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J. T. Rosa, Jr. (1895-1928) Pioneer in Vegetable Crop Research¹

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The tragic and sudden death of J. T. Rosa, Jr. occurred at a comparatively early age in the midst of what surely was to be his most productive years.³ He left behind him, however, a legacy of more completed, and more seminal research than most of us are likely to accomplish, should we be lucky enough to survive the hazards of modern day living to reach the biblical age of three score and ten. As I am one of the few people (living) who knew Professor Rosa from the vantage point of a student, I wish to record my recollections of this inspiring teacher and productive scientist. In completing this task, I have had the assistance of three individuals: V. R. Boswell, H. A. Jones and Gilbert W. Scott. Dr. Jones was a colleague, and Drs. Boswell and Scott were students of Dr. Rosa and worked under his supervision.

As an undergraduate student at the University of California, Davis, I was most impressed with the number and diversity of programs Dr. Rosa had in progress at any one time. Currently, it is fashionable for an investigator to focus his research energies on one, or at

most, two crops. Dr. Rosa had research projects in progress simultaneously on potatoes, spinach, beans, tomatoes, watermelons, muskmelons and cucumbers. These projects were not mere paper exercises, but actual field and laboratory studies in depth, from which much fundamental information was derived and reported. Dr. Rosa was an awesome bundle of restless energy, well-disciplined, and well-directed. Although he seemingly never ran out of energy, he occasionally ran out of time. To counter this uncontrollable annoyance, he arose early, and was on the job by 5:00 AM during the muskmelon pollinating season.



Joseph Tooker Rosa, Jr.

As a teacher, Dr. Rosa was a matter-of-fact lecturer, casually presenting his material on a take it or leave it basis. But in the laboratory and in the field, by precept and example, he instilled in his students and younger associates a thirst for knowledge that remained with them indefinitely. During my undergraduate days, I served as assistant to Dr. Rosa, collecting data and pollinating muskmelons and cucumbers, measuring beans, and serving in other capacities as needed.

Dr. Rosa was a gentle, kindly, courteous man; patient and precise in explaining the techniques needed to perform the task at hand. He was tolerant, yet firm, in correcting the mistakes that inevitably occurred. Always a good-humored optimist, he had no difficulty in relating to students, particularly to those of us in the less-affluent category. This empathy probably flowed from his own experience as an undergraduate. He is reported to have worked his way through 4 years of college at Clemson (now Clemson University) subsisting mostly on a spartan diet of peanut butter, bread and milk, supplemented by scavenging fruits and vegetables in season.

Dr. Rosa readily adapted new knowledge and techniques from diverse disciplines to solve practical problems that arose in his own research. At an early date (1926), he decided that the new science of genetics had much to offer plant breeding. To understand the fundamentals of inheritance, he took time from his busy schedule of teaching and research to audit a class in genetics for undergraduates and graduates. The class was taught by a well-known geneticist, J. L. Collins. In addition to his talents

¹See Jones, H. A. 1928. Joseph Tooker Rosa, Jr. *Proc. Amer. Soc. Hort. Sci.* 25:397, for curriculum vitae. Dr. Rosa was survived by his wife, Bess, nee Naylor, a professional home economist, and 4 children.

²I am grateful to professors O. A. Lorenz and C. M. Rick of the Univ. of Calif., Davis, Department of Vegetable Crops, for making available the photograph and other material in the files of the Department.

³The cause of Dr. Rosa's sudden death remains a mystery. Feeling badly, he left the field in the afternoon for home and went to bed. The next day he died. His physicians suspected a virulent virus, but the exact cause was not determined.

