed out a semester to work. He went back for the spring semester of 1937. Unfortunately, the money ran



Paul Thomson in June, 1917



Paul with parents and two sisters



Paul as a young man

out at the end of that semester and in the summer of 1937 he reluctantly dropped out of college and looked for a full-time job.

Most of the jobs he found were farm work, which paid little and demanded hard labor. He remembers one farm where he had to arise at 4 a.m. and be at work by 4:15, watering 7,000 turkeys. Breakfast was served from 7 to 7:30, and then back to the fields shocking (harvesting) wheat for the rest of the day, ending at 7 p.m. Dinner was served at 7:30, followed by milking and other secondary chores until 9, when he was too tired to do anything but fall into bed. For this he got 75 cents a day.

The best job he found paid two dollars a day shocking wheat for another farmer. Paul was very pleased, but unfortunately the job didn't last long. He was also happy to get work on a construction crew in Crete, Neb., at 25 cents an hour.

Following that he was able to get work on the CB&Q (Burlington) Railroad, putting in the first railroad signal-control system in the world on the line from Akron, Colo., to Denver. In this job he lived in a bunk car with an attached tender supplying the water. The crew included a man and woman who cooked and cleaned, and Paul remembers eating better than he had ever eaten before because the woman was an excellent cook. He worked on the railroad until October 1937, when the job ended and he was laid off. Based on that experience, however, he was able to get a job working for Western Union putting a telegraph line from Denver to South Park and down to Leadville. The line ran over Kenosha Pass, which was higher than 10,000 feet. Once that work was completed, he was laid off again at Christmas in 1937.

## United States Marine Corps

After spending Christmas at home, Paul traveled out to the Marine Corps recruiting office in Denver, and on January 11, 1938, enlisted for a four-year term. He was sent to boot camp in San Diego, Calif. This was before the days of Camp Pendleton, and the boot camp was situated where the Marine Corps recruit depot is located today.

Paul was asked what kind of job in the Marine Corps he would like. He had played in the national guard band for three years, and asked for a band assignment. There was no opening in the marine band at that point, but Paul was able to get into the Field Musics, a drum and bugle corps that marched with the troops in parades and other formations. In this job he played the bugle. Then he heard of an opening for a French horn player in the band and applied for that. The bandmaster asked if he knew how to play the French horn and Paul assured him he certainly did. The bandmaster was skeptical, and gave him a French horn instruction book just to review and brush up his skills. That was on Wednesday. The bandmaster told him the band had a concert on Friday and that he would be expected to play his parts. Paul admits now that he had not previously played a French horn, but he felt confident because he had played a larger instrument, the

sousaphone, in the national guard band. He practiced with intensity, was able to play his part in the Friday concert and was accepted into the band.

After some time in the band, Paul was asked if he would like to play French horn in the marine band in Peking or in Hawaii. He chose Peking, and was of course sent to Hawaii. And, instead of playing the French horn, he was put back to playing the sousaphone. This continued until 1941, when he was shipped back to rejoin the marine band in San Diego.

Shortly after this he met his wife-to-be, Helen Benlehr. Helen was the daughter of Charles and Cornelia Benlehr from Ohio, who were missionaries in India for the same church that had sponsored Paul's parents. The Benlehers were stationed in the Central Provinces in India, a bit south of the Thomsons. The Thomson and Benlehr parents knew each other, but the children did not. Helen has noted that her first language was Hindi because she had a Hindu nursemaid. Since her parents were Americans, she of course also learned English shortly thereafter. Helen went to a Methodist school for girls through high school. Then she was sent to a Quaker college in Ohio for two years. She later transferred to the California Christian College in Los Angeles for her last two years and graduation.

After graduation, Helen was advised to get business-school training that would qualify her for a job. She did this and took a position with the Del Mar Hotel (since closed) in Del Mar, Calif. After a period there, she got a better job with Western Metal Co. (also since closed), where she was in charge of financial records and the typing pool.

After spending 36 years in India as missionaries, the Benlehers retired and returned to the United States to live. Charles was invited to speak at a conference at the University Christian Church in San Diego. Paul had heard of Benlehr; he respected the man and attended the conference to hear him speak. Helen of course was present as well, and there Paul and Helen met.

A fairly brief period of dating followed. Helen

remembers pointing out that she was older than Paul, and asked him if he would like to know when she was born. She says he told her not to bother, that he would just ask his mother, who knew when everyone was born in their community in India. Paul proposed marriage to Helen on a Wednesday in October, 1941. They were married on Saturday of the same week, October 11, in Yuma, Ariz.—a location chosen to avoid California's two-week waiting period.

Not long after that, the December 7, 1941, attack on Pearl Harbor occurred and Paul's plans, like those of so many other people, were changed. He had been planning to leave the Marine Corps in January because his four-year term of enlistment would be up. Such plans were cancelled by the Marine Corps; it extended his enlistment for two years, and later four more years.

In the Marine Corps, the members of various bands were mostly moved into other jobs. Paul was sent off on recruiting duty starting in Butte, Mont. His memory of that station starts with a temperature of 54 degrees below zero (F) on the day he arrived. Later he was posted to Great Falls for sixteen months. He put in a request to get back to line duty. His colonel valued his contributions and offered to get him located wherever he wanted. Paul requested that he be made a permanent corporal and that was granted. Along with his promotion he was sent to a school at Camp Elliot, located a couple of miles southeast of the present-day Miramar Marine Corps Air Station.

Paul was assigned to a Japanese-language school at Elliott, and recalls feeling that it was not a good subject for him. After a couple of months he pointed out that he was having increasing difficulty with the material and would like to be transferred. So he was assigned to be an instructor in chemical warfare, based on the fact that he had been to a chemical warfare school for enlisted men at Camp Beale in Northern California. He recalls with pride that he, a corporal, was teaching not only enlisted men in the course but officers up to the grade of major as well.

Then the navy took over Camp Elliott and the



Paul as a U.S. Marine



Paul as a U.S. Marine

marines left. Paul was assigned to a tent camp at the north end of the new Camp Pendleton near San Onofre, Calif. With his lineman experience Paul spent the first couple of months stringing wires. He was then sent back to the headquarters area in Camp Pendleton. Based on these assignments, Paul credits himself with being in on the establishment of Camp Pendleton.

One day a small group of marines in Paul's company were marched off to headquarters to be interviewed for Officer Candidate School. The principal interviewer was Col. Smith, who had been Paul's commanding officer at Pearl Harbor. Smith asked Paul if he would like to be a lieutenant. Paul said no.

The colonel said—You have just had your interview and you are going to be an officer, period.

Some days later a contingent of about 450 marines, including Paul, were loaded on a troop train and sent across the country to Quantico, Va., to attend the OCS school. It turned out that many of the marines had claimed college credits they did not have and a substantial number of them were dropped from the group. There were no longer enough men to make a full class, so those remaining, again including Paul, were given a curriculum they called pre-OCS training while they were rounding up replacements. After another month the OCS procedure was started again, beginning with new physical exams. More men dropped out—and there was more delay while they brought in even more candidates. Finally they resorted to bringing in V-12 students and even Netherlands marines—many of whom did not speak good English. They were all graduated from OCS and were commissioned second lieutenants, including Paul.

