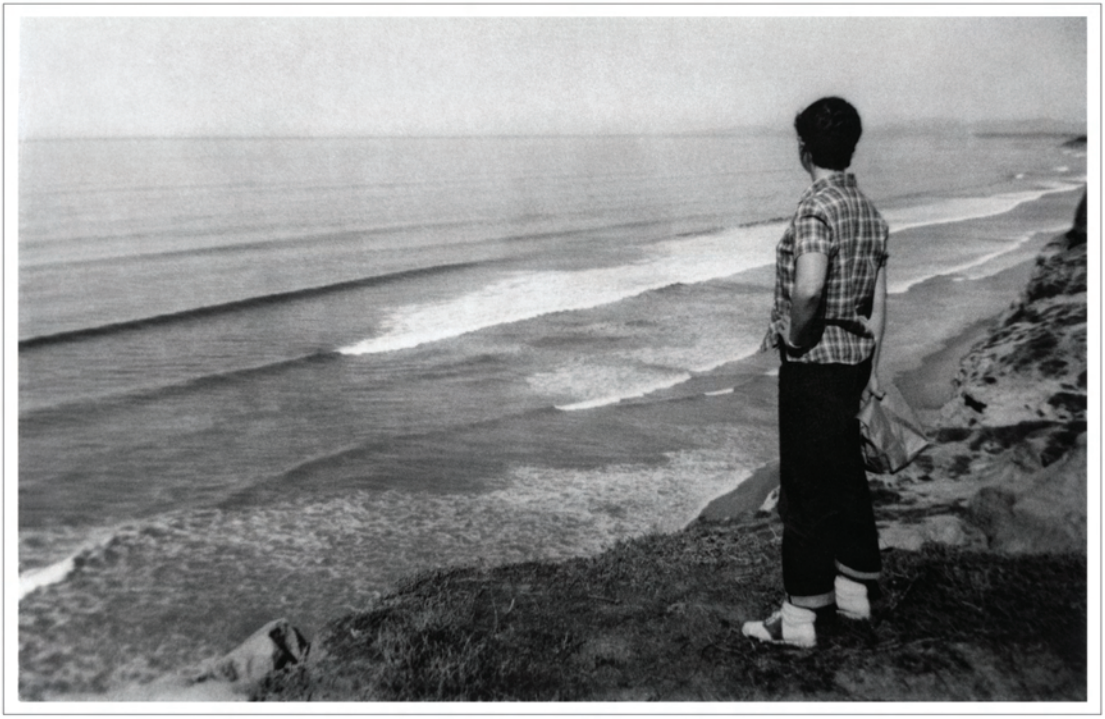
Reflections from Box 150



Chronicles of a Childhood Growing Up on the U.S. Horticultural Field Station near Torrey Pines

La Jolla, California

Beverley Whitaker Rodgers

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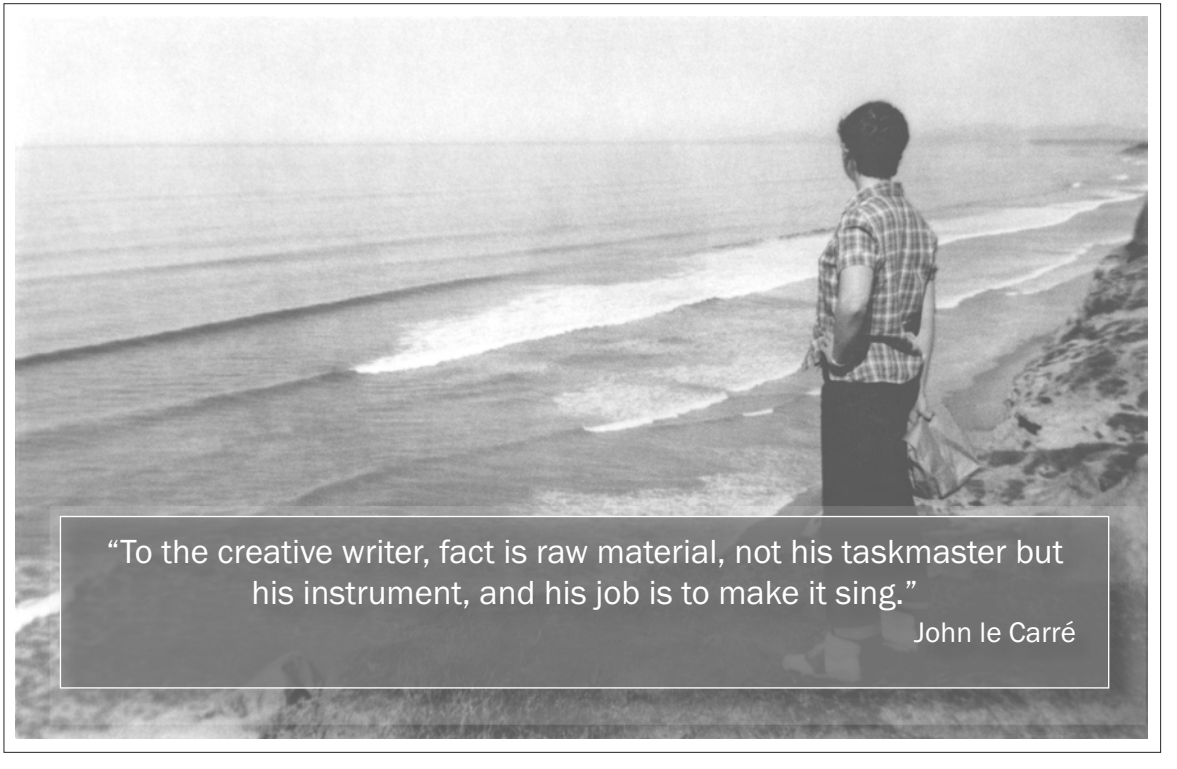

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by

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Based on short stories and vignettes written between 2003-2021

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Foreword

Using stories that are both uniquely personal yet poignantly universal, Beverley Whitaker Rodgers calls upon contemporary literature and personal experience to eloquently coalesce culture that is Americana, with historical events that dramatically shaped the United States in the early decades of the twentieth century.

Beverley was born in Atlanta, Georgia in 1935 and spent only a short time in the South while her father taught at the Agnes Scott College for Girls following his doctorate work at Harvard—and while the United States recovered from the Great Depression—and lived most of her childhood on the U.S. Horticultural Field Station near Torrey Pines in La Jolla, California. The daughter of a southern gentlewoman who descended from one of the First Families of Virginia and of a father who was seventh-generation native Californian, Beverley straddled two decidedly different worlds: that of a rural, tomboy life with distinct, traditional male/female roles, housework, chores, horses, books, and cats, with that of coming of age when high society, bridge clubs and the arts lay the foundation for the small, elegant beachside community of La Jolla, California.

The writer's account chronicles milestones of any average childhood: illnesses and emergency room visits, seemingly endless road trips to spend holidays with family, sibling rivalry, forming life-long friendships, tending to farm animals, learning to read, sew and pray, arguing with Mother over fashion trends, and adoring her Father. Beverley's descriptive writing style lends itself to recount the instant camouflaging of defense plants in San Diego in anticipation for war with Japan, the transformation of the area south of Torrey Pines when Camp Callan suddenly materialized, and the swift disappearance of Japanese neighbors after the attack on Pearl Harbor that sparked the United States entering World War II. She aptly weaves tales of "Settling the West" on her horse Navajo, illustrates the development of vegetation, housing and highways in Southern California that influenced the state's economy, and recounts adjusting to life in two new cities as an awkward 12-year old during her father's studies as a Guggenheim Fellow, dividing a year of his time between the Missouri Botanical Gardens in St. Louis and at University of California at Davis, before returning with his family to Southern California.

