

The Richard Peters Pear

By William S. Clarke, Jr.
 Pennsylvania State College,
 State College, Pennsylvania

The Richard Peters pear was developed by Professor Ernest L. Nixon, for many years plant pathologist at the Pennsylvania State College. He was working on fire blight, studying the ways by which the bacterial organism lived over winter and how it entered the plant and spread through the plant tissues. Some of his studies were made on apples, and some on pears. To aid him in these studies, about 1925 he planted a large number of seeds of the Kieffer pear, and the seedlings were used for the purpose of inoculations with the fire-blight organism.

A New Variety Immune To Fire Blight

Among the Kieffer seedlings was one which seemed to be immune to fire blight. Repeated inoculations failed to develop into the disease. The tree was allowed to grow, and after a few years it reached fruiting age. Then on May 22, 1935, it was named the "Richard Peters", on the occasion of a visit to the College by the time-honored Philadelphia Society for Promoting Agriculture.

Philadelphia Society For Promoting Agriculture

This society was founded in 1785 by a number of men influential and prominent in the affairs of the country.

Among them were bankers, attorneys, members of the Continental Congress, statesman, and other men who had played important part in the life of the nation. The society exerted considerable influence on the spread of agricultural knowledge and new, improved farming practices in the early days of our republic. It sponsored exhibitions of cattle, searched for ways to control the Hessian fly in wheat, sought to improve the method of plowing, worked to control soil erosion and attempted to introduce European plants adapted to the conditions of American agriculture. This group also established an agricultural library. It tried unsuccessfully to sponsor an experimental farm.

Richard Peters

Richard Peters was one of the twenty-three founders of the society and served as its president from 1805 to 1828. He was a well-known judge and had been Secretary of the War Board during the Revolution. He made the first demonstration in America of the value of gypsum as a fertilizer for clover and aided in the establishment of a practical system of crop rotation. He is said to have been very much interested in the development of blight-resistant pears.

The Richard Peters Pear

The original Richard Peters pear tree, now about twenty-three years old, is still standing. It is among a group of five pear trees left from the seedlings

grown for the studies of fire blight. The building program of the past ten years has eliminated the nursery in which they were growing, but they were left standing and are now in the rear lawn of a sorority house, not far from a recently constructed college building. Hundreds of trees have been propagated from this original tree, and the extensive cutting of scion wood has probably dwarfed the tree to some degree, as it is now considerably smaller than its companion tree. It has never developed fire blight, even during the years when blight has been very serious and trees of susceptible varieties have been killed to the ground.

The fruits of the Richard Peters pear, as grown at the Pennsylvania State College, usually run small in size, being a little larger than those of Seckel. They have long necks, reminding one of the shape of the Bosc pear. They are of reasonably good quality, though they could not be considered as high-quality pears. However, they are much better than the fruits of Kieffer and much more tender and less grainy. Like most varieties of pears in central Pennsylvania, the Richard Peters is somewhat erratic in its bearing habits, but it usually bears some fruit every year. Pollination studies show that it is self-sterile, that it needs cross-pollination to produce fruit. This pear may have value as a parent with Bosc and other pears in breeding projects which are designed to produce blight-resistant pears of high quality.

The Richard Peters pear has distinct merit in regions where blight-suscepti-



The original Richard Peters pear tree is now twenty-three years old. It stands in a lawn behind a sorority house on the campus of the Pennsylvania State College and is surrounded by several seedling pear trees of the same age.

ble pears cannot be grown. Hundreds of trees and large quantities of scion wood have already been distributed to experiment stations and to interested fruit growers, chiefly in the South and in the West.

PLUM VARIETIES

The Stanley plum, of the prune type, is the best of a number of varieties tested recently. The fruit is large, dark blue, and of excellent quality, and the tree is very productive.

from 59th Annual Report for year 1946
Kentucky Agri. Expt. Station.