From there Paul was sent to Reserve Officers School and he graduated from that, too. Then he was assigned to the Chemical Warfare Laboratory at Edgewood Arsenal in Maryland for further training. The students in this group were all second lieutenants, but essentially

all from the army with only two marines. Paul remembers being put in charge of the group as they marched to and from the classes. Paul graduated from this school also and remembers that Helen came to Baltimore for a visit during his tour of duty there.

From Maryland, Paul was transferred to Camp Lejeune, N.C., and placed in the 2nd Replacement Battalion, which was forming to be sent out for overseas duty. Some three weeks later it was full and shipped to Camp Pendleton, where it was broken down and individual assignments were made. Paul was assigned to the 18th Service Battalion located at Kahului, Maui, that supplied the 4th Division. His job was battalion adjutant, one for which he felt he was not suited.

When the war was over he was given the job of real estate officer. The Marine Corps had confiscated large areas of farm land in Hawaii for firing ranges, and it was necessary to put the land back in the same shape as when taken over. The land was overgrown with lantana bushes that had to be cleared before the artillery shells could be found and removed. Since there were a lot of unexploded shells, Paul drove a tank with a flame thrower attached, which he used to burn off the bush. Many of the shells were exploded by the heat of the flame thrower, but the tank provided its driver with protection. An ordnance team then combed the area and exploded the live shells they found. Paul enjoyed this duty because it accomplished something and was a relief from a job of continuous paper shuffling.

At the end of the war, Paul was also permitted to bring Helen to Maui, where they rented a house in Wailuku—a time Helen remembers with pleasure.

All wartime officer commissions were temporary commissions. In due course, Paul, and other temporary commissioned officers were interviewed and their records examined to see if they wanted to stay in the corps on a permanent commission—and of course, to determine whether the Corps wanted to keep them

on as officers.

Paul was flown to Oahu to meet a formal interview board consisting of a full colonel, three lieutenant-colonels and a major. The full colonel asked the questions, which were standard enough, except that at the end he asked for Paul's opinion on how the corps was treating people of color. This was a sore subject with Paul, and he answered more candidly and negatively than caution would have indicated. The colonel was an old timer, regular corps, who had fixed ideas on the subject and rejected Paul's sentiments. He finally interrupted Paul, told him that would be enough and terminated the interview. The upshot was that the colonel rejected Paul for a regular commission. Paul got several comments of astonishment from his previous commanders who had written letters of commendation and expected him to be a top candidate.

Shortly afterwards, Paul received orders transferring him and Helen to the Marine Corps Base in San Diego for reversion to enlisted status. He was promoted to first lieutenant the day they boarded ship to return to the United States.

The program of reverting temporary officers as high as major back to enlisted status caused hard feelings, and many officers left the Marine Corps rather than rejoin the enlisted ranks. The corps soon found itself short of officers and issued an order that there would be no more reversions and that unreverted temporary officers would be held over indefinitely.

Thus Paul continued as an officer assigned to headquarters company. He became the executive officer by default since he and the captain were the only two officers left in the company.

After a couple of weeks the chief of staff, a colonel, called Paul in and said he had been assigned as aide to the commanding general of the marine base. While this would have been an attractive route to promotion, Paul was very uncomfortable with the social aspects of



the aide job. So he requested 30 days home leave which was an entitlement for which he was overdue at that point. As he expected, the job had been filled by another lieutenant by the time he returned.

After a month, the captain was transferred and by default Paul became company commander. One of his jobs was to issue orders which came from on high as company orders. The lieutenant colonel in charge of supply, an old timer, did not take kindly to being ordered by a young whippersnapper lieutenant, and by pulling a few strings got Paul transferred to the marine detachment at North Island Naval Air Station.

Two years later he became eligible for transfer and was sent to the marine detachment at the Naval Ammunition Depot in Fallbrook, Calif., where he was executive officer of the detachment. Unfortunately he became involved in a personality conflict with a new younger officer and his superiors did not back him up. He finally became unhappy enough to ask for a transfer and was sent back to North Island Naval Air Station's guard company.

It was his fate to get involved in another politically charged incident in his new position. He describes this as follows. "The major in charge of the marines was heartily disliked by one and all and was the security officer for the station as well. An order was issued by the (naval) captain in charge of the naval station stating that all expired I.D. cards must be turned in and the bearer had to go to security to obtain a new one. When the major's wife came through the gate, the pfc on duty asked her to turn in her expired card. She refused. So he called the corporal of the guard. Again she refused. So the corporal called the commander of the guard, a technical sergeant, and she refused to turn it in to him. So he called the officer of the day, who unfortunately happened to be me. I took the order signed by her husband and showed it to her, but again she refused. I insisted. After yelling and screaming and creating quite a scene, she finally turned it in to me. As she left she screamed, 'You'll hear about this.' By a very strange coincidence, three days later I received an unsatisfactory fitness report for doing my duty and carrying out my orders. At Marine Corps Headquarters a board of three officers was convened and decided as long as I was still a temporary officer, it would be in the best interests of the Marine Corps to revert me to enlisted status. I received orders reverting me to master sergeant on 29 October 1949, after serving almost five years as an officer. This was one of the best things that ever happened to me in the Marine Corps."

The character of the Marine Corps was changing as it shrank to peacetime strength, and the officers turned to turf wars and organizational infighting. Paul felt that master sergeant, the highest enlisted rank, was respected by both officers and enlisted men and was not unduly upset to be in that position. It did fix in his

mind the goal of getting out once he had served the 20 years required for a pension.

At that point, 1950, the Korean War was impending and Paul flew back to Washington, D.C., to call on officers under whom he had served well and to request their assistance in getting a transfer to the engineers unit. This was done, and as a first step he went to engineering school for six months at Port Hueneme, Calif. When war broke out he was transferred to Camp Pendleton and assigned to an engineers battalion that was being formed. Paul liked being in the engineers. His unit was shipped to Kobe, Japan, and waited for action. A typhoon washed much of their equipment out to sea and there was a delay while they waited for resupply.

Paul was assigned to a landing ship tank (LST) and sent to participate in the Inchon landing. On the way they withstood another typhoon, and finally landed at dusk. Paul was assigned to guard duty. Twelve North Korean soldiers, evidently with surrender on their minds, showed up in his sector. Paul took them in and turned them over to be taken to the colonel and then resumed his guard post.

From there Paul was shipped up the coast to the Han River country, specifically Hamhung and the Hungnam port. Paul was given the specific assignment of operating three sawmills to make lumber for military operations farther north in the Chosin Reservoir area. The last act in this operation was reembarking to move back to a city on the coast of South Korea. Here, Paul had responsibility for a group that repaired camp buildings. In view of his knowledge of Japanese—which was minimal but more than anyone else had—he was put in charge of a Korean crew.

In December 1952, having spent 16 months in Korea, Paul was brought home for Christmas and while back was stationed at Camp Pendleton (despite his request for Camp Lejuene). In this new assignment, Paul was put in charge of a maintenance crew of 30 to 40 men that maintained buildings as far north as San Onofre. Paul has good recollections of this assignment, which lasted from 1952 to 1955.

He was then transferred to the Marine Corps Recruit Depot in San Diego, where he was assigned to the job of police sergeant. His duties included working in the base nursery, growing plants that were used in maintaining landscaping on the base. He took a considerable interest in this aspect of the assignment and learned to graft trees from an excellent worker of Mexican extraction. Paul found that he enjoyed grafting.

