

# CONNECTICUT INDUSTRY

APRIL • 1968

## BURR'S "BUSH FACTORY"



*Reprinted from* CONNECTICUT INDUSTRY, April 1968.

Connecticut Industry is published by The Manufacturers Association of Connecticut.

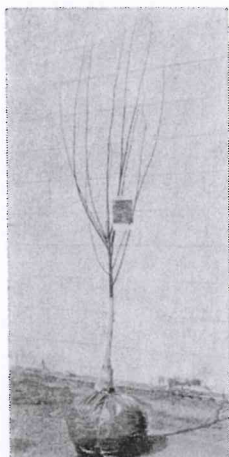


# BURR'S "BUSH

## FACTORY" . . . . Connecticut Case History On Progressive Conservation

Now . . .

*the C. R. Burr & Co., Inc. main offices and a major warehouse facility in which temperature and humidity are closely controlled are housed in this functional Manchester building.*



■ "Only God can make a tree. . . ."

That classic line will be disputed by no one in authority at C. R. Burr & Co., Inc. For 70 years, the Manchester-based firm has been close to Connecticut Valley soil, a healthy company with healthy respect for the omnipotence of nature.

But there is nothing like 70 years in the nursery business — most of them successful years — to make also for a realistic awareness that the Lord helps those who help themselves. There is nothing irreverent in recognizing that production and inventory control cannot be left entirely to the Supreme Being.

The nurseryman must do certain things himself, at precisely the right time and in exactly the right way. That, if one stops to think, summarizes almost any manual of factory management. Whatever the product, differences lie more in techniques than in principles followed.

By doing the right thing at the right time in the right way, the Burr company now has what is probably one of the half-dozen largest nursery operations in the Northeast and, in fact, is outranked by relatively few in the entire country. An odd although not especially important side effect of this growth is that the firm



ABOVE, Charles S. Burr, president of the company and son of its founder, inspects some of the arbor vitae for which his organization is nationally known.

LEFT, quality on parade. Sturdy evergreen shrubs getting their start on a Burr plantation in Connecticut will rise from the ranks to grace some of America's finest homes and recreation areas.





### . . . and Then

*Circa 1910 but, even then, the Burr company could not be called a "one horse" bush factory. Old photo shows work force at warehouse and shipping room then located on Oakland Street, Manchester. Fourth from left in foreground, wearing derby hat, is the founder of the company, Clifford R. Burr.*

may be less well known by its Manchester, Conn. neighbors now than it was in 1898.

The reason is simple, Burr marketing today and for some time past has been on a large scale, strictly wholesale basis, selling to garden supply centers and other nurserymen. Its storage, office, packing and shipping functions are correspondingly large, completely efficient but housed in buildings more functional than ornate. The off-street location, while not remote, gets scant notice from the passer-by.

It was not always that way.

When Clifford R. Burr founded the company in 1898, he specialized in growing fine fruit trees on his then-limited acreage in Manchester and sold them, one at a time, from door to door. It was a good way to start and an excellent way to get better acquainted with more of his neighbors. In the process, he built up a solid reputation for high quality stock and equally high standards of business conduct.

Growth, then, was inevitable: in acreage, product lines and market

coverage. The Connecticut nursery gradually broadened wholesale distribution westward and southward to become well known as far away as Michigan and the Carolinas.

This has been called a conservative member of a conservative industry. To the extent that the phrase fits, company officials neither deny nor apologize for it.

To grow the actual product may be less modern than to fabricate a flashy imitation out of synthetic materials but certainly is no easier. If conservatism means conducting a business in 1968 with the same principles of integrity demanded by its founder in 1898, Burr is conservative. If it is reflected in the firm's policy always to "grow up to quality" rather than "grow down to price," the word still fits. If it is conservative to keep and improve upon the same basic lines in an era when some manufacturers boast of having so many new products never even heard of five years ago, then Burr is in that category.

And doing quite well in it!

Clifford R. Burr may have been

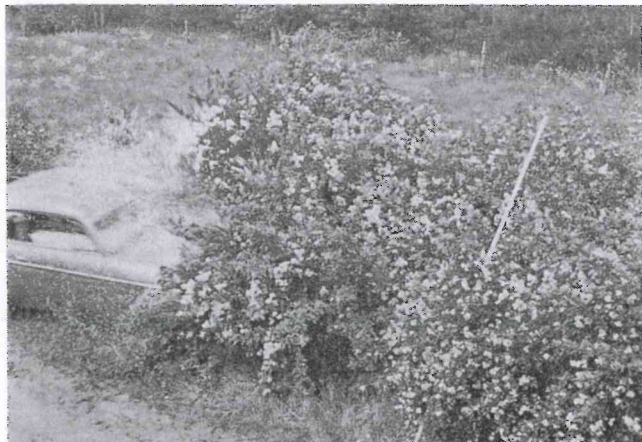
conservative in the constructive sense of that word but he stayed in tune with the times from the day he started until his death in 1946. The record suggests that, as with many typical Yankees, the traditional caution in his makeup was sprinkled liberally with a spirit of entrepreneurship. Some of his ventures paid off, some did not, but willingness to be venturesome always was there. Since his passing, the company has made notable strides in technology, marketing methods and sales volume under his son, Charles S. Burr, now president of the firm. But these result from carefully calculated moves which the founder, if still present, probably would not have resisted and, indeed, might have initiated. He was that kind of a man.