Blending humor, drama, and wit to share with readers her less-than-mundane childhood, Beverley borders on the persuasive with first-person narratives differentiating this book from the wave of memoirs that crashed onto the shores of bookstore shelves in the 1990s biography boom that continues today. Through the mining of family history papers and in-depth historical research, Beverley unveils an upbringing that describes an era of innocence to offer readers a reminiscent glimpse of the influences that formed a foundation of morals and manners by which she lived. Her strong family life gave her a deep appreciation of her rich heritage that includes her maternal grandfather, Henry Clay Somerville, a surgeon (as a civilian in the Hospital Corps) in the Civil War and her paternal great-grandparents, Jerónimo and Catalina López, two of the original founders ("Pobladores") of the City of Los Angeles.

Taylor Whitney, M.A.
President and Founder
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Editor, designer, archivist, photo curator, publisher
Reflections from Box 150:
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Introduction

We are the memory keepers of our own generation, as well as our parents' generation. Without our stories, both oral and written, our collective past would not exist. In every age, there are those who are aware of the duty, or better said, the necessity, to record life as it was lived at a particular time and place. The death of Grady Sanderson, at age 92 (in 2006), the last living member of my parents' generation who worked and lived on The U.S. Horticultural Field Station, made me acutely aware of the need to tell my story of that unique place, and of what life was like, at least for me, growing up there. If I don't, who will tell the tale? For what narrative do we have regarding those most primitive people, whose few skeletal remains tell us that they lived in the area some 4,000-7,000 years ago? All we have is what I was shown as a child in the brush at the edge of the Lower Field—piles of shells and a few matates to indicate that there was once a thriving settlement there along the shores of an ancient sea. They left no written record. Likewise, where is it recorded what motivated scientists in 1922 to re-occupy this small plot of land near the ocean north of La Jolla, in order to grow exotic plants on the sage-covered hills and in dry arroyos; and who were these scientists? I suppose the story of this decision can be found amongst the dusty files of a government office somewhere, but I have no information regarding the beginnings of this project. As a child, I saw a palm tree growing in a distant canyon, a Macadamia nut tree growing by the side of the road, some crumbling stone steps covered with vines leading nowhere, and a neglected tennis court. This indication of a previous grand design meant nothing to me at the time, just as the midden sites aroused no curiosity. They were merely layers of history, as well as mysteries that fueled a childhood imagination. But now all evidence of The Station has been physically erased by the latest occupants. Yes, the buildings, the fences, the roads, even the arroyos are gone; only a few landmark pines remain. I feel the need to tell its story—and my place in it—more urgently. All the documents regarding The Station that were in my possession were sent to the La Jolla Historical Society to be secured for posterity. What is left is what gives the story a human touch—brings history to life, gives maps and photos meaning, and keeps memories alive.

At this point, I must warn you: I am aware that my memories are not always accurate, because time has passed, things have been forgotten or omitted, some facts were never really known or can only be guessed, and emotions play a large part in the telling. Moreover, much of what I have to say is from a "reflective vantage point" which, I believe, should be an important ingredient in any memoir. Memoirists tend to look for patterns or lessons gleaned from events in their lives, for what is a story without a moral, or a life without a beginning, middle, and end?

My story and my memories begin some time around 1937, when we moved to the U.S. Horticultural Field Station. This was the stage on which my growing up took place. All of the vignettes included in this memoir have some relationship to, and were influenced by, what we called "The Station" in those days. In fact, one might say that The Station is the ever-present hero of this memoir. My physical ties to it were cut when I went away to college, but as I write about my youth, I realize how my sense of self—of who I am and where I came from, as well as how life was lived in the forties and fifties in southern California—was shaped by the unique experience of living on The Station. So "speak, memory," to celebrate a bygone era and to help construct life stories that define an individual life, as well as an age.

Beverley Whitaker Rodgers

Backstory

-With a Little Help from the Dictionary-

The U.S. Horticultural Field Station, Torrey Pines, California. That's where I lived. What does that sound like to you? What is a "horticultural field station?" It sounds like a bad, off-color joke, doesn't it? According to Webster's Dictionary, "horticulture" means "the art of growing fruits, vegetables, flowers, or ornamental plants." A "field station" would be a place where growing such plants would take place, and "U.S." infers that the United States Government had a hand in the enterprise. Box 150, La Jolla, was our mailing address, but obviously that's not where my family and I lived. As you can imagine, I spent a lot of time trying to clarify the situation. I would explain that it was a farm, and like most farms, it had no street address and was not connected to any nearby town. I would describe it as being two miles south of Torrey Pines Park (now called Torrey Pines State Reserve), 14 miles north of San Diego, five miles northeast of La Jolla and one mile east of the Pacific Ocean off Highway 101.

The U.S. Horticultural Field Station was located 14 miles north of San Diego, just off Highway 101.
1925

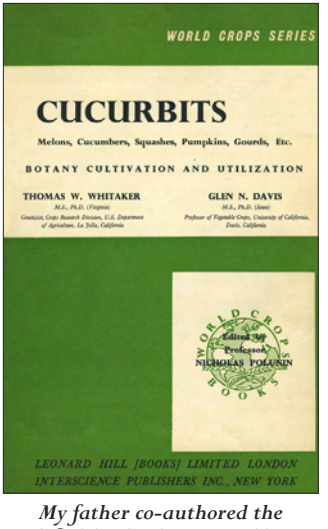
In spite of being "out in the sticks" according to most people in La Jolla (where we shopped, dined, did business, and went to school), it has become for me, in my memory, "this other Eden:" a place where the landscape had a beauty and significance all its own and the breezes were always fresh and smelled of the sea. Exciting adventures were just around the corner, and even everyday experiences were unique.

California's Torrey Pines State Natural Reserve is located on the cliffs above Torrey Pines State Beach about 2 miles north of the U.S. Horticultural Field Station, where 1750 acres have been dedicated to preserving the fragile tree. The tree can be found only here in this one part of the Unites States and Santa Rosa Islands off the coast of Santa Barbara because, it is believed, that in ancient times the islands were connected with the mainland. Since the tree was designated as one of the nation's rarest pines, steps were taken to preserve it in its native habitat. Therefore, in 1970, the name changed from Torrey Pines Park to the more serious and accurate name Torrey Pines State Reserve. However, in my stories, I often refer to it as a "park" not a "reserve" because that is what it was thought of at the time when we first arrived on the scene.

Before it was "The Station;" it was the "U.S. San Diego Acclimatization Garden," and its purpose was different from what it became under my father's leadership. Referring again to Webster's Dictionary, "acclimatization" has to do with adapting plants under controlled conditions to new temperatures, altitudes, climates, and environments. Thus this "garden" was a place where plants that had their origins in other parts of the country—or the world for that matter—were raised in controlled conditions to ascertain whether or not they could adapt and flourish in the Mediterranean climate of Southern California. The potato, corn (maize) and the cacao bean—all indigenous to the Americas—are obvious examples of how, having been introduced into countries far from their source, they adapted and radically changed the economies and therefore, the way of life in these countries.