As the end of his 20 years approached, Paul found he was still running into politics and superior officers who took a dislike to him. When he had but five months to go, his new commanding officer went out of his way to get Paul exiled to duty in Okinawa for those final five months. Ultimately Paul was returned to Camp Pendleton for discharge on 10 January 1958 with retirement pay of \$35 per month.

## Getting Established in Bonsall

When Paul returned from Korea, he and Helen bought a house in Ocean Beach in San Diego County. The house was close to the shore, with all the characteristics of living next to the ocean. Helen loved it. Paul found that living so close to the water led him to be afflicted with almost continuous colds. He wanted to move inland, and felt that Escondido would be about right. Paul and Helen selected the town of Bonsall as a compromise—somewhat inland, but not as far as he would have liked. In 1952, he and Helen bought an undeveloped 5.43-acre parcel of land that was being farmed on a hill west of, and overlooking, the bridge on Highway 76 in Bonsall. They paid \$5,500 which they felt was excessive. Paul acquired a trailer to live in on-site while he built a house. The construction took five-and-a-half years.

The house was located at the top of the hill between two downhill fields on either side, north and south of it respectively. When he bought the land it was encumbered with a three-year lease to some farmers of Japanese extraction, so in theory Paul did not immediately have any place to plant things. However, the Japanese farmers had planted the north field to peppers and lost their whole crop to a freeze. So they were no longer interested in that field. The south field was much warmer and they continued to farm it. There was a gully in that field, and because of it the Japanese did not farm in or close to the head of the gully. So the north field and the gully head were available for Paul's use. The farm lease was not renewed and thereafter Paul had the entire place to himself.

During Paul's years on the Bonsall place, the north field had one or more freezes every winter except 2002. On the north end of the field, down by the road, the temperature has fallen as low as 15F. However, these temperature lows are brief. Even in a cold winter period, the area warms up well beyond freezing during the sunlight hours. Consequently, fruits that need a substantial number of chilling hours often do not get them despite low temperature readings, because such conditions are too temporary.

In 1962 Paul bought a second piece of farmland about 5.5 miles away in Vista, which had a milder climate. He called this place Edgehill. It had been occupied by an old avocado grove that included a substantial segment of Nabal avocados—a very large avocado, and by some thought to be the best tasting, although the tree was an alternate-year bearer. The property was partly in the Vista irrigation district and partly in the San Marcos irrigation district. Straightening this out so that he could get water to all parts of the property took a while.

When he bought the place there was an avocado grove owned by a neighbor to the west. However, the neighbor sold it to a developer who removed the grove. This seemed to let cold ocean breezes blow across Edgehill, which sent Paul's mangos into decline, and

also adversely affected his cherimoyas—plants he was then focused on at Edgell.

Around 1990, Paul decided he was not able to keep up with both places. He sold Edgell to Steve White, who intended to maintain it as a subtropical fruit grove. Apparently the economics of this plan did not work out, and White lost the property. The land was later sold to a developer and now has three very large houses on it. Paul has continued to live in his house on the property in Bonsall.

Paul's interest in growing fruits seems to have started when he was in Korea in an area where chestnuts were widely grown and a common diet staple. The owners of the groves were displaced by the war and many of the chestnuts themselves were left on the ground where they fell. Paul took an interest in this and began to correspond with Dr. J. Eliot Coit back in Vista, Calif. Around 1910 Dr. Coit had been responsible for the establishment of the Citrus Experiment Station at Riverside, which in due course evolved into the University of California at Riverside. As a result of the correspondence, when Paul returned to the States he looked up Dr. Coit and became his good friend. Coit had broad botanical interests and introduced Paul to many kinds of fruits, especially subtropical fruits. Paul says that Dr. Coit was his mentor in the fruit field. When Dr. Coit was about 88 or so, retired, and having difficulty living alone, Paul came over to Vista and took care of him in his home until he had to be hospitalized. Dr. Coit died at the age of 92.

Dr. Coit introduced Paul to Wells W. Miller of M&N Nursery in Vista. Miller was a retired Marine Corps colonel and the M&N Nursery in its day was an important source of subtropical fruit trees for the area. The N stood for Vernon Nuthall, also a retired marine, who was Miller's partner, but whose interests were mostly on the financial side. The Vernon sapote is named for him and the original tree stands on the old M&N location. Anyway, Miller ran the business. Even while still in the corps, Paul associated with Miller and helped him found the California Macademia Society.

After taking over the Bonsall property, Paul planted the north field to avocados. The third year after planting, those all froze out. Then he tried macadamias, the big seller at M&N in those days. The macadamias froze out too. He tried Christmas trees, and those were destroyed by a fire. He tried pistachios because he was confident they could stand the cold weather. The yields were minuscule. Evidently the problem with them was not getting enough hours of chilling. Then he planted feijoas. He grew feijoas for many years and some of the bushes are still there in his north field. His leading varieties were the Nazemetz and Trask, both obtained from the Alexander and Goodwin Nursery in San Diego. Alexander Nazemetz used his first name in the nursery designation because he thought people might have difficulty pronouncing his last. Murray Goodwin was his partner. The nursery had planted a couple of

thousand seedling feijoas and selected the two best and they worked out very well in Paul's north field.

Paul's problem with the feijoas was the marketing. About 1980, Paul told me that somebody beat him to the commissary at Camp Pendleton (which was his market of choice) with an early delivery of inferior quality feijoas. A week later, when Paul's feijoas were put out for sale, nobody would buy them because of their recent bad experience. Paul said that if he could get four growers to plant good-quality feijoas they could establish a marketing order that set minimum quality standards for the product. I agreed to plant a half-acre and participate. Evidently this scheme did not work out for Paul. (In my case, in four years we never even got a flower. The coldest location on my land evidently did not get enough chilling hours for feijoas. And then later on my feijoa planting was burned up in a fire from my neighbor, Camp Pendleton.)

Overall, Paul's recollection is that too many others noticed him making money on feijoas and planted, and soon the price was too low to make them worth harvesting. Another major problem was that a promoter from New Zealand began to persuade farmers in the San Joaquin Valley to plant feijoas—and he had them plant New Zealand varieties. The cold was not a problem, but the New Zealand plants were not bred to withstand the high temperatures of the San Joaquin Valley and died out, giving feijoa farming a black eye in the market.

Paul decided to plant chestnuts in the south field, and obtained many varieties from many sources. Most, but not all of them, were hybrids. Unfortunately, even the best chestnuts have a difficult pellicle that the nut meat has to be removed from. Paul found that the pellicles were much easier to remove if the plant had access to abundant water. Paul was often short of water and found that the markets did not respond at all well to his chestnuts.

## Major Projects

Paul lived in a world of projects, whether they were stringing wire, or Marine Corps objectives or developing rare-fruit plantings. During the years after he retired from the corps some of his projects appeared to me to stand out as bigger in scope, or in hours of work, or perhaps in the number of years he committed to the project. Those included the following:

## Grafting

After Paul retired from the Marine Corps he adopted grafting as his vocation. His first major customer was the M&N Nursery. In the beginning he specialized in macadamias. M&N was riding a wave of plantings by people in the area who were impressed by the commercial development of this nut in Hawaii. Paul did the M&N grafting and M&N supplied most of the trees for the Southern California market. Paul has the impression that a majority of the trees in the macademia groves of Southern California are his grafts.

