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BERRY GROWERS UNDER CAREFUL MANAGEMENT
HAVE SOLVED DIFFICULT PROBLEMS PAST YEAR

By D. E. TOWLE

The following article is submitted, complying with the Outlook's request that data be furnished for a story for the Christmas number covering the early history and subsequent developments of the berry industry in this locality and the co-operative plan of marketing that now seems to be quite firmly established.

As a preface I wish to say that the majority of us humans are inclined to be conservative or reactionary and to look back and say, "What was is best," and that history will repeat itself and that we cannot hope to do much better than grandfather did. We concede that people of this class have much the best of the argument and still those of us who are imbued with the co-operative spirit believe there are better things ahead when the co-operative spirit, inspired by the religion of the Golden Rule, will not only cement localities together for the common good but reach out and embrace the people of the whole world, crushing that spirit Bobby Burns referred to which, if revised to date, makes countless millions mourn." This may be only an ideal but ideals generate ideas and is in keeping with the Christmas spirit.

To sum up briefly: the conservative or individual schools say by their actions they are afraid there will not be enough of this world's goods for all, while the other schools are optimists, thinking there is enough for all, if fairly distributed, and freight rates are not too high.

Co-operative Cannery Started.

The history of the berry industry around Gresham dates back in a commercial way to about 1910 or 1912, when the late W. W. Cotton, on the suggestion of H. E. Davis, planted the old acreage on the Cotton Farm. Some fifty acres were in bearing in 1914, (when Gresham looked good to the writer and he pitched his tent here,) but there was no market organization and I recall how bitterly Mr. Cotton denounced the "Front Street gang" who were well enough organized to pound the price down to where the bid for the berries was but little more than the cost of the crates. In the spring of 1914 the idea of building a co-operative cannery was introduced. The sale of stock was made to the amount of \$7200.00 and the cannery was built. The incorporators were Milton O. Nelson, H. E. Davis, Chas. Cleveland, H. M. Miller and F. A. Lehman. The cannery was used during the season of 1915 mostly as a receiving station. Some of the Cuthbert crop was shipped to Hunt Bros. in Salem, some sold in the raw fruit market and a

small quantity was canned in gallons, called pie stock or water gallons, for which the growers received 3c per pound the following June, 1916. On the whole the venture was not a success for various reasons and at the annual meeting in January, 1916, the books showed unpaid bills of about \$2500. The question was, What to do? The new board elected at this meeting was F. A. Lehman, H. E. Davis, O. W. Tarr, Jas. Sterling and D. E. Towle. Jas. Elkington was appointed secretary succeeding K. A. Miller, who could not serve owing to pressure of other business. The board had three propositions to consider. One was to have a receiver appointed; second, there was some talk of a new company being organized, and third, the sale of more stock, to the amount of \$2500 to pay the debts. This last plan prevailed and a canvassing committee, consisting of Dr. Todd, Jas. Elkington and the writer was named to raise the wind. In two weeks the cash was raised and the debts paid, (and Richard was himself again,) but the new year had to be financed.

Finance Problems Worried.

So the ways-and-means committee burned the midnight oil on plans. Mr. Cotton was not pleased with the previous year's experience and his co-operative sentiment oozed out. The truth was that he belonged to the old school and preferred not to affiliate in a broad way, so he made an offer through Mr. Davis to pay us by the case to have his berries canned. The offer was accepted and one good feature of the deal was that he would pay cash every Saturday night. This deal was fairly equitable but there was some \$800 worth of sugar used in his berries more than the specifications called for, which he acknowledged and probably would have paid had he lived. The other growers' berries were bought that year at 4 1/2c per pound at the suggestion of the broker who said that was all the market would stand. The terms agreed upon were 1 1/2c on delivery to cover picking and the company was to give its note for the 3c balance at 8 per cent, due in November, which it did. This plan worked out satisfactorily, but the big job was to pay the 1 1/2c on delivery. This was covered finally by an advance made by the writer of \$5000, loaned to him as follows: the U. S. National Bank, Portland, \$2000; First State Bank, Gresham, \$2000, and the Bank of Gresham, \$1000. The writer was secured by a trust deed to the cannery and assigned fire insurance, subject to a preferred claim on the insurance running to the U. S. National Bank, who generously agreed through Mr. Cotton's influence to make us an ad-

vance on the pack, pending sale. The office force consisted of James Elkington, whose duty was to always keep some cash in the treasury and keep the books; Joe Chiodo was time-keeper, Mrs. Rose Metzger, floor lady, Fred Castor, cook and the writer roustabout. I recall Castor was to receive \$150 per month and was always prompt in collecting. I do not recall definitely what the others received, I do remember that I was to receive \$35 per month and \$1.00 per ton for making the contracts but while I was back east in November the cannery burned along with all the records, so in settling we had to estimate the tonnage. However the field was occupied, we employed a lot of help and the payroll amounted to quite a large sum. The pear crop was real good and we worked from July 1st to September 30th, principally on berries and pear. The cherry crop was spoiled with an untimely rain, but we were pleased because it made the financing easier. As to the cause of the fire, I do not know that it was ever fully decided how it started, but those who saw it first said it was in the northwest corner of the office. I am sure it was not owing to friction in the management, as we all pulled together for dear life to make a success of the enterprise. H. E. Davis also helped in every way possible and preached co-operation. He is doubtless entitled to much credit for educating the people of this locality along those lines. Mr. Elkington's faith never forsook him. He was always cool and dignified, even if there was danger of the bank account getting in the red. The insurance carried was sufficient to settle all claims and rebuild the present cannery less \$1500, but we had no funds to buy and install equipment.

This new building was built in the spring of 1917 by the board elected in that year who were as follows: Theo. Brugger, Walter Proctor, H. E. Davis, W. C. Lawrence and the writer. The equipping and financing of operations were serious problems. The loss in 1915 and 1916 was very unfortunate. To sell more stock was not to be considered, as we did not think the people would respond and the stock issue would be too top heavy. Again Mr. Cotton came to the rescue with an offer to carry the balance due on the building \$1500, at 6 per cent and put in the equipment, pay us \$600 a year rent for two years, and to carry the insurance and pay the taxes. This was agreed to and we made growers' contracts for five years on cutberts at 5c, assigned for 1917 and 1918 to Mr. Cotton, and the association was to have

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Beautiful patterns high in quality, something that adds to one's comfort. Give one.

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Farmers' Week in Gresham

January 16 to 21, 1922

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