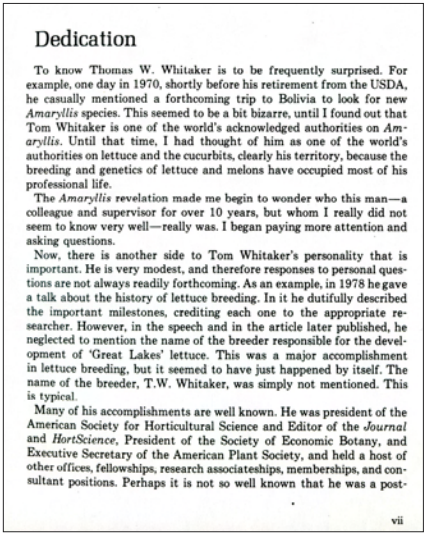
During the early 1900s, there was a rush to find more of these plants. The first maps of The Station yield some clues as to what had been planned for the acclimatization garden. It was to be a place where scientists would introduce non-native plants to see if they could be grown for commercial purposes. Apparently there were several such plots in different parts of the United States, where this work was being done in the twenties and thirties. If you look carefully at the map on page xxviii, you will see bananas being grown in one section; in another, coffee and guavas; in another, avocados, rubber trees and palms; and "foreign" cottons in several other spots. What really puzzles me is why some of the plants were located in relatively inaccessible parts of canyons, while others, such as the clusters of aloes and agaves, natal plum hedges and mulberry trees, grew along the edges of the country roads and were the landscape of our daily life. It is interesting to note that all of the above-listed plants are no longer considered exotic; we just take it for granted that they have always been grown in the United States.

At some point in the early 1930s, the Acclimatization Garden was phased out and replaced with a more important enterprise. A new concept for California—irrigated agriculture—had been developed, and farmers found it more lucrative to concentrate on single crops that would feed the nation, rather than raising a variety of ornamental plants. It was recognized that the soil of the Imperial and San Joaquin Valleys was fertile and the climate was right; all that was needed was water. Once the problem of access to water was solved, primarily by a system of aqueducts, the farmers needed back-up from the government to improve their product, and that's where my dad and other geneticists came in. Dad was hired to work as a specialist on cantaloupes, gourds, and lettuce, and The Station was selected as his workplace.



My father co-authored the definitive book on cucurbits.

The Station was an ideal spot for experimentation with plants, because the climate was mild and there were two growing seasons per year. On this 63-acre farm, leased from the city of San Diego, scientists planned to grow, experimentally, a variety of crops important to the U.S. economy. The specific traits scientists were working on were improved flavor, disease resistance, and ability to be shipped. They were early practitioners of "genetic engineering," you might say. Dad's forte was lettuce and cantaloupes. He developed the "Great Lakes" variety of lettuce (now called "head" or "iceberg lettuce" and used mostly for wraps) that we eat today. He was also working on cucurbits, such as cantaloupes and gourds. He became an authority on modern-day gourds, as well as those used by ancient civilizations, and he accompanied archeologists on digs to identify gourds, their age, and use. The importance of the work of such scientists as my dad cannot be overestimated. The strength and viability of U.S. agriculture, as well as agriculture in other countries, has its roots in this work.



Dedication

To know Thomas W. Whitaker is to be frequently surprised. For example, one day in 1970, shortly before his retirement from the USDA, he casually mentioned a forthcoming trip to Bolivia to look for new *Amaryllis* species. This seemed to be a bit bizarre, until I found out that Tom Whitaker is one of the world's acknowledged authorities on *Amaryllis*. Until that time, I had thought of him as one of the world's authorities on lettuce and the cucurbits, clearly his territory, because the breeding and genetics of lettuce and melons have occupied most of his professional life.

The *Amaryllis* revelation made me begin to wonder who this man—a colleague and supervisor for over 10 years, but whom I really did not seem to know very well—really was. I began paying more attention and asking questions.

Now, there is another side to Tom Whitaker's personality that is important. He is very modest, and therefore responses to personal questions are not always readily forthcoming. As an example, in 1978 he gave a talk about the history of lettuce breeding. In it he dutifully described the important milestones, crediting each one to the appropriate researcher. However, in the speech and in the article later published, he neglected to mention the name of the breeder responsible for the development of 'Great Lakes' lettuce. This was a major accomplishment in lettuce breeding, but it seemed to have just happened by itself. The name of the breeder, T.W. Whitaker, was simply not mentioned. This is typical.

Many of his accomplishments are well known. He was president of the American Society for Horticultural Science and Editor of the *Journal* and *HortScience*, President of the Society of Economic Botany, and Executive Secretary of the American Plant Society, and held a host of other offices, fellowships, research associateships, memberships, and consultant positions. Perhaps it is not so well known that he was a post-

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doctoral fellow among that most illustrious group of geneticists at the Bussey Institution at Harvard, a group that also included W. E. Castle and E. M. East, and many other geneticists of the classic period.

A measure of the tremendous breadth of interest and ability harbored in this man is found among his reviews of books. I have in my files 23 of these. The books reviewed range from the expected ones in the field of vegetables to also include such diverse titles as "Studies in Genetics," "Haldane and Modern Biology," "The Bering Land Bridge," and "The Sunflower."

This breadth of interest is carried over into his popular and semi-popular writings. The titles include "Collecting Amaryllis in the Bolivian Yungas," "Lettuce: Evolution of a Weedy Cinderella," "Gourds and Gardeners," "Gourds and People," "The Torrey Pines Association, Its Purpose and Program," "Agriculture Behind the Iron Curtain," and "J. T. Rosa, Jr. (1895–1928), Pioneer in Vegetable Crops Research."

This breadth of interest is not to be taken lightly. Tom Whitaker is no dilettante, no jack-of-all-trades. He is master of two important horticultural crops. No one knows more about the cucurbits and no one knows more about lettuce than he does. No one has mastered the sciences of these crops better than he has, as can be seen by perusing the many professional publications he has written on his own or in widespread collaboration. And few have contributed more to the industries of these crops.

It seems to me that the breadth of his interests comes from a spirit of adventure and a fearlessness often found among talented scientists. The depth of his accomplishments with lettuce and melons comes from a spirit of perseverance found in our most dedicated scientists. Breadth and depth together are found only in our best scientists. T. W. Whitaker belongs in that rare group.

This description may give the picture of a formidable man. Not so. He is kind, generous, and friendly. In conversation, these characteristics are wrapped around the ever-present spirit of inquiry, which brings forth many questions nearly always prefaced with "Say, Ed . . . " or "Say, Jim . . . "

Life with Tom Whitaker is a delight. To him, Volume 3 of Horticultural Reviews is dedicated, with respect, affection, and awe.

Edward J. Ryder
U.S. Agricultural Research Station
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Science and Education Administration,
Agricultural Research
Salinas, California

The dedication of my father's book, "Cucurbits," was written by Dr. Edward J. Ryder. Dr. Ryder with whom my father co-authored "Lettuce and Its Production" in 1962.

Dr. Edward J. Ryder in one of his lettuce greenhouses at the U.S. Agricultural Research Station in Salinas, California.
circa 1960

Dr. Edward J. Ryder is now retired and working on a new book.
circa 2003

"Of course, I remember Dr. Whitaker very well. We were friends and colleagues for many years. Tom was actually my boss until 1972, just before he retired in 1973, when the Agricultural Research Service was reorganized. We collaborated on a few publications on lettuce and I grew several trials each winter of my own lettuce breeding materials at the field station in Brawley in the Imperial Valley."

From Edward Ryder in a personal email dated February 20, 2016

That, dear reader, is the backstory—the where and the why of The Station. It remains only to introduce the main characters and explain how they came to be there. My father, Dr. Thomas W. Whitaker, seventh-generation Californian, an incipient farmer, a holder of a B.S. from the University of California, Davis and a Ph.D. from the University of Virginia (with a post-doctorate at Harvard and two years of teaching at the college level under his belt), was anxious to return with his family to his beloved state. For this reason, he was delighted to be offered a job as a geneticist at The Station. In addition, he thought that my mother, who was reluctant to leave the South, would be somewhat appeased by the glittering social life and beauty of La Jolla, and that my brother and I would enjoy living near the beach. For him, The Station seemed to be our destiny, and soon our little caravan was rolling across America from Atlanta, Georgia, to the shores of the Pacific.