## Thomson Nursery

Having worked for M&N Nursery off and on, Paul felt he understood the business and decided there was an opportunity for him to build a nursery business specializing in mangos and cherimoyas. He established the nursery at Edgell in 1964 offering these two and some other fruits. He was never able to develop an adequate market. About 1972 he abandoned the nursery for lack of demand.

### *Macadamia Macadamia integrifolia* and *Macadamia tetraphylla*

Paul was stationed in Hawaii when the macademia industry was starting up, and he took an interest in it. Macademia grafting had its challenges. A simple graft does not form a union with the rootstock by the time the scion dies. This was addressed by girdling the scion some time before harvesting it, so that the scion would build up an oversupply of carbohydrates which would sustain it long enough for the graft to take.

Unfortunately, for a variety of business reasons, the Southern California groves were never able to duplicate the commercial success achieved in Hawaii.

### *Carob Ceratonia siliqua*

Another project Paul started on, even before leaving the corps, was a large planting of carob across the Mexican border in the Guadalupe Valley, about 14 miles northeast of Ensenada. A man from Paris named Badan bought about 2,500 acres in the valley with the idea of developing a major source of carob for the world market. Paul originally acted as an advisor in the development of the land and part-time supervisor of the workers who were carrying out the plans.

After Paul retired, he spent a large part of his time during the next three years out in the carob fields budding the rootstocks. The grove was a success from the point of view of production, but markets were again the problem. The major customer was the Nestlé Company, but they used carob merely as a cheap adulterant for chocolate. On top of that Badan died in the 1970s and his wife was not up to running the place. Their son, an oceanographer, took over and gradually removed the carob trees, replacing them with wine grapes. The project is now a substantial producer of its own brand of wine.

Paul has continued to take an interest in the carob. He still has three trees that bear well. He noted that carobs are of particular interest to gophers, something I have experienced, too. Paul plants his carob trees in holes lined with chicken wire that has a 3/4" mesh—often called aviary wire. He warned me that you have to line the bottom of the hole, too, or the gophers will tunnel under to get at the roots.

Paul noted that only a few of the carobs are hermaphrodites—only one of the three he has left is in this category. The others are females and have to have a source of pollen. His favorite variety is one called

Sfax which is a female. The hermaphroditic one is also excellent and was the clone of a seedling growing in one of the oil fields of Los Angeles.

### **Red Squill** *Urginea maritima*

The red squill is a member of the lily family and its bulbs have ancient use as a very specific and thus safe poison for rats. Its advantage over other rat poisons is that it is a powerful emetic. If eaten by a child or another animal it will immediately provoke a vomiting reaction and the child will be rid of it. Rats are unable to vomit and are killed by the squill.

Red Squill is native to the Mediterranean area and was grown in quantity in Morocco. During the Second World War this source of supply was cut off from the United States. Our government managed to acquire some bulbs and sent them to a program in Denver to select plants with the highest potency. The best plants were then planted out and propagated in Ensenada, Mexico. When the war ended and Mediterranean supplies became available, the government dug up the bulbs and terminated the program. Half the bulbs were provided to Dr. Howard Gentry, a well-known botanical researcher with the USDA, who planted them in Murietta, Calif.

A quarter were given to Paul who planted them at Bonsall, and the other quarter went to a man in Escondido. Paul received his bulbs in 1958.

The Red Squill bulbs seem to be well adapted to Paul's location in Bonsall and grew there almost without attention. The bulbs grew larger and each bulb seemed to produce about one additional offshoot plant a year. But nobody came by asking to buy a crop.

After about 15 years Paul looked into the market and found that the bulbs could only be sold for about 50 cents a pound. So he has not pursued this.

A Red Squill bulb puts out one stalk of flowers each year, usually at the end of summer. Helen liked the flowers and used some in the arrangements she provided to her church group for use as decorations. The other members of the church decorating group considered them quite attractive and made comments to that effect. Paul mentioned that to Dr. Gentry who passed the word on to an associate who has worked up a good business selling the flower stalks to the commercial floral trade.

### **Jojoba** *Simmondsia chinensis*

Around 1980, Paul participated in another major agricultural movement, jojoba development. Jojoba is a native plant in the chaparral areas in Southern California and Baja California, and a plant that had interested Paul over the years. The seeds of the jojoba have an unusual oil in them in which the alcohol moiety (portion) is not glycerine, as in most fats and oils, but rather a long-chain alcohol. In many applications, especially where a fat or oil is exposed to high temperatures, as in lubricating oil additives, glycerine has a tendency to decompose. The industrial approach to this problem had been to use sperm whale oil, which

also contained a long-chain alcohol. Nobody was comfortable with the idea of hunting sperm whales for this purpose. The notion that one could get the same kind of oil from a plant was thus attractive.

This was a large project and enlisted the support of many kinds of people. Paul was hired as part of this to scour the countryside for native jojoba plants that might be cloned to provide commercial varieties for the plantings that were being planned. Paul's instructions were to select for productivity—yield of seeds. U.C. Riverside conducted tests to indicate the percentage and quality of the oils contained in the seeds.

As with many large agricultural development programs, this one was only partly successful. Over 40,000 acres were planted to jojoba at the peak. In Paul's view too much of the land purchased down by the Colorado River and over in Arizona was selected because it was cheap. And the purchasers devoted it to growing jojoba. It turned out the land was subject to freezing and many of the plantings were destroyed. There is still a modest level of production of jojoba oil today, mostly used in cosmetics.

As was his habit with any project he took up, Paul read everything he could get his hands on relating to jojoba and in 1976 wound up editing and publishing the 156-page *Jojoba Handbook*, summarizing what was known about cultivating the plant.

### **Dudleya** *Crassulaceae*

Paul has always been interested in native plants of the region. One that he found of particular interest starting in 1978 was a group of succulents called the Dudleyas, a subfamily in the Crassulaceae. Although this was a strictly academic field, Paul mastered the literature, made contact with a Cornell professor who was an expert in these kinds of plants and set about to collect information and specimens over a rather wide area in Southern California and the Baja. He discovered several new species, developed various approaches to their cultivation and hybridization, and collected extensive information on their locations and pictures of them. With all this in hand he wrote, illustrated and in 1993 published in hard-cover the 248-page *Dudleya and Hassenanthus Handbook* on this subject. He is proud of the fact that this impressive academic work was done on his own without any of the usual support that people working in universities get.

### **Pitahaya** *Hylocereus* spp.

For fifteen years Paul has grown pitahayas for their fruit. These fruits are grown in many equatorial parts of the world, but not much has been published about their cultivation or, for that matter, their taxonomy. The plants are not easy to distinguish or identify, and Paul has worked diligently to collect information that would help with these problems. He has gradually progressed from small to larger plantings, gradually working out the factors that matter to someone starting

into pitahaya cultivation.

In 2000 Paul published a 46-page booklet, *Pitahaya*, in which he discussed most aspects of his work on this group of plants. The book seems not to conform to the various publishing formalities normally observed for Bonsall Publications handbooks, but nevertheless seems a substantial contribution to the literature in this field and a work of merit. The activities of Bonsall Publications is described below.

