

GROWERTALKS

Acres & Acres

9/1/2024

The More Things Change ...

Chris Beytes

One of the benefits of working for an 87-year-old publication is access to its archives. Since that first issue in May of 1937, *GrowerTalks* has covered the floriculture marketplace through nearly nine decades of history. Occasionally, I like to dive back into old issues to see what was on the minds of George J. Ball and his sons and the growers they visited. What I most often find is the more things change, the more they stay the same.

These examples are all from the 1940s:

September 1945—Christmas Marigolds

We always seem to be looking for something to sell alongside (or instead of) poinsettias. George was, too (also note the cool growing temperature, something else we seek today):

“On September 1 last season we made a sowing of this dwarf French class just to see what could be done with them. They were grown on in 2 1/2-in. wooden bands and in a 45 to 48F house, and we had them fairly well in flower for Christmas ... It should be unnecessary to remind anyone of their colorful value in combinations, and considering the amount of holiday business that’s done in combinations, this suggestion should be considered.”

April 1948—Storrs and Harrison

George lamenting the loss of a well-respected nursery, which at one time had 10,000 acres and 300 employees. We, too, have recently lost some well-respected businesses:

“Fifty years back we very clearly recall the high position of this firm in the retail, nursery and seed business at Painesville, Ohio. Today, after 93 years of contribution to horticulture, this valuable firm of Storrs and Harrison is in bankruptcy. Whether this is due to lack of enuf* close, hard management in recent years is not easy to say. But at some state in its life this break from the enterprising spirit of its past must have happened ... Storrs and Harrison operated in the past during the golden era of business. They probably would have been flourishing today had management been more conservative or foresighted.”

April 1948—More Work, More Pay

Carl Ball reported from the University of Illinois Short Course on a presentation on one way to get more work from your staff:

“Rod McClellan of San Francisco gave a snappy talk on efficiency in greenhouse operation. To illustrate his points, he described McClellan’s operating procedures, particularly in dealing with personnel. According to Rod, they’re pretty well set up on an incentive basis with extra pay rewarding the fast, skillful, hard-working people. This is an

admirable set up, as increased production and decreased costs benefit 1. society (greater production and efficiency), 2. McClellan's (lower labor costs, more profits), and 3. the employees (larger paychecks). ... McClellan's talk suggests the unquestionable value of getting fast, efficient, dependable help and rewarding them in proportion to their effort."

June 1949—Greenhouse Cost Keeping

Vic Ball gives them (and us) all six reasons to keep cost records on greenhouse crops:

1. You can detect and eliminate crops that don't pay their own way. You probably already suspect some of your crops, but lack the facts.
2. Your cost system will tip you off to a crop you may not be handling right. Warned by the records, you can often find the trouble—poor varieties, disease, a rotation that ties up bench space too long.
3. With cost records, you can decide on facts whether it is cheaper to buy young stock, cuttings, etc. or to produce it yourself.
4. Cost accounting helps keep you oriented in changing conditions. All your production costs are going up; flower prices certainly aren't. Which of your crops are paying this year?
5. A common retail grower's question: Is it cheaper for me to grow my own carnations or buy them? Set up a cost sheet on them, crediting it with all the flowers produced at published market prices. You'll have the answer each year.
6. Satisfaction that goes with knowing and controlling your costs.

January 1948—Ten Years of "Talks"

Carl Ball on noting that they forgot to mark the tenth anniversary of *Grower Talks*. His dad's explanation: "We were too busy getting out orders to notice!" Carl concluded:

"... the future of 'Talks' is largely in your hands. When we no longer write of things you are interested in, we'll stop printing. So let's have your comments—favorable or otherwise—on how we can keep it interesting to you. We're anxious to make 'Talks,' like our West Chicago newspaper, 'Cussed by few, discussed by many and read by all.'"

Seventy six years later and we're still printing, Carl! **GT**

**George subscribed to the movement of the time known as "simplified spelling," which was also used by the Chicago Tribune.*