We spent one year in a small rented house (or so I believe, although I was not old enough to remember precisely), then we transferred to The Station, where my story begins and where I lived until I went away to college.

Dr. Thomas W. Whitaker remodels vegetables and melons to fit the needs of Western vegetable growers. The Field Station of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Plant Industry, and Soils is the laboratory where plants are . . .

. . . Made to order!

YOU COULD DRIVE from San Diego to Los Angeles a thousand times and never see it because it doesn't stand out, in comparison to the other points of interest along the beautiful drive up the coast.

Yet, it is one of the most important places in the United States, in a way. Keep it in mind the next time you are in a hurry to get to Tijuana, or are coming north from the city of the Padres.

GO NORTHWARD

As you swing northward out of San Diego on Highway 101 you will pull up the grade to La Jolla Junction. From there you speed across a level stretch by the buildings of World War II Camp Callan. The view to eastward is beautiful from there and you'll probably be looking toward Palomar and the other mountains that tower against the sky.

Just before you drop down the Torrey Pines grade you may notice a rather weatherbeaten sign to the right of the highway bearing the words US Department of Agriculture . . . . the rest of the legend is almost unreadable.

FIELD STATION

If you're a common tourist you won't give it a second thought, but if you are interested in the great vegetable industry of California, you should swing into the narrow unpaved roadway and spend a delightful and interesting day at the Field Station of the US Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Plant Industry, Soils and Agricultural Engineering.

It is not a very imposing station as laboratories go, but in it you will find the largest collection of lettuce and melon seeds in the entire world.

SEEDS DEVELOPED

From the staff, you will learn that 90 percent of the lettuce produced in California stems from seeds developed at the station. About 80 percent of the melons from the Golden State owe their existence to the scientists at the station.

Complaining about the government has almost become a religion for many people. The high cost of living, the low returns on crops, the state of the nation, the unrest in Asia . . . . you name it, and the government is to blame for it. Depending upon which side of the political fence you are, you either believe or discount such statements.

GREAT THINGS

Consequently, it is difficult to remember, that in the quiet of the laboratory or through long hours in the field, non-political figures and missions are accomplishing great things with little notice.

Such is the case of the La Jolla station and the people who staff it. Organized in 1923 as an experiment station for coffee and rubber, the station has been directing its efforts, for the past quarter of a century, to the improvement of the major vegetable crops of Southern California.

INDUSTRY SAVED

The story of the station and its work is largely the story of its directors. First, there was Ivan Claude Jagger, whose tireless work from the early 20's until his death in 1939, saved the infant lettuce and melon in-

(Continued on page 20)

Dr. Whitaker, director of the station and one of the country's foremost plant geneticists, stands in the greenhouse with one of the many melon strains developed in the fight to combat Mosaic Disease.

Entrance to the US Horticultural Field Station is easy to miss, as cars speed by on Highway 101, near Camp Callan—just north of La Jolla Junction.

Photos by Anderson

PASSING INSPECTION—USDA Geneticist Thomas W. Whitaker (left) and Farm Advisor A. F. Van Maren inspect the first Coachella Valley field of new romaine lettuce varieties. The new strains were earlier and had better color than other commercial types in the area.

New Romaine For Coachella

HARVEST HAS been completed of a variety and seven romaine lettuce selections on the Yosh Mizutano Ranch, Oasis district, according to A. F. Van Maren, farm advisor. The new variety, Valmaine, and two of the selections have exceptional promise for culture in the Coachella Valley.

The selections matured from seven to ten days earlier than the commonly grown variety, Parris Island. Compared with Parris Island the selections were darker green in color, produced more upright, rigid plants, and had better caps and straighter leaves. In addition, the selections bolt to seed much later than Parris Island in early plantings.

The new variety, Valmaine, was released to commercial seedsmen in March, 1963. Valmaine was developed for culture in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas. It is resistant to downy mildew, a persistent hazard to successful lettuce production in the Rio Grande Valley. Valmaine matured a few days earlier than Parris Island in the Coachella Valley tests. It also produced slightly larger, more compact heads, and darker green exterior leaves than Parris Island.

Downy mildew is not a problem in the Coachella Valley, therefore, one of the earlier maturing selections will probably be better adapted to our conditions than Valmaine.

Valmaine was developed and released by the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station, Weslaco, Texas, and the U. S. Department of Agriculture, La Jolla, California. Mr. Paul W. Leeper, Dr. Thomas W. Whitaker, and Dr. G. W. Bohn directed the work. The selections are derivaties of a cross between Parris Island and a romaine type obtained from Southern Turkey. The breeding work was done at La Jolla and Brawley by Dr. Thomas W. Whitaker, research geneticist and Dr. G. W. Bohn, plant pathologist.

About 200 acres of romaine lettuce were planted by Coachella Valley growers this season. Romaine lettuce provides a significant portion of the "mixed car" shipments, an important outlet for marketing fresh vegetables from the Coachella Valley.

Expanding Alphabet

(Continued from Page 11)

mercial materials which will get the nutrient to the tomato plant.

• There is no value in delaying nitrogen applications after thinning and late applications in the water can hurt more than they help.

• Late watering can have much the same effect as excess nitrogen —excess foliage and spreading of maturity; it is better to get growth early and to slack off on treatment. The grower should remember he is growing for one crop only and has no late set to worry about.

Because of the danger of drift to alfalfa and other crops, DDT and DDD have been removed from the University's list of recommended materials for use on tomato posts, the growers were told by Woodrod W. Middlekauff of the UC Department of Entomology at Berkeley. New insecticides have shown promise for controlling the pests, but they generally have less residual action. "Growers must accept the necessity of repeated applications, and more expense," Middlekauff said.

UC plant pathologists are convinced that the disease called blotchy ripening in California tomato fields is the same as what is known as "gray wall" or internal browning in other parts of the country. The cause is not known, and the various forms of the disease apparently are caused by different environments in which it appears, reported Extension Plant Pathologist Dennis Hall. Among the factors that apparently worsen the condition are high nitrogen, low potassium, high soil moisture and humidity, shade, soil compaction, and the presence of tobacco mosaic virus. "Any of these, alone or in combination, can enhance the development of blotchy ripening," Hall said.

The new mechanical harvesting tomato variety VF 13-L has shown significant improvement over VF 145 in handling and transportation tests.

Close attention to all these factors, the researchers felt, would help growers make the painful conversion from the long accepted hand harvest to the machines which may soon be their major method of harvest. With the bracero program, which supplies most of heir pickers, due to expire in 1964, the huge California industry must not only pay attention to the Vs, Fs, Ns, and Ls of the variety alphabet but must also mind its Ps and Qs in every other part of its work.

My father was one of the geneticists doing research in the field of agriculture, contributing to the changing farming landscape in the state of California. Working on the U.S. Horticultural Field Station, Dad was instrumental in introducing techniques that helped control insect infestation, reduce disease and mold, and bring international foods to the United States.

My father lived on a farm in MacFarland, California, a small town near Bakersfield, during his high school years. Therefore, he was familiar with the valley and its potential. He was one of the first to realize that one day, the San Joaquin and Imperial Valleys would be the birthplace of huge agribusinesses. As we drove through these two valleys in our youth, we teased Dad because he would remark again and again about the fertility of the soil and say that if only there were a water source, the deserts would bloom. We could not imagine those two valleys ever being anything but barren or that the catalyst would be as Dad predicted: water.