### **Honey Locust** *Gleditsia triacanthos*

Paul studied the honey locust for fifteen years. Characteristically, he began by getting scions of varieties he could find. In addition, he was able to get a couple of varieties that were emerging from research programs. In all he had about seven trees, which are still living on his land. His objective was to produce trees that would provide pods for cattle feed.

As usual, the problem was selling the concept to potential customers. One he worked with found that by the fourth year he was getting considerably more pods than his cattle could eat. But solving the problem seemed to satisfy the customer and he abandoned cattle for other opportunities.

A drawback of honey locust is its somewhat menacing thorns. Larger ones at the base of the trunk can injure tractor tires. There were thornless varieties, but the pods they produced were not as good. Paul noticed that as the tree grew upward, the thorns diminished and after a few years there were no thorns in the top part of the tree. He discovered that by taking his scions from the thornless areas he could produce whole grafted trees that were thornless.

## **Bonsall Publications**

Since first taking an interest in the field of fruit-tree growing nearly 50 years ago, Paul has been constantly and consistently eager to learn everything he could about fruit trees and other plants—generally those of potential economic interest. He bought books, read them and integrated what he learned into his projects. One of his favorite books is *Tree Crops* by J. Russell Smith, which he credits for giving him several good ideas. He carried on an extensive correspondence with other growers. And he was motivated to write articles on these subjects to pass along the information he had accumulated.

Before the formation of CRFG, Paul was a founding member of the Macadamia Society. Elwood Trask, the editor of the society's yearbook asked Paul to write a series of articles on the president of the society and on the members of the board of directors. When it came to writing the article on Trask himself, Trask instructed Paul to use a 40-year old picture of himself as a much younger man. Paul refused. Trask was succeeded by Lois James, and Trask instructed her to not publish anything written by Paul. So, when Paul came in sometime later with a long article on a subject that was suited to

the yearbook it was summarily rejected. Paul looked around for other routes to publishing.

A large part of Paul's drive to write and publish found an outlet in the establishment in 1968 of CRFG with its quarterly newsletters and yearbook. Paul wrote and edited numerous articles in CRFG publications. But there were still subjects that Paul wanted to write on and publish that were not well suited to CRFG periodicals. Bargyla Rateaver, an organic-growing pioneer, suggested that Paul set up his own company and use it to put out such publications. They came up with the name "Bonsall Publications," and Bargyla handled the registration of the company for Paul.

In the course of his work on the jojoba, Paul had written a lengthy article on the horticulture of this desert plant and showed it, among others, to Lennox Davidson from Australia. Davidson expressed great interest in the article and encouraged Paul to get it published. Paul was able to get permission from *Economic Botany* magazine to reprint an article on the natural history of jojoba by Dr. Gentry, and combined with his own article this made up the above-mentioned book on jojoba. Put out in 1976, this was the first product of Bonsall Publications. It was successful, and second and third editions were published. Following that, Paul was contacted by Frank Koch, who had published a series of articles in *Avocado Grower* magazine. Koch had many years of experience with avocados, and wound up writing a book on that subject. He had been unable to find a publisher. Paul agreed to take a chance on the book, but felt that it needed a good deal of editing. Over the next couple of years Paul and Koch met about twice a week and collaborated on the rewrite. This culminated in the publication of the *Avocado Grower's Handbook* in 1983. The book was well-received and reprints are still sold through CRFG.

The *Kiwifruit Handbook*, published in 1988, responded to a need for information felt by many growers who were putting in kiwi plantings in the 1980s. It was written in three sections by two experienced kiwi growers and Paul. There was no other book available locally on this subject at the time, and it too made a little money for Paul.

The most recent handbook published by Bonsall Publications, the one on Dudleyas, was of a different character. Instead of being a how-to book for fruit and nut gardeners, it was a specialized natural history book in which Paul established his claim for a position in the history of botany. From a business standpoint, the market was entirely different and this book did not make money. It is a fascinating contribution to the literature, however, and certainly should outlast the earlier books in residency on the academic library shelves.

## Other Projects

Over the years, Paul has tried to grow just about any fruit he could get his hands on that might be suited to his climate. On many occasions, I asked him about some particular fruit and he always gave me a

knowledgeable answer, usually including some indication that he had first-hand experience growing it. The following are fruits that came up in the interview.

### Mangos *Mangifera indica*

Mangos are a fruit that Paul worked on for a number of years at Edgell; Bonsall was too cold for them. He worked with 72 varieties and has exhibited 29 varieties at various times. His favorite variety, he said with a smile, is the one called Thomson, which was a seedling from a Manila variety. He was in close contact with the people who were developing a mango grove in the low desert. One of Paul's seedlings did very well in the desert, but did not make the final cut because the fruits were not big enough.

### Cherimoya *Annona cherimola*

Another tree that Paul spent time on was the cherimoya. Ted Frolich of UCLA had given a collection of 20 varieties to M&N Nursery, and Paul experimented with these. The one Frolich liked best came from Spain, and he just called it "Spain." Paul also collected about nine varieties of atemoya, which is a cross between *Annona squamosa* and *A. cherimola*. It was hoped that this would provide a more tropical fruit which at the same time could be grown in the Southern California climate. In Edgell, the atemoya grew well and fruited abundantly without hand pollination. However, Paul considered the quality of the best atemoya to be about equal to a rather poor cherimoya.

### Lychee and Longan

#### *Litchi chinensis* and *Dimocarpus longan*

These fruits have also been favorites of Paul's and were an important part of his grove at Edgell. He brought in several varieties from Thailand, brought back seven kinds of longans from Florida and four or five varieties of lychee. He remembers particularly his experience with the Kohala from the big island of Hawaii, a highly regarded variety in Florida. It grew to be a huge tree but he got very little fruit from it.

### Pear *Pyrus communis*

Paul was emphatic in saying that some pears did very well in Bonsall and that he thinks pears are an overlooked fruit in Southern California. In fact, Paul says he is surprised that no one is growing pears commercially here. His pear plantings were in his north field, sited there to get as much cold as possible. At the time he worked on them, pears were being grafted onto pear rootstock and the results were inconsistent. Paul did all his pear grafts onto quince—on rootstocks he prepared from quince cuttings—and that worked very well for him. Of course some pear scions are incompatible with quince, and for those Paul made use of a compatible pear interstem graft.

Paul's favorite pear varieties were the Copes and the Comice, both of which thrived at Bonsall. Paul found

it best to grow these two together so they would pollinate each other. Comice is widely known, but Paul no longer knows of a source of the Copes. Paul tried Asian pear varieties, but was not impressed by the quality of the fruit, although he notes that it has achieved some popularity here.

### Apple *Malus pumila*

Paul acquired a substantial number of apple varieties. The best, in his experience, was the Makepeace variety. It had low chill requirements, the fruit was of outstanding quality and the apple had good keeping quality. He got this variety from a source in Rancho Sante Fe. He commented that the Anna apple did well also at Bonsall, but the fruit did not keep well.

### Cherry *Prunus avium*

Paul tried these in Bonsall, but they did not bear much fruit. He concluded that the location just did not have enough hours of chill. The varieties he liked best were the Black Republican and the Governor Wood, but productivity was so low that he gave up on cherries.

### Black Mulberry *Morus nigra*

Paul had a dozen varieties of *Morus nigra*, and all did well at Bonsall.

