

MINUTES

of

CONVENTION OF CITRUS FRUIT GROWERS OF FLORIDA,

CALLED TO MEET IN ORLANDA, FLORIDA, SATUR-

DAY, NOVEMBER 4, 1911.

The convention was called to order at 10:00 o'clock a. m., Joshua C. Chase, Esq., acting as temporary chairman.

MR. CHASE: The meeting will please come to order. In the absence of the President of the Fruit Growers & Shippers Association, I, as Secretary, will read the call of the meeting on which this meeting was based:

(Reads) "Jacksonville, Fla., Oct. 17, 1911.

To the Citrus Fruit Growers of Florida:

In view of the libelous course pursued by the Florida Citrus Exchange in stigmatizing Florida oranges when shipped at this time as poisonous, and in view of the injury that the industry is likely to suffer from the gross misrepresentations and misstatements that have been spread throughout the United States, a convention of citrus growers is called to meet in Orlando, Florida, on Saturday, November 4, 1911, to consider the matter and present the true facts to the people of the United States so that the false impressions created by the libelous publications referred to may be removed from the minds of consumers of citrus fruits.

(Sgd.) ALEX. ST. CLAIR ABRAMS, JACKSONVILLE."

Now, gentlemen, what is your pleasure in electing a temporary chairman?

CHAIRMAN: What is the pleasure of the convention?

MAJ. ABRAMS: I move that you appoint a committee on representation, those who are members of this convention.

CHAIRMAN: The general rule is that the committee be appointed by the chairman. Therefore I appoint the following gentlemen:

M. S. Moreman,
W. P. Barnett,
T. J. McLain,
Fred W. Fee,
Braxton Beacham,

A motion was then made that a committee on permanent organization be nominated and the chairman appointed the following:

B. F. Tillinghast,
H. H. Pattishall,
S. J. Carlton,
William Angas,
E. A. Thomas,

CHAIRMAN: In the meantime, while the committee is at work, I want to introduce Major Abrams, who will state the object of the meeting.

MAJ. ABRAMS: I would suggest that perhaps it is rather early, it seems to me rather premature, that I should state the purpose and objects of this meeting, as I understand that quite a large number of other persons, men who are orange growers, are on the way now, and will arrive later in the day; but, as I have been asked to do it, I will start right now.

Because of the attacks made upon me for the part I have taken in denouncing the act of the Citrus Fruit Exchange, it may be necessary for me to say something rather personal of myself. I have been charged, first, with taking this stand because I am distantly related by marriage to one of the fruit growers who had been arrested. Now, my friends, I had not seen that gentleman for years when I started to oppose it, I had not spoken to him for years, I have had no communication with him orally or written up

to this hour, I do not represent him professionally in any manner, shape or form, and this story is but a part of the systematic misrepresentation and falsehood which this Citrus Exchange is circulating concerning every man that does not bend his knee to that corporation, and assist in making it a monopoly in the State of Florida. (Applause)

Failing to create any impression on the public mind because of this absurd statement, they have gone a little further. It is now charged that because I represent the Florida East Coast Railway in certain cases, that I have been instructed by that Railway to oppose this libelous publication which has threatened the entire industry. Now, there are some men before me today who have known me for the past thirty seven years, who have known me when I had the courage to get up and express my personal views on public matters, when doing so threatened me with political and professional death, and I never hesitated one moment to say what I thought, regardless of consequences. Neither man nor corporation has ever yet succeeded in putting a collar around my neck and leading me where I didn't want to go. (Applause)

It has been charged that I am taking this stand because I am representing the Florida East Coast Railway in certain claims or cases that have been brought by this Citrus Fruit Exchange against it. My friends, I do not represent the Florida East Coast Railway in one single case brought by any members of the Fruit Exchange or by the Fruit Exchange against it. Here you have another of those lies that have been put in circulation for the purpose of breaking down every man who will not put the Fruit Exchange collar around his neck in the State of Florida. (Applause). And what is more, when I read that libel, I telephoned the Vice President to know if there were any cases pending against it by the Fruit Exchange, and I heard there was one single case in existence