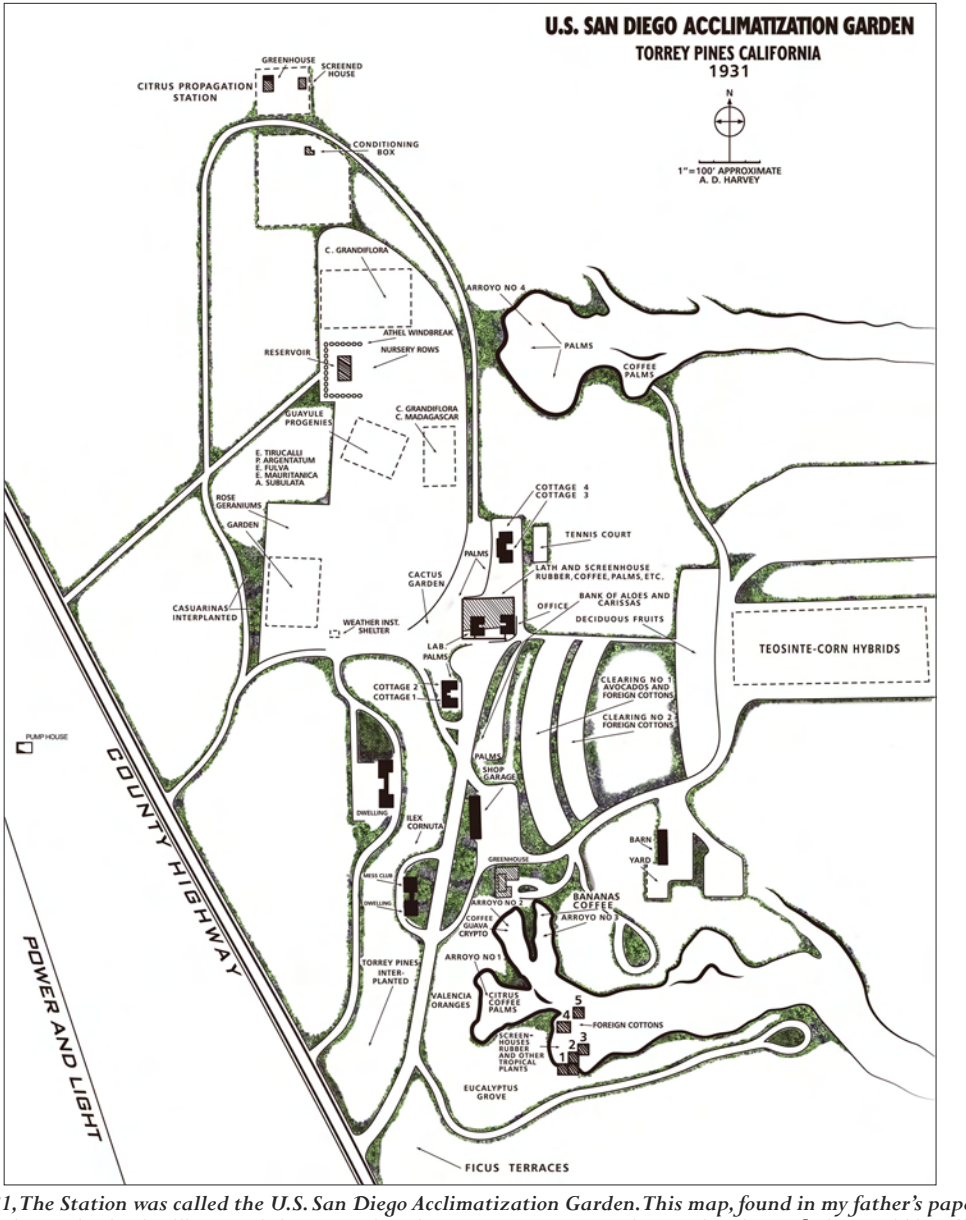
Virtual Tour

-Take a Hike-

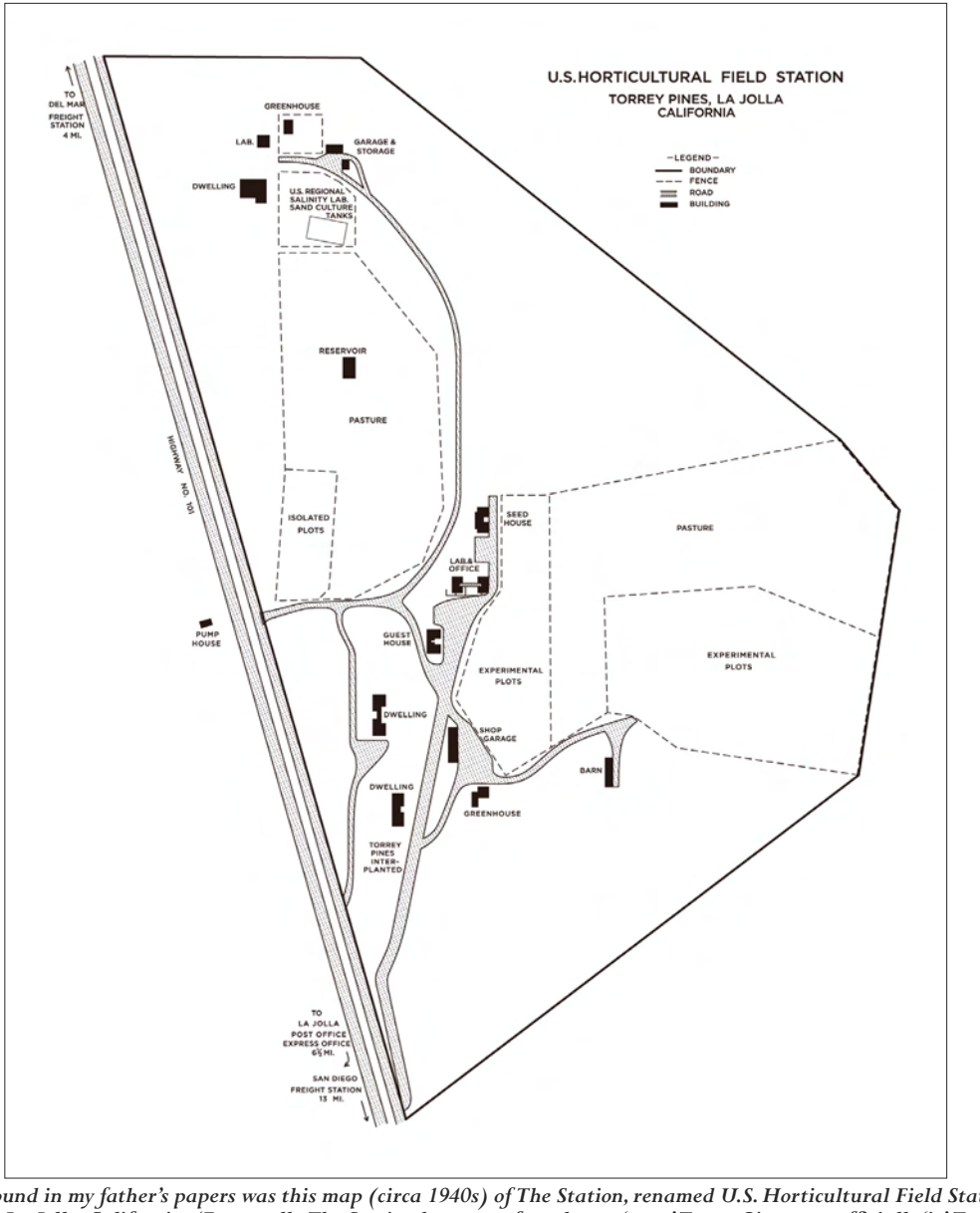
Stories do not happen in a vacuum—every story needs a setting or some indication from the author as to where it takes place. As soon as the setting is established, the author is free to ignore it for the rest of the tale, if he or she wishes. Not so with the story of my childhood; the setting is an integral part of the tale, and all the characters that inhabit the story are influenced in some way by it. In fact, one of the purposes of my memoirs is to explore just how living on The Station has had an impact on my life, because it is thought that to know yourself well, you have to know where you came from. The problem is that The Station has been demolished—arroyos filled, trees cut down, buildings destroyed, and hills leveled. I have had no second chance for an actual tour of The Station; I must rely on memory—assisted by old maps and photos—in addition to valuable personal accounts from two friends, John Bohn, who, like me, grew up on The Station, and Joe Principe, a schoolmate of mine who worked for my father.