### Chinese Mulberry *Cudrania tricuspidata*

Paul worked with this plant a bit. Its seeds do not germinate very well, but it is easy to propagate by cutting off and planting some of the yellow roots. The drawback for this plant is that it is very thorny and has a tendency, almost as bad as the jujube, for migrating out underground.

Paul found, as in the case of the honey locust, that the more mature parts of the tree have relatively few thorns.



Paul with young longan plants

**Black Locust** *Robinea pseudoacacia*

The black locust tree has white flowers, but Paul noticed that an occasional tree had purple or even pink flowers. He talked to some ornamental nurserymen to see if there would be some interest in trees with more colorful flowers and concluded that they were really not interested in deciduous trees.

**Guava** *Psidium guajava*

Paul grew guavas at Edgell, especially some hybrids from breeding programs in Florida, Hawaii and the University of California at Riverside. The last source seemed to have the best varieties for his location. His personal favorite was the Red Indian.

**Almond** *Prunus dulcis*

Almond was another fruit that Paul tried, but he concluded that they did not pollinate properly and so he lost interest in them.

**Tuna** *Opuntia ficus indica*

Paul planted about a dozen varieties of tuna at Edgell and, in general, they all did well. Some were planted under or near eucalyptus trees and seemed to be adversely affected by them. Paul said the fruits were good and he ate them over many years. One had to learn how to cut them open, of course. The only real drawback to him was that they had rather large, hard seeds.

He concluded that one had to get used to the idea that one should just swallow the seeds and expect them to be passed in due time. He did not remember any varietal names, but said that they had varieties in Mexico and that would be the best source of them.

Paul noted that while we in the U.S. are focused on the fruit, the Mexicans actually consume more of the *nopales*, or the pads, as a vegetable.

**Capulin Cherry** *Prunus salicifolia*

Paul grew some capulins and still has a couple on the property. He was disappointed with the quality of the fruit and did not think he could sell it.

**White Sapote** *Casimiroa edulis*

Throughout his entire career in growing fruits, Paul maintained an interest in the white sapote. When I set out to make a collection of white sapote varieties, Paul supplied all of my original trees. He collected scions from individual specimens of trees all around northern San Diego County. He had been watching all the individual white sapote trees (almost all seedlings) as he drove around the area, tasting their fruits in season. Typically he would tell me that this one came from a row of five sapote trees along a driveway and specifically from the next to last tree on the west which was the one that gave the best fruit. I remember he mentioned that there were three sapotes growing next to the Fisch avocado packing plant, and

the workers only ate the fruit from one of those trees, so that was the one he propagated.

When Edgell began to get a little colder and less desirable for mangos because of the changes next door to the west, he embarked on a white sapote planting there, trying to develop a collection of trees such that one would be bearing fruit each month of the year. He preferred trees in which the fruit turned yellow when it was getting ripe, fruit that would mature off the tree after picking and fruit that could be stored under refrigeration before and after maturity. This was an admirable but ambitious goal, and was not carried beyond the work-in-progress stage. With the changes in Edgell the trees are gone now and the project was not completed.

**Sapodilla** *Manilkara sapota*

Paul got some sapodillas from Florida and planted them at Edgell. They grew but did not fruit. After Steve White bought Edgell from him, one of the trees finally began to fruit.

**Surinam Cherry** *Eugenia uniflora*

Paul grew Surinam cherries, but they tended to freeze out in Bonsall. Those that didn't bore only sparingly.

**Tree Tomato** *Cyphomandra betacea*

The tree tomato was another plant that Paul tried to work with. It did well and fruited abundantly, but the fruit were barely edible by Paul's standards.

**Tejocote Hawthorn** *Crataegus pubescens*

Paul got a couple of tejocote hawthorn varieties from Mexico. They did produce fruit—but Paul thought the quality was nothing special. Actually he was hoping to use the plant as rootstock for apples. He concluded that apples did better on apple rootstock.

**Neem Tree** *Azadirachta indica*

Paul tried the neem tree at Edgell since the plant was clearly too temperature sensitive for Bonsall. He had heard of someone else in Vista (Calif.) who was growing it. In particular he grafted it onto the Chinaberry tree (*Melia azedarach*), a hardier, relative. But the tree froze out anyway.

**Pinyon** *Pinus* sp

Paul got interested in the reports of pinyon nuts that had almond-sized or larger nuts. He obtained seeds from Afghanistan and from the northern Himalaya. He also got some seeds from Mexico (*Pinus maximartinezii*) All these trees grew, but so far he has not been able to get any nuts from them.

**Pistachio** *Pistacia vera*

Paul had the trees but had only three crops of nuts in 40 years. His conclusion is that even at Bonsall there are not enough chill hours.

**Marula** *Sclerocarya caffra*

The reports of marula fruit fermenting on the tree and that condition leading to drunk wild elephants tearing up gardens were intriguing. But the marula tree didn't do well at Edgell and finally died.

**Java Plum** *Syzygium cumini*

Miller had Java plum at M&N Nursery and Paul kept an eye on it. The tree grew to be huge and covered the ground with fruit. In Paul's view the fruit was not edible and he had no interest in its cultivation. What he does remember was that the fruit was red and that there were other trees of that species that had blue fruit that tasted good. He pressed Miller to get one of those, but Miller never got around to it.

**Jujube** *Ziziphus jujube*

Paul had jujubes at both Edgell and Bonsall. He found that the ones planted in locations exposed to a lot of wind did not bear fruit. As it was, the crows seemed to get most of the fruit on his trees anyway. He was looking for varieties that did not spread and had no thorns. At one point he repeatedly tried grafting jujube scions onto other *Ziziphus* species. Unfortunately this suffered a fate well-known to experimenters—a Mexican worker he had hired to clean up the place a bit cleaned up the experiment. When he repeated the experiment he found that the grafted trees did not grow much and concluded there was not enough graft compatibility to sustain the trees.

**Jaboticaba** *Myrciaria cauliflora*

Paul had one jaboticaba tree. Over a period of twelve years it did not bloom at all, and thus produced no fruit.

**Ilama** *Annona diversifolia*

Paul planted ilama fruit at Edgell, but concluded over several years that the location was just not tropical enough. The plants lived but were not very productive and he turned away from them.

**Banana** *Musa acuminata*

Paul planted six or eight varieties of banana, only to see them fall over as the gophers—which seemed to be especially aggressive at Edgell—got to them.

**Wampi** *Clausena lansium*

Paul tried three or four varieties of wampi. They all fruited, but the products did not appear marketable, so he gave up on them.

As I have gone over this list I can remember snatches of other conversations with Paul through the years, and I know that he investigated many fruits that are not mentioned. For example I remember a conversation on the western sand cherry (*Prunus besseyi*), which had a sentimental interest for me. It turned out Paul was using it as rootstock for stone fruits. Just reading

up on and rounding up sources of supply for all these various fruits over the years must have required a great deal of letter writing and travel. Paul noted that he flew to Florida several times to get air-layered fruit trees such as lychee and longan. In the course of this he had conversations with Bill Whitman, founder of Rare Fruit Council International, and came away with considerable respect for Bill's knowledge of the field. He was happy to see that Bill had the money to carry many of his projects to successful conclusions.

