President’s Message

May 2012

My son graduated from college this month with a degree in history. Although I may have once hoped that he would have studied horticulture, it is important to realize the value of studying history. I keep SHAP’s history book close at hand for two reasons: it is very entertaining and it allows me to use other peoples’ thoughts to write my letters.

Recently two reports in it stood out to me. The first was a comment about the 1890 season. It was called the most disastrous ever experienced…not only were Pennsylvania orchards bare, but also those of Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey and New York. Many growers in the state can resonate with bare trees this season. Similarly, the 1904 and 1936 crops experienced severe winter damage and 1945 “will be remembered by many growers as the one [year] with the shortest crop of fruit ever experience.”

The other report is one of continuing importance and deals with something over which growers have more control. At the 1888 meeting, Professor W.A. Buckhout from Penn State talked about the Hatch Act of 1887 which authorized the establishment of agricultural experiment stations in affiliation with land grant colleges in each state. Its effect on the fruit industry was timely as indicated by the following two reasons given for the name change of the Fruit Growers Society to the Horticultural Association in 1881. First, “insects and diseases were so bad some growers thought the end was near for the fruit trees and had changed to growing vegetable crops to make a living; and [second] many nurseries had added ornamentals to their line and wanted this part of horticulture added to the meetings.” The revitalization of the Pennsylvania fruit industry was directly correlated to the establishment of experiment stations.

SHAP is a strong supporter of research projects and the Mid-Atlantic Convention in Hershey and this Fruit News publication relays the information to growers. The majority of research is done at FREC in Biglerville but scientists from other places also may submit proposals. Our situation in Pennsylvania is unique as we are the only state horticultural organization which funds its own research without outside monies. Independence in today’s regulated world is a blessing. SHAP’s Board of Directors passed a resolution to increase research funding by an additional $100,000.00 per year by 2015.

Back to the value of studying history. There are plenty of challenges on our doorstep that need further and aggressive study-BMSB, spotted-wing drosophila, and scab resistance to name a few. As growers we have control over how quickly we get answers by how much we fund research. We cannot risk the viability of our industry while waiting for others to get answers for us. If we want to encourage the next generation to carry on our efforts, then it is important to show them we are invested in it. That investment doesn’t always come in John Deere green or New Holland blue, but also in setting aside funds for increased knowledge. One doesn’t have to look far on their farm to see how they have benefitted by scientific research. In the coming weeks you should receive a letter from SHAP outlining our plan. Please give serious consideration as to how you can contribute.

Respectfully,

***Carolyn McQuiston***