personally liable for every dollar of debt that that company contracted, without any power on the part of a single member to limit that liability or to prevent extravagance on the part of the men who managed it. I found, further, that it inflicted a penalty on every man who could find a buyer for his fruit at prices satisfactory to him of 50¢ per crate. I was mindful then of what is known as the Sherman act of Congress. I had studied the question, and I warned Mr. Inman, as I warned every member of the fruit exchange here that that provision in the contract signed by them violates the law of the land and exposes every member to fine and prosecution and to imprisonment. I told Mr. Inman that I was a sworn officer of the court and I did not propose knowingly to become a party to what was and is clearly a violation of law. I have quit bucking against the Government of the United States. Fifty years ago, as a boy of sixteen, for four years I tried to whip it, and it licked the hide off of me, and I don't propose in my old age to try any more such experiments with the Government of the United States. And, my friends, only recently the Supreme Court of the United States and every Circuit Court of Appeals of the United States before which this question has been brought, has declared in clear, emphatic terms that this is a violation of the law. They said it in the Tobacco Trust Company case, they said it in the **Bath** Trust Company case, and they have said it here to the State of Florida in the case of the Southern Wholesale Grocers Association, that any contract or agreement which fixes a penalty on any member against dealing with anybody else, is in restraint of trade, is a violation of that statute, and exposes every man forming that combination to civil and criminal prosecution. (Applause)

CHAIRMAN: I would like to interrupt you just a moment. I would request the Committee not to make so much noise in getting the names.

MAJ. ABRAMS (Continuing) Thus, my friends, what I told Dr. Inman before a single decision had ever been rendered, has been verified by the final appellate tribunal of this republic and by every inferior tribunal of the United States; and sitting before me in conference, Dr. Inman said that which was plain to be seen, however, that the real purpose and object was to create a monopoly and control the entire citrus industry of this state.

Now, my friends, I have never changed one iota from the position I took years ago, namely, that I am opposed to monopolies, or trusts, in any form or shape in this land of ours. I am opposed to any man or set of men dictating to me to whom I shall sell my product or what price I shall take for it. I propose to maintain the right of an American citizen to do with his property that which he thinks is for his best interests and for the promotion of his prosperity, and not to be tied, shackled and bound by the dictation of any man or set of men. Only a few days ago there was an illustration by this Fruit Exchange of the arbitrary, monopolistic purpose of it. I am going to call names. Not many days ago, Mr. Gilgore, a member of that Exchange, had two car loads of crated fruit for sale, and tried to sell it through the Citrus Exchange of which he is a member. He is in South Florida. They told him the best they could get for him was \$3.50 per crate f. o. b. Right at his door was a man who offered him \$4.00 a crate for it, and he sold it, as he ought to have done, as his duty to himself and his family re-

quired him to do,---he sold those two car loads of fruit for \$4.00 a crate. Wouldn't every one of you have done the same? What is the result? Because he did it, they raised a row with him, and assessed a penalty against him of 70¢ per crate, or \$420.00, and because he refused to pay it, they kicked him out of the Exchange. And, mind you, this corporation have it in their power to kick a man out of that Exchange, and no matter how much money he has contributed to the property it owns, he then ceases to have the slightest interest in it, he then becomes an outlaw, an outcast, and is exposed to the vengeance of this corporation. In other words, it's an organization which says that you must prefer damnation with it rather than salvation outside of it; and, my fellow citizens, I would rather have salvation out of that Exchange than damnation as a member of it. (Applause)

Now, mind you, I come to the crux of this whole question, and I trust that the moment you get tired you will ask me to stop, and I am perfectly willing to sit down then.

Some years ago a certain cry was raised. Was it in Florida? No. Where did that cry begin? In California. And why? Our fruit matures from six to ten weeks before the California fruit matures and becomes fit for shipment. For the purpose of competing with us during that period of time, the California growers commenced to pick their fruit before it had matured and to color it artificially and bring it into the markets of the country in competition with Florida early fruit. Today the whole burden of blame and abuse is being visited upon the Florida early shipper because of something that the California shipper originally did and which has never been done in the State of Florida, for I am unable to find, after a careful

investigation, that there has ever been any artificial coloring of fruit by any grower in the State of Florida; and if there has been any, it has been so ~~ma~~ ridiculously small as not to be worth mention.

Now, then, here comes upon the stand something else: I have a circular printed a short time ago by a concern calling itself the California Fruit Auction Company, in which their circular in plain language says that some time ago this California Fruit Exchange sent agents to Florida to get control of the Florida Citrus Exchange; and it's a remarkable fact that the active managers of this Florida Exchange are immigrants from California who were formerly connected with the California Fruit Exchange. And thus, my friends, we are in the hands----- that Exchange is in the hands ----of the ex-agents of the California Fruit Exchange, which is trying to destroy the Florida industry and secure a monopoly of the citrus industry itself. I don't propose to be governed by any such men, do you? And, my friends, I understand that one of their principal officers has said, when his attention was called to the fact that we should ship our early fruit and thus give way to the later fruit: "Oh, well", he says, "There is no use of shipping Florida fruit in October, because there is plenty of California Valencias in the market." In other words, we must keep from shipping our early fruit to give the California shipper an opportunity of marketing his Valencias at high prices so that when his fruit comes into competition with ours later in the season, we might get little or nothing for our fruit. Is that policy? They failed to secure even a majority of the citrus growers of Florida. Two years ago they caused a great deal of disaffection and a large