## California Rare Fruit Growers

In the 1950s, when he began to take an interest in fruit trees and other trees and shrubs having economic value, Paul made the acquaintance of probably most of the active growers of rare fruits in San Diego County and, to some degree, in other places. In Southern California, a group of people with overlapping interests in this general field came to know each other informally and a few formal organizations such as the Avocado Society and the Macadamia Society were created to focus on specific, narrow fields. In addition, the Farm Bureau and the University of California Extension Service covered a wide range of agricultural pursuits with the bulk of their attention on big volume agricultural crops. But apart from the formal academic journals, there was no convenient mechanism for experimenters and rare-fruit explorers to exchange information.

In Paul's search of the literature he ran onto some books, such as *Trees of Santa Barbara* by F. Franchetti, published around the turn of the 20th century, showing that decades earlier people had found ways of growing the trees he was trying to grow. There were other books about trees in a city, such as one for Santa Monica. Paul collected all of these books he could find, but he was conscious that most of his fellow enthusiasts did not have access to them. He was also conscious of the groups that amateur fruit growers had formed in Florida to exchange information, but aware that many of their problems were different from the ones he faced.

As it happened, on December 26, 1966, John Riley, another rare-fruit experimenter, and his wife were driving north toward their home in Santa Clara and called to see if they could stop for a visit with Paul as they passed through the Bonsall area. Paul and John had not met before, but they knew of each other and of their mutual interests in unusual fruit trees. They met and discussed their projects. And they agreed that there was a need for some formal mechanism for publishing articles so that people working on unusual fruits could communicate their findings to each other.

There were a lot of details to be worked out, and it was not until November 1968 that CRFG was officially launched. Thomson and Riley envisioned publishing a quarterly newsletter edited by Paul and an annual yearbook edited by John. The first newsletter is dated February 1969, and includes a list of 29 members.

Thomson and Riley each contributed in full measure

to multiple aspects of the start-up of this new organization. Paul bought a Mimeograph machine and an Addressograph machine. John arranged for publication of the yearbooks at his end, and initiated a seed bank. The editorial duties were split, but Paul took responsibility for the bulk of the paper handling and the publications were mailed out of the Bonsall post office. The volume of work increased significantly over the next few years as the membership grew into the hundreds. Culbert Faries helped Paul with the newsletters. The Barker family, Floy Paxton, the Coxes, Fisches and Albertses all came forward and pitched in to help as the workload grew.

In mid-1973 John Riley had to relinquish his responsibilities for the yearbook and other aspects of CRFG although he continued to run the seed bank for another year. He was overloaded with engineering work and felt that he had to give his obligations to his employer priority.

Muriel Fisch stepped forward to take responsibility for the yearbook. Paul continued to edit the newsletters and to take ultimate responsibility for all the other aspects of CRFG. The first annual meeting was held in 1971 and was continued each year thereafter. Some of us watching this from the outside wondered how Paul managed to keep up with it.

Things could not help but slip a little as the years went along. The yearbooks were coming out six months or so after the year was over. Some of the members were beginning to berate Paul a bit when they thought things were not up to the standards they desired. One of the members got up in the annual meeting and made disparaging remarks about the functioning of the organization and even about Paul's role in the process. At a time when, in my opinion, Paul was working far too hard on CRFG and taking all of the responsibility, his reaction to these complaints, from members whose only contribution was to pay dues at a low rate, was to question why he needed to put up with this. In 1978 Paul began to float some ideas, in conversations, about reducing his commitment, about shifting the responsibility to others, perhaps even about retiring from the position he had built up. Finally, he warned that at the 1978 annual meeting he was going to step aside, and that if the members wanted to continue the organization they would have to pick up the responsibilities themselves.

The 1978 annual meeting was held in the Bonsall school auditorium. Paul made his speech. The unanimous feeling of those present was that they wanted to continue CRFG, and there was a call for nominations to the board of directors. Thirteen hands were raised, and board has had 13 members ever since. At the end of the meeting the 13 who had volunteered to be on the board met around a big round table in a small room off the auditorium and elected Claude Sweet as president of CRFG. The organization founded in 1968 by Thomson and Riley and built by their efforts was to continue. Today CRFG has become the biggest rare-fruit growing organization of private members in the world, thanks

to Paul's efforts and those of many exceptionally able members who followed in his footsteps.

## The Interviewer's Opinions

Like Paul, I grew up in Lincoln, Neb., and knew people who were, or had contact with, agricultural pioneers in that state. The work of a pioneer was not something that could be structured or captured in a job description. Although it often seemed to be composed of mundane chores, it involved many projects and demanded whatever was necessary to make them successful. The overall accomplishments of pioneers were frequently hard to categorize and yet they were necessary and effective steps on the way to the easier life for those of us who came along later. By these standards I think Paul was clearly a pioneer. He made progress on many projects in many fields and his overall legacy, including CRFG, is certainly impressive.

Various recognitions of his contributions can be cited. He was listed in *Who's Who in California* in the 1979–80 and 1981–81 editions. He was listed in *Men and Women of Distinction*, published by Cambridge University in 1982. In the 1970s *Organic Gardening* magazine featured him and his trees in an article and Rodale awarded him the first certificate as an organic gardener in the nation. He was invited to teach horticulture courses at UC San Diego and to take over responsibility for Quail Gardens when the county took it over from its founder. His commitments to ongoing projects precluded him from accepting either of those offers.

Paul has complained many times about Ph.D.s, which I think he means to include professors and the academic establishment. Actually I observed that he didn't mean to complain about all Ph.D.s, only about those whose technical knowledge and judgment he views as inadequate given their elevated status. The aspect of this I find ironic is that Paul himself seems to me to have nearly all the characteristics, good and bad, of an eminent Ph.D. professor of botany. He has an encyclopedic knowledge of the literature in his field. He is constantly probing, experimenting, wondering about implications. He is constantly thinking about publishing his insights or describing them to an audience. At the same time he is intolerant of technically limited people who present themselves as experts. And he resists any bureaucracy that tries to ride herd on him. He has often demonstrated a lack of talent and interest in organizational politics.

But Paul didn't get started into this field until he was nearly forty years old. He didn't have an academic mechanism guiding him down a well-trod path. Or one that gave him well-organized and predigested information, coached him with examinations, or rewarded him with degrees. Looking at Paul's career, I think the eminent position he achieved in the field of fruit growing is particularly remarkable, considering that he did it all on his own.

Finally, anyone who spends some time with Paul

will have experienced his personal form of corny humor. I can't usually remember jokes long enough to repeat them, but two he brought forth in the interview went roughly as follows.

1. One man asked the other the names of his two dogs. Bulova and Timex said the second. Why the strange names? The answer—they are watch dogs.
2. The teacher expounding on antiquities asked her students to use the word "archaic" in a sentence. Johnny stuck up his hand and said, "We can't have our cake and eat it too."

I have asked Paul before if he had some hidden source of these jokes, perhaps one that dates back to the heyday of the Farmer's Almanac. I asked again this time, and Paul finally admitted that he makes up most of them himself. I am not sure what to make of this except to conclude this inclination is another facet of Paul's many talents—one that goes well beyond anything I would expect in someone with his other accomplishments.