To stay in Connecticut when the center of the market has moved west and south is not conservatism but common sense. Getting back to that "only God can make a tree" concept, Connecticut Valley soil and climate conditions happen to be ideal for propagation of evergreens in particular and those are among the largest factors in Burr's business volume today. Various shrubs and trees also thrive in this area.

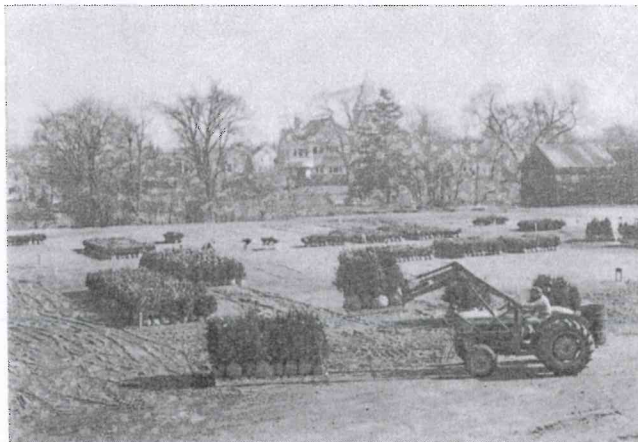
The company is not sentimental about it. Roses, another major item in the Burr line, do well in Connecticut but do better, or at least get a better start, where the growing season is longer. These now are obtained primarily from contract growers in California.

There are plenty of other shrubs, hedges and trees to occupy the hundreds of acres in Burr's several Connecticut plantations. As a matter of fact, the nursery business is the state's

*BLOOMING CRASH BARRIER was supplied by Burr some years ago to test impact-absorbing efficiency of such material in median strips on major highways. Below, state police officer angle-crashes car into a 12-year multiflora hedge.*



*FORK LIFTS and PALLETS are among conventional materials handling equipment needed by large scale nursery operations. Conveyor line methods and complex packing equipment also are used widely inside Burr's Manchester, Conn. plant.*





fastest growing agricultural industry and Burr, obviously, leads the pack. That would hardly be possible without alert, forward-looking operating methods.

*Relaxed but not detached* might describe the atmosphere here. It shows up in the cooperative, friendly attitudes of the work force, from green-thumbed veterans who have the nursery business in their blood and background, to young college-trained horticulturists who have joined the company in recent years.

A sense of humor helps, too, and is clearly present in the Manchester organization to which Mr. Burr himself has been known to apply the whimsical title "bush factory." As with all genuine humor, this is liberally laced with sober fact. Here is agriculture but also it is manufacturing; considerably more sophisticated than many realize.

Humor and sophistication both sparkle in an incident which had its start toward the end of the 1960 presidential campaign. Burr had developed and patented a new hybrid tea rose. (Incidentally, the fact that such things can be and often are patented is common knowledge in this "conservative old industry" but a surprise to many laymen.)

At any rate, no stranger to the virtues of well-timed national publicity and with no misgivings as to the outcome of that political horse race, Mr. Burr had the happy thought of calling his new rose *Pat Nixon* in honor of the next President's wife. She, by the way, was equally confident about the election and gracious in permitting her name to be used on the rose.

He can laugh about this now but, at the time, Mr. Burr had to make

an agile recovery to salvage what he could from that crack in his political crystal ball. He didn't do too badly at that. The rose was quietly renamed "First Lady" and he personally presented a bouquet to Mrs. Kennedy who seems to have been equally gracious about it all. A photo of the presentation received wide circulation and now has a prominent place in his office.

Most Burr horticultural innovations are not similarly amusing and perhaps none so mortifying but all are gratifying and, over the years, there have been a good many of them. "Firsts" are something of a tradition with this company which constantly researches and experiments with that in mind. And potential customers soon learn about them from a marketing organization considerably expanded in recent years.

The old days and the old ways would have precluded the kind of growth which has resulted. Problems of drought, disease, insect pests always will exist but are less forbidding today with the irrigation systems, pesticides, fungicides and mechanical equipment which never were available to the founder.

Gone, too, are the old bring-your-own-basket-and-trust-to-luck distribution methods. The Burr people have pioneered in packaging nursery products, from the standpoint of adding sales appeal and providing maximum protection during storage, enroute and on display.

As far back as the 1920's, Burr Nurseries pioneered in assisting several national organizations to commence marketing nursery stock. Through this experience, the company has learned to handle the distribution of such products in large volume and over great distances

which might very well pose problems that would stump the average nursery.

To bring a shrub or tree from a tiny cutting, through various intermediate steps, to the marketplace is a complex process which, in some cases, may take years to complete. It requires special knowledge, long experience and that rare ability to know, not only what to do and how but — equally important — the best time to do it. Steps involved need not be detailed here for they would be meaningful only to other professionals in that field but the present industry status of C. R. Burr & Co., Inc. indicates how effectively it now operates.

A bush may be a bush by any other name but not necessarily the same bush as was grown back in '98. By its own efforts and in close cooperation with University of Connecticut scientists, Burr does things differently and puts a new face on that word *conservatism* by which it often has been labeled.

Through its president, the company is actively affiliated with leading trade associations in its field. Early in January, Mr. Burr was elected vice president of the Eastern Regional Nurserymen's Association. His firm, for many years, has been a member of the Manufacturers Association of Connecticut.

There is vitality in this company as there so obviously is in its products and there is a progressive tongue in its conservative cheek when it refers to itself as a "bush factory." That name will serve until one more colorful comes along but, in the meantime, it stands as a rather unique but impressive testimonial to Connecticut's industrial diversity and leadership.