number dropped out last year, and I understand that last year they handled less than 25% of the entire crop of the State of Florida. And yet we find them in the attitude of the tail trying to waggle the dog and with their 20% of the crop appearing before the legislature and secretly obtaining the passage of a law which has no precedent in the history of legislation in the United States. I have searched the statutes of every state in the Union---I have been doing it ever since I learned of the passage of that law---and it stands solitary, alone, a monument to the imbecility of a Florida Legislature and to the menace of every fruit grower in the State of Florida.

Eighteen years ago, when I was unfortunately a member of the Senate of Florida, I published my opinion of a Florida Legislature, and I have watched them since, and I have never seen any reason to change that opinion. / In fact, my friends, I have said that while I was as much opposed to perjury as any man in the United States could be, if I should happen to be put on the stand and asked if ever I was a member of the Florida Legislature, I would be tempted to swear and to repudiate anything of the kind. (Great applause)

How was this law passed? Where was the necessity that called for its passage? What amount of immature citrus fruit had the people of Florida ever ~~received~~ shipped that required the Legislature of Florida to put a brand upon the brow of every citrus grower in the State of Florida that he was dishonest, that he was unprincipled, that, for the sake of a few dollars, he was endeavoring to poison men, women and children throughout these United States. Where was the demand for any such law? It was concocted by this very Fruit Exchange, passed through the legislature without opposition, signed because there was no

opposition,---to be used by this Exchange as a weapon to coerce the fruit growers of Florida to submit to plans to create a monopoly of the citrus industry in the State of Florida. I say that law has no precedent. I have read laws ~~for~~ the protection of public health, which regulated the shipment and the sale of something that was of itself deleterious to public health; I have seen laws which regulated the transportation of explosive dynamite, glycerine, gun powder and the like; I have seen laws and read them, which prohibited the shipment of articles full of contagion or infection, because of the danger to every human being throughout the territory through which it might pass; but this is the first law ever put on the statute book which prohibited the shipment of something that of itself was as harmless as an unborn babe and which was not in any way deleterious to health when consumed. I was born in a home that was surrounded with citrus trees. I have been eating oranges, grape fruits, lemons, limes and sweet limes, which, perhaps, some of you never saw, from my babyhood. We didn't call it grape fruit in those days. We called it forbidden fruit. And this is the first time in my life of nearly sixty-seven years that I have ever heard a green orange charged with being poisonous and dangerous to life,---the very first time. I have eaten them green with sugar; I have eaten them green with salt; I have eaten them green without either salt or sugar, and I never before got ^{even} a belly ache from a single one of them; but I have got the worst kind of gripe from eating a green apple;---but you can ship and sell all the green apples to Florida that you have a mind to!

Now, unquestionably, there are certain systems and constitutions in which intestinal disturbance would be created by the eating of not a green orange but equally so of a ripe lemon or

lime. Because a particular system will be injured by it, shall we denounce it as poisonous? If that is the case, you can wipe out every fruit that was ever grown. Why, gentlemen, the worst attack of sickness I had was from eating ripe strawberries, and for years I haven't dared to eat ripe strawberries. Shall we prohibit the shipment and consumption of strawberries because one or two men or a dozen men in the State of Florida can't eat them without their digestive apparatus being impaired? Not many years ago, Mr. S. B. Hubbard, one of the wealthiest and prominent merchants in Jacksonville died between 11 p. m. and four o'clock in the morning from the effect of eating ripe watermelon. Shall we prohibit the sale of watermelons because they acted upon the digestive apparatus of Mr. Hubbard so as to give him acute indigestion and cause his death in five hours? Just see the absurdity! And yet this concern publishes to the whole world a declaration that you and I and others are shipping green fruit, injuring the lives, (mind you, that is the language of the telegram) and health of men, women and children, pronouncing that early fruit shipped by you is poisonous. And what further? Offering a reward, a bribe, to every health officer of every city in the United States if he will confiscate the fruit shipped during a period of thirty days.

MR. CARLTON: Major, I never read that telegram. There may be others here. Have you got it? Just please read that telegram.

MAJ. ABRAMS: I will read it. Before I read it, I want to add this: There are over four thousand cities in the United States. Here was a bribe offered to four thousand health officers in four thousand chartered cities of the United States to confiscate a car load of fruit brought within the city, by the Citrus Fruit Exchange.