I have included two maps and two aerial views of The Station. The first aerial view was taken at 3,500' with a 12" lens in 1924, a year after The Station began operation. On the back it is labeled "Dep't. of Agriculture property on Torrey Pines Grade." It depicts four groups of buildings and a reservoir. The second photograph is another aerial view taken from 3,000' in a southeasterly direction some years later.

With the assistance of maps, aerial photographs and other research documents, I was better able to describe The Station where I was raised north of La Jolla, California.



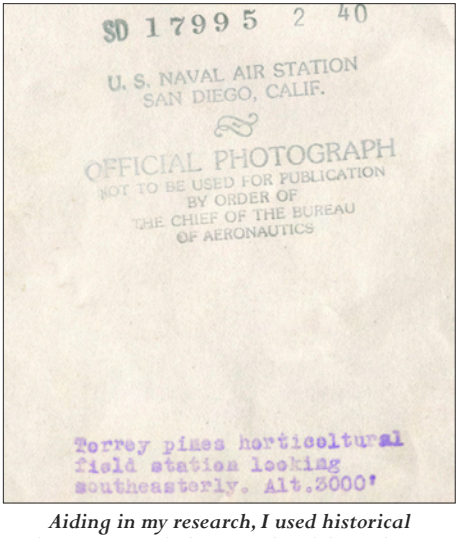
In 1931, The Station was called the U.S. San Diego Acclimatization Garden. This map, found in my father's papers, illustrates the roads, the dwellings and the vegetation that was grown or experimented on by my father and his colleagues.



Also found in my father's papers was this map (circa 1940s) of The Station, renamed U.S. Horticultural Field Station, Torrey Pines, La Jolla, California. (Eventually, The Station became referred to as 'near' Torrey Pines, not officially 'in' Torrey Pines.)

I will refer to the U.S. Horticultural Field Station at Torrey Pines as "The Station."

Circa 1930 aerial view looking southeasterly at altitude 3,000'



Aiding in my research, I used historical documents and photographs with pertinent information stamped on the back.

I've also included a 1931 map, charted pre-The Station, called the "U.S. San Diego Acclimatization Garden." By then, most of the buildings had been constructed. Finally, I reference a map drawn a few years later, after our house had been built and the area had become designated as a Horticultural Field Station. Armed with these resources, I will take you, the reader, on a virtual tour of The Station before beginning the stories of my childhood. I beg your indulgence if I seem to linger too long on any particular place, because as I write, I find that every one of them calls to mind some person, object or tale that I just have to tell you about. I almost feel that I should construct a map like A.A. Milne did in *Christopher Robin*, wherein each spot has an accompanying illustration that refers to something mentioned in the story. However, that's not going to happen, so I suggest that if my stories confuse you, just refer back to one of these maps.

First, a few statistics: The Station consisted of about 63 acres. The residences, greenhouses, and fields used about nine of these acres. The Upper Field near our house was about 390 feet above sea level. This was the highest point on Torrey Pines Mesa; everything went downhill from there, ending with the lowest and biggest field.

A virtual tour of The Station in the years we were there would begin at one of the three entrances off Highway 101, two miles south of Torrey Pines State Park, as it was called then. All of the entrances bore a sign, and although each entrance led to a different section, they were all labeled the same: U.S. HORTICULTURAL FIELD STATION. None of the slightly-faded, weather-beaten signs looked inviting or at all informative. Nothing advertised that here, the futures of some of the major vegetable crops of California were being determined; that here, botanical alchemists were changing unimposing, tasteless, disease-prone vegetables, such as lettuce and cantaloupes, into the beautiful specimens that we see in the markets and put on our tables today.

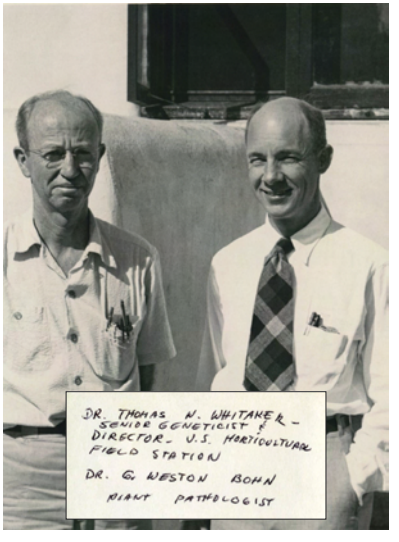
But back to the entrances: to get to our house, we would take the northern entrance. To find the house of Grady Sanderson, photographer and technician, we'd opt for the middle entrance, and to go the Bohns' house or to the office—the hub of all activities at The Station and receiver of most visitors—we would take the southern turn-off. So of course, that's where we'll start.

On the way in towards the office, we will pass the home of Dad's second in command, Dr. Wes Bohn, and his family, consisting of his wife Rene (pronounced rē•nē), children Bob and John, and mother-in-law/grandmother Fran. Their house was on the left and was one of the two barbell-shaped houses marked "dwelling" on the map. The unfortunate shape made it a difficult place to live, because the middle, where you entered, was very narrow and more like a hall than a living room. The large area to the left was where the bedrooms were located, and the similar area on the right contained the kitchen and dining room. To their credit, the Bohns managed to make the place very homey and pleasant.

The three entrances to The Station had relatively benign signs. This one is located at the southern turn-off.
U.S. Horticultural Field Station, Torrey Pines, La Jolla, California

Wes, Rene, children Bob and John, and grandmother Fran lived in the Bohn family house. Later, Wes built a façade to hide the duct work that spanned the roof, and added landscaping, stairs and a retaining wall to make it more attractive.

Grady Sanderson and family's house. Grady was employed as the official photographer at The Station and was responsible for taking many of the photos featured in this book.



My father and Dr. Wes Bohn.
Dr. Thomas W. Whitaker, Senior Geneticist and Director, U.S. Horticultural Field Station
Dr. G. Weston Bohn, Plant Pathologist

I remember going to their house for a Christmas visit. In their living room was a brightly decorated tree that was huge, and was engulfed in stacks of presents of all shapes and sizes. How I envied the lifestyle that could produce such an amazing display of gifts and a tree that appeared to dominate the room! I vowed that when I grew up, I would duplicate this festive room. Later on, the Bohns built a deck with a gazebo and barbecue on the hill behind their home (called "Rene's Retreat"), and created a beautiful, park-like area across the road from their house, with a lawn and trees, which was a great place for the boys and their friends to play.

> "Across the road from the house was just brush, and a lot of it. Dad single-handedly removed all of that and installed a huge lawn. In that process, he made a 'drag' out of 2x4s and had my brother stand on it while I pulled it across and up and down that large area to smooth it out before planting the lawn. It was a great place to play as we grew up in the early fifties."
>
> Exerpt from a personal email from John Bohn, June 27, 2017

Moving on...there is a barely-visible residence to your left on a small rise. It is another barbell-shaped house, and the middle entrance from the highway leads to it. This is where Grady, his wife Flodell, and their large family lived. I don't think I ever went inside their house. We didn't associate with them much, probably because the children were were not our age and my mother and Flodell didn't have that much in common to become friends. Not too many years ago, I was invited to a 60th anniversary party for her and Grady. She seemed very glad to see me, although she had never made an effort to visit us while my parents were alive. I was happy that we could reconnect after all that time. Across from them and down the hill a bit is a tool shop and a garage. We'll pass them again on the way back from the office.