### Paul's Recent Status (added by Emory Walton)

Since Robert Chambers interviewed Paul in 2003, profound changes have affected Paul's life. In May 2007, Paul lost Helen, his wife of 65 years. Shortly thereafter, Paul sold his home and now resides in an assisted living facility. In contrast to the numerous plants that he has grown in years past, he now has just two pitahaya plants in pots on his patio. Paul still manages to attend CRFG's annual Festival of Fruit, as well as the annual pitahaya meetings that Edgar Valdivia has organized over the last few years.

During those meetings, Edgar noticed that although Paul is revered by veteran CRFG members, he is virtually unknown to many newer members. Edgar,

who has benefited from Paul's expertise in developing his own collection of pitahayas, is determined to correct this deficiency. Edgar has taken it upon himself to expand the project of highlighting the life of Paul Thomson that Robert Chambers initiated several years earlier. Edgar, his wife Pat and his friend Emory Walton visited Paul on November 13, 2007. Gray Martin, who is involved in the development of pitahayas, lives in close proximity to Paul's current residence. Gray graciously offered his home to host the visit, despite the fact that his home had been perilously close (within a few feet) to a major California wildfire just a few weeks earlier. Although Paul no longer stands straight and walks rather slowly, his mind is still razor sharp. After surveying the scorched landscape adjacent to Gray's home, Paul, refusing any assistance in walking, accompanied the others to the other side of the property to see Gray's collection of pitahayas, which were not damaged by the fire. Paul promptly corrected Edgar's misuse of the name *pitaya* to describe the plants that were being viewed, stating that members of the *Hylocereus* species should be called *pitahaya*, and that the name *pitaya* pertains to a different species that is grown in Mexico. Edgar brought along a number of various fruits for the occasion, with the intended purpose of first photographing Paul with the fruits that he had helped to develop. Following the photography, all parties enjoyed a small feast of those fruits. In many instances, Paul was readily able to determine which variety of fruit was being tasted. There were a few fruits to which Paul claimed no involvement. Edgar brought one fruit, the lucma, which to everyone's amazement, Paul had never previously tasted. Paul found the taste of the lucma to be rather dry.

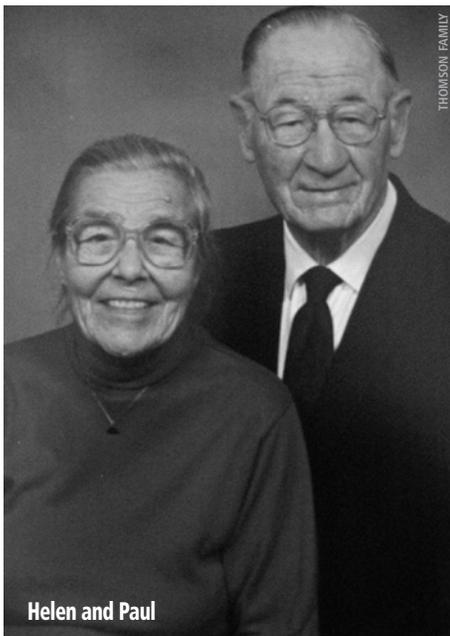
Following the photography and the fruit tasting, we went inside Gray's home where Edgar recorded Paul's answers to some questions which Edgar had prepared

beforehand. Paul was able to state which information had already been included in yearbooks published decades earlier. Paul believes that most of the changes in CRFG subsequent to his leadership have been for the better and that CRFG will continue to grow.

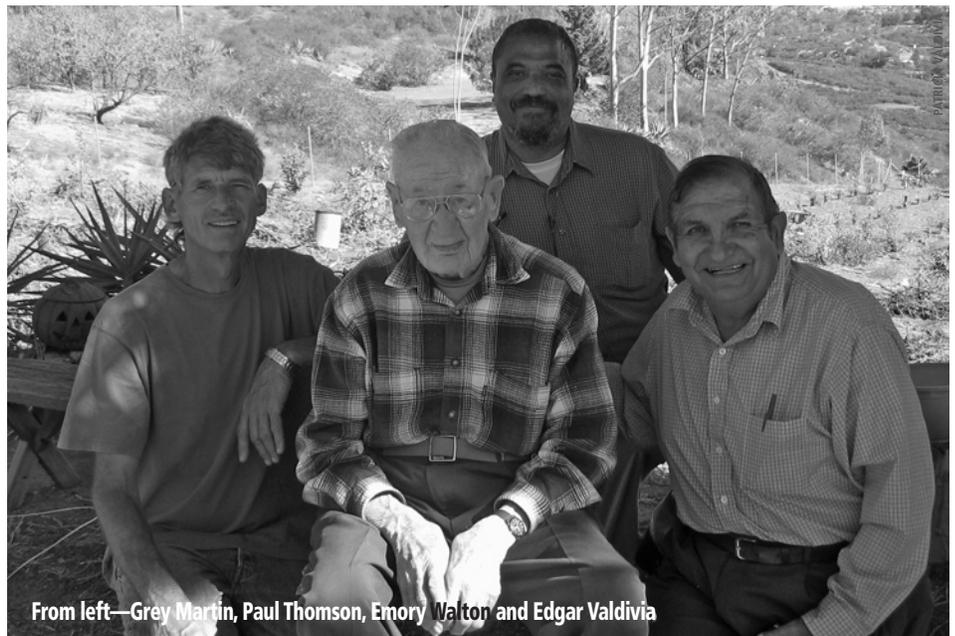
Following the interview, we enjoyed lunch at a restaurant before returning Paul to his residence. There, Paul shared a number of his treasured photographs with us, many of which are shown herein. Paul's sense of humor is completely intact, as evidenced by his reaction to the comment made while looking at photos taken when he was very young, that he must have been born at a very early age.

Paul lamented that he is unable to do his own cooking where he now lives. He has a small microwave oven, but no sink nor any other cooking facilities in his apartment. Paul has a large collection of recipes that he had gathered over many years. He earnestly wanted those recipes to be compiled and published as a cookbook, so cooking is apparently an activity that he really enjoys.

Paul said that he still likes to sing, but he cannot sing in all of the registers which he could when he was younger. Paul has a computer in his apartment, but says that it has been several years since he last used it. He has no television, stating that he has never had one, and at that this point, a television would be of little use to him since he is hard of hearing. He says that he sees no hope of recruiting any new CRFG members from his new neighbors since at the age of 91, he is one of the youngest residents where he now lives. His new residence appears to be spacious and well maintained, with a lovely tiled fountain right outside of his doorway. One might conclude that even if Paul has not adjusted to his new lifestyle, he is in a comfortable environment. Paul's sharp wit and his encyclopedic knowledge made us all feel honored to enjoy his company.



Helen and Paul



From left—Gray Martin, Paul Thomson, Emory Walton and Edgar Valdivia



Paul Thomson with mangos

### Books by Paul Thomson

*Pitahaya—A Promising New Fruit Crop for Southern California.* 1st ed.

#### **Horticultural Handbook Series**

*Avocado Growers Handbook.* 1st ed. 1983.

Currently out of print (see note below)

*Dudleya and Hasseanthus Handbook.* 1st ed. 1993

*Jojoba Handbook.* 1st ed. 1992

*Kiwifruit Handbook.* 1st ed. 1988

*The Avocado Growers Handbook is currently being refurbished and repaginated in typeset (as opposed to typewritten) form. This refurbished edition should be available for sale by mid-2008.*