



North 13th Street. By 1889 William P. Britt and his six sons sold fruit trees and evergreens at their 20-acre nursery west of Rogers.

The Benton County Nursery Company was established in Rogers in 1915 by T.L. (Thomas Lee) Jacobs (1876-1960), after he spent the previous 11 years running a similar operation in LaCross, Arkansas. The nursery was first located in his home on South 4th Street, with Jacobs' bedroom serving as the company office, his barn the packing house. As the business grew, more space was needed. In 1925 a concrete-block building was built on Dyke Road just north of the former Daisy Manufacturing plant located along Highway 71 South.

A brick office and packing house built in 1935 was described as having "spacious dimensions and . . . [of being] designed and built with a view of affording every modern convenience for the rapid handling of . . . business." The nearby Frisco railroad tracks facilitated nationwide shipping.

It was a family business from the start, with Jacobs' wife and children acting as vice presidents and managers in later years. Their motto was "It is not a home until it is planted." In their 1943 catalog the company described themselves in the following folksy manner, an approach cultivated, no doubt, to appeal to "regular" folks:

*Who We Are . . . We are a bunch of old fashioned, hardworking, blue-eyed hillbillies, who grew up right here in these Ozark Mountains, on the farm, and made our living from what we could grow out of this mountain soil and all we know is to treat you exactly like we would want you to treat us if we were in your place and you were in ours. We would be "tickled pink" to work hard all the year and come out with a ten per cent profit.*

*What We Are . . . We are natives of Arkansas, born and reared on farms in the Ozarks and our forefathers as far back as we can trace have all been agricultural people, and we do not know from which European country they formerly came. In fact, they have been in America for many, many generations.*

*Where We Are . . . ON THE TIP TOP OF THE OZARK MOUNTAINS where our growing season is almost thirty days shorter than at Fort Smith, Arkansas. Our summers are short and nights are cool, and our growing season more like that of North Missouri, Iowa and Nebraska . . . Hence our stock is well adapted to the extreme Northern, Eastern and Western States, as well as being the best for the Southern States.*

Every year the Nursery's catalog featured testimonials from satisfied customers. A grower in New Hartford, Missouri, noted: "Last year we had a heavy sleet in April, but the [Concord grape vines] came through and bore a very good crop," while a homeowner in Sedan, Kansas, remarked: "We picked about twenty quarts [of blackberries] in the four weeks the vines were bearing . . . I took first prize at the County Fair for my preserves."

Although they carried a wide variety of plant materials, the Nursery specialized in fruit. As befitting Northwest Arkansas' historic past as a major apple-growing region, several catalog pages were devoted to apples. Listed were summer, autumn, and winter varieties with evocative names such as Early Red Bird, Old Fashioned Horse, Red Astrachan, King David, Arkansas Black, and Winter Banana. Soft fruits were also featured, such as cherries, nectarines, apricots, peaches, figs, persimmons, grapes, and paw paws, as well as a number of exotic berries such as juneberries, youngberries, boysenberries, dewberries, and gooseberries. For \$60 the home gardener or farmer could even order his or her own one-acre fruit orchard "kit" which rather surprisingly included five horseradish plants amongst the pears, quinces, raspberries, rhubarb, plums, etc.

What's interesting about the advertising for the home fruit orchard is its reference to a topic on everyone's mind in 1943 — World War II. By offering the orchard at a low price, the Nursery was "co-operating with our Government which is encouraging the planting of more fruits, etc., to help with the National Defense Program." Featured in the catalog is a quote from the Honorable Claude R. Wickard, Secretary of Agriculture: "Food will win the war and write the peace."

After food rationing was begun nationwide in the spring of 1942, a home garden was an important factor in supplementing a family's nutritional resources. To encourage the planting of Victory Gardens the Nursery put together the Victory seed collection #1, which included a packet each of Early Alaska peas, Chantanay carrots, Golden Bantam sweet corn, Scarlet radish, California Wonder peppers, Detroit Dark red beets, Improved long green cucumbers, and Improved Rutgers tomatoes — all for 65¢ postpaid.

By 1950 the Nursery owned and operated 300 acres of land, including 100 acres in Bentonville. Delicate plants and bulbs were cultivated and readied for sale in the greenhouse. Field-grown plants were dug in October and stored in labeled bins whose floors were covered in damp sawdust to help preserve the plants. Warehouse walls were also sprayed with a special white paint mixture at season's end to ensure a healthy environment. About 100 people were employed during the shipping season.

As noted in an ad placed in the July 1, 1950, edition of the Rogers Daily News, thousands of catalogs were mailed annually to "practically every locale on this earth," advertising the nursery's "hardy trees, plants, shrubs, evergreens and roses . . . and advertising Rogers and Northwest Arkansas." Over 99% of the company's mail-order business was from out-of-town customers, making the business the largest postal customer in Rogers; in 1949 it cost the company \$16,000 to ship plants.

The final fate of the Benton County Nursery is unknown. The company closed its doors sometime between 1961 and 1964, shortly after T.L. Jacobs' death. Since then the brick office and packing house, once described as "one of the show places of Northwest Arkansas," has been greatly remodeled to house various concerns over the years including the Daisy Airgun museum and a thrift store for the Battered Women's Shelter.

#### **CREDITS**

The booklet *A Message to the Homeseeker* (1938) and the *Rogers Daily News* article "Fruits Developed in County's Nurseries" (7-1-1950).