The almost-hidden residence on the left belonged to the Bohn family.

Across and down the road from where the Sandersons lived, is the building with the tool shop and garage.

Taking the left fork, sraight ahead towards the office, are the two guest cottages.

Visitors to The Station parked here in front of the office, which is just down the road from the guest cottages.

Ahead, the road separates; the left fork leads up the hill towards our house. Straight ahead on the left are two cottages joined by a patio in the middle. These are small and used mainly for summer guests (often vacationing families from the field station in the Imperial Valley). I know there was at least one kitchen, because I remember Mrs. Usselman, the wife of one of the workers from the Brawley station, made doughnuts there every Saturday for her family of six children. The enticing smell of fresh doughnuts wafted throughout that part of The Station; of course we all dropped what we were doing and ran to the house to taste the warm, fresh doughnuts.

I remember too that one day a week she would put her girls' hair up in rags to make long "Shirley Temple" corkscrew curls. When she was finished, they looked like movie stars. How lucky they were to have hair like Shirley Temple's! Later, another family group that was cousin to the Usselmans—the Hovleys—spent a few weeks in the summer at The Station over the course of several years. There were six of them, most of whom were near us in age. My brother and I loved the Hovleys. When we were younger, we chased each other all over The Station; when we got older, we actually had a party at our house. Barbara and my brother were quite an item, and Gerry and I made some steps in that direction, but I was too shy to get involved in that boyfriend-girlfriend thing.

My brother Tommy (standing) and Gerry Hovley clown around in the yard.

The Hovleys visited every summer and Barbara and I remained good friends long after I left The Station.

One year, we went down to spend the night with the Hovleys in Brawley. They introduced us to our first A&W Root Beer stand, which had recently become popular. We ordered the special float just to show off (it was huge…maybe half a gallon), and we all got sick on the way home. I've never felt the same way about root beer since. Later in life, Barbara and I renewed our friendship and wrote to each other at Christmas. It was always so good to hear from her.

A little further down from the guest cottages, the main road widens and becomes a parking lot for visitors to the office. It then veers around the building's east side, passing another small cottage that John Bohn called "the seed house" and Joe Principe called "the storehouse/melon house." It is similar in design to the other cottages, called "dwellings" on the map. John seemed to be quite familiar with the seed house.

Opposite this building is a tennis court. To my knowledge, no tennis was ever played there during the time we lived on The Station. My dad, a star player in high school, might have been tempted use it, but I don't think he had time for such things. Furthermore, tennis is a sport that requires at least two people and a well-maintained court, neither of which were available. The road came to an abrupt halt near the tennis court.

"The building was called 'the seed house' while I lived there. The section on the right was used for seed storage, and there were racks of seeds, all cataloged and labeled, just like a library. The left part had large lab tables and racks. Cantaloupes were brought there from the field for scoring and seed collection. I remember many times being my father's "recorder," writing down the measurements and evaluations he did on the fruit on huge spreadsheets. Tools were stored in the building's middle room, but it was actually a fairly well-equipped shop. I was privileged to be able to use it when I got older as long as I, as my dad said, "PUT THE TOOLS WHERE THEY BELONG!"

From John Bohn (son of Dr. Wes Bohn, and the only one who knows more than anybody about the seed house) in a personal email to Beverley while conducting research for this book

My father, on right, with Grady Sanderson, inspecting the red squill (used for rat poison).

Next to the tennis court is an area used occasionally for experiments that the government requested. For example, one experiment involved the guayule plant, a possible source of rubber that could be grown commercially in the United States. Another experiment was red squill, a plant that was being tested as rat poison. Rats are affected by red squill because they do not regurgitate; they eat the poison and die. Until warfarin came along, red squill was the preferred method for getting rid of rats without poisoning humans or domestic animals at the same time. From the road, we can walk on a dirt footpath up the hill that connects to the road leading to our house. We usually take this shortcut when we want to visit the office, but we won't now, because that would mean missing some of the most important parts of The Station. Instead, we'll backtrack to the front of the office.

The puzzle of why the residences looked the way they did was explained to me by Joe Principe, who worked at The Station. In the beginning, money was tight and not too much importance was given to residences—just to the greenhouses—so each residence was a square box including the necessities: kitchen, bathroom and bedroom. Later another box was attached to each of these rudimentary buildings and a hall connected the two and there you had it—a two-bedroom house! The Bohn and Sanderson homes, as well as the office/lab, the guesthouse, and the storehouse/melon/seed house, were all made of thick adobe in Pueblo style. Our house and the one across from it were wood-framed stucco, also in the Pueblo style.

Paraphrased from a phone conversation and personal email with Joe Principe in 2012

A word about the office. It doesn't look much different on the outside from other buildings I've described, thus revealing, on the part of the original architect, a complete lack of imagination or a very tight budget, or perhaps that there was no architect at all. It consisted of two large rooms on each side and a narrower connecting hall in the middle, where the receptionist/secretary sat. The room to the left and front was my dad's office. The most memorable piece of furniture was his huge roll-top oak desk. I'm sure I could have sold it for a good price; it was very impressive and they "don't make 'em like that anymore," as the saying goes. However, I chose to give it to a young man, Mitch Beauchamp, who was mentored by my dad, and who was very kind to him and to me during Dad's last days and afterwards. He assisted with the donation of Dad's magazine collection and other important scientific items that he knew more about than I did. Next to the desk was a file cabinet, and on the other side a sink. Books were lined up on top of the desk, as well as on shelves above the sink. There were photos of his family and his favorite professors from Harvard, where he did his post-doctoral work. I think there were other file cabinets in the room, because my dad had to keep track of the seeds that he had developed, along with photos of the fruit (melons, gourds, and lettuce) in small envelopes, in order to send them to the companies who would grow them and sell them to the farmers. In the other room was an extensive and valuable library of scientific books, magazines, and journals. Also included were the books and papers he had written with colleagues, some 300 in all. I believe behind this library was a space for the darkroom, where Grady developed his photos of plants that my dad had been working on. To the right front, past the secretary's domain, was Wes's office, and another room behind it that might have been a lab.

The office, where Father worked, was a major focal point of The Station.

This Pueblo style stucco building made of thick adobe was the office.

Father at his roll-top desk.

Dr. Wes Bohn at his desk.

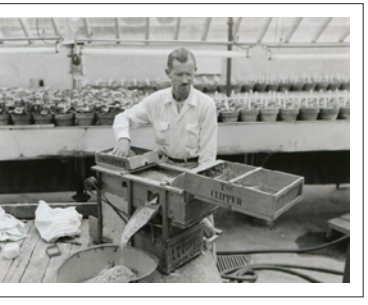
We are now in front of the office, retracing our steps, past the guest cottage and heading down the hill toward the garage on the right, where heavy farming equipment (trucks, tractors, plows, etc.) are stored and where the tool shed is located. On the left is another plot, with different kinds of crops growing there. The only constant is a line of avocado trees; I know we didn't eat avocados in those days, so I can't tell you what kind they were or what they tasted like. I do know the trees were good for climbing and the coyotes liked to eat the fruit.

A greenhouse and a fairly deep arroyo will keep us from continuing straight ahead past the garage, so the road divides here. The above-mentioned arroyo, or canyon, as we called it, deserves some space, although it wasn't as spectacular or visited as often as the one on the way to my house, since I rarely hiked into this canyon. However, it did have its attraction: a mysterious staircase. One day, as I was climbing down the side of the canyon, I suddenly came upon some steps, appearing from nowhere and ending abruptly. The state of extreme disrepair led me to believe something dreadful had happened there. The surrounding vegetation had begun to cover the steps. Vines and weeds filled the cracks and pried them apart. Driven by my fertile imagination, and fueled by stories of ancient civilizations such as Angkor Wat, I looked closer to see if there were any inscriptions carved on them. I found nothing. Then, remembering detective Nancy Drew in *The Clue in the Crumbling Wall*, I inspected them to determine if there was a hidden message, or a diary or a letter. Nothing. I thought no one knew the history of the stairs or their purpose. The mystery was solved when I had a chance, many years later, to see the 1931 Acclimatization Garden map. Apparently there were areas in the canyon where rubber and other tropical plants, as

Heading down the hill from the office is the garage for heavy equipment and the tool shed.

These greenhouses were next to Arroyo No. 2.
See inset on next page

Arroyo No. 2 was near the large greenhouse and had an aura of mystery.

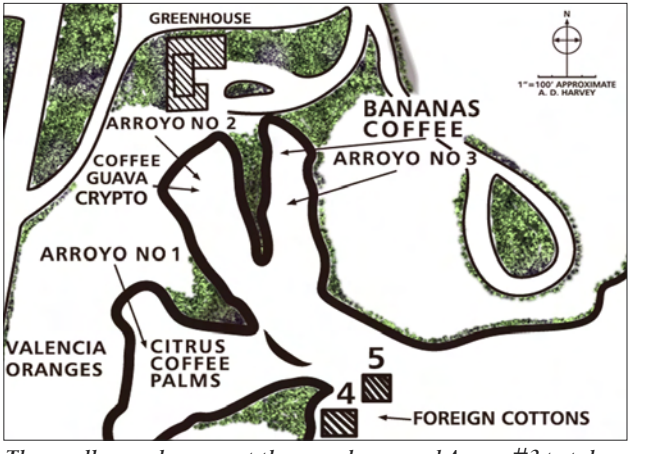


Photographer Grady occasionally helped sort seeds at the hopper.

well as foreign cottons, citrus, coffee, and palms, were grown. Obviously the workers would need stairs to access their projects. When they left, they took what they could, but left the stairs behind. What a disappointing end to my speculations!

The divided road goes up the hill to meet the main road near the Bohn house, and the left hand fork takes an abrupt 90-degree turn and runs steeply down to the Lower Field. A gate marks the end of this road. To the right is a thriving mulberry tree, the only remains of an ambitious plan to establish a silkworm industry in San Diego County.

Next to the mulberry tree is another barn for tools, and on the other side of the road is a pen for chickens. There I got my first introduction into the psychology of the chicken, and indeed, a life lesson. I accidentally opened their cage one day and they all escaped. When I tried to catch them individually or herd them in groups back into their cage, they began squawking, flapping their wings and running in all directions like my students did when a substitute was in charge of the class. It was then that I recalled a word of advice from the great early-American writer Nathaniel Hawthorne about butterflies: "...a butterfly, which



The smaller road goes past the greenhouse and Arroyo #2 to take a sharp left at the main road to lead to the Lower Field.

While doing more research for this book, John Bohn told me that his father knew of the stairs, because he saw them by Arroyo No. 3 near where the bananas and coffee were grown.

Father standing next to the flourishing mulberry tree.

Next to the mulberry tree is a second barn for tools.

My father checking on the crops in the "Lower Field," looking toward Sorrento and Highway 5.

My brother Tommy used a plow similar to this one when "working the fields."

Tommy working with Murd, one of the field hands.

when pursued, is always just beyond your grasp, but which, if you will sit down quietly, may alight upon you." I stopped pursuing the chickens and calmly found a bag of chicken feed. Then I tossed the feed around inside their cage. Next I called them, "Here, chick, chick," and they all stepped docilely back into captivity as though that's what they'd planned to do all along.

The Lower Field, at four acres, is the biggest area under cultivation. In season, there are rows of tomatoes, string beans, chard, lettuce, melons and corn—all being grown experimentally. I remember as a small child getting lost in the hybrid cornfield. It was near the end of the season and the stalks were higher than my head…my first experience of being in a "corn maze."

My brother enjoyed farm work; he learned to drive the tractor, use the plow pulled by mules, hoe weeds, dig ditches, and all manner of "down and dirty" farming duties. Being a girl, my tasks were limited to household chores. I did pick tomatoes and pole beans for dinner, and one summer I learned to hand-pollinate the cantaloupes, but that was the extent of my outdoor work. I did, however, learn to appreciate all the labor that went into farming.

There is one more stop before leaving the Lower Field: a special surprise. At the furthermost remote end is a sizable midden, consisting of broken shells of all sorts, human skeletal remains, and metates (stones with a concave upper surface used as the lower millstone for grinding grain), all of which indicate that the land had been inhabited some 4,000-7,000 years ago. Scientists have inspected the area and determined through carbon dating that a primitive civilization had settled here either on the edge of what was once an inland sea or at the shores of an ancient ocean. Awesome! My friend Joe Principe tells the story of accidentally digging up human bones there. People from the nearby University of California were notified and added the relics to their collection of artifacts from this particular midden.

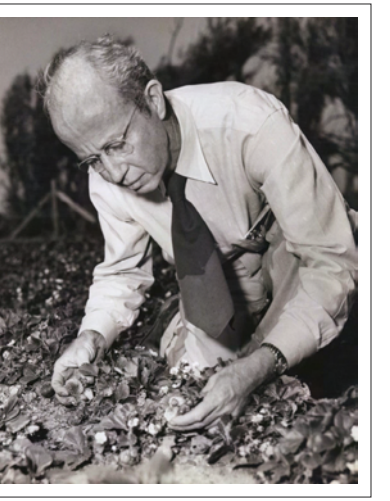
Now we have a choice to make: 1) we can trudge back up the three hills to reach the road that goes to the other part of The Station, or 2) we can hitch a ride on a truck going up that way. The thought of retracing our steps all the way up the three hills is not pleasant, so let's opt for the truck, even though the ride will be a bumpy one.

Virtual Tour

-Hitch a Ride-

After a short ride, we find ourselves where the road we are on intersects with the main road to our house. In front of us is the second-largest pasture, which is the highest point on The Station at 390 feet above sea level. It is surrounded by barbed wire, and in the middle are a covered reservoir and some trees. The reservoir is a mystery; I have no recollection as to what it was for or even if it had water in it.

The rest of the field has had many purposes. My horse Navajo was kept there, because it was close to our house and I could take care of her food and water needs easily. It was convenient having her nearby; when I wanted a short ride, I'd put on her hackamore (bridle) and ride her bareback without the trouble of saddling her up. The milking cows were also kept in the Upper Field, but at the other end, nearer to the office. They had their water trough and their hay together under some shade trees. I'm sure they enjoyed their al fresco dining out in the fresh air—no stuffy barn for them! I don't know for sure when or why we got rid of the cows—probably after World War II—but I do know that Dad sold Navajo after I left for college.



Father inspecting the strawberries for Victor Voth's research.

Sometime in the late fifties, Victor Voth, who was working out of the UC South Coast Research and Agricultural Extension Center in Irvine, and who was known as "the strawberry guru" of California, claimed the land in the Upper Field to develop new marketable strains of strawberries. Needless to say, The Station personnel were provided with delicious samples of Victor's experiments in return for use of the land.

"It is interesting to note that, in 2019, the California strawberry was praised for being bigger in size, brighter in color and more flavorful due to the year's rain. My observation, however, is that the research of genetics conducted by Victor Voth and encouraged by my father and other scientists, is the reason for the beautiful strawberries we have today."

Victor Voth tending to his strawberry fields at The Station.
1955