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Coxe's "View"

"A View of the Cultivation of Fruit Trees" by William Coxe, published in Philadelphia in 1817 was the first book on fruits written in America, and by a writer who made his descriptions first hand.

William Coxe, of Burlington, N. J., was apparently a man who combined business with pleasure. He maintained a large experimental orchard of fruit trees, and corresponded with European horticulturists, with whom he exchanged scionwood. He was the first to grow in this country a great many varieties of European fruits, insatiably gathering propagating material from every source. He preceded Manning, Hovey and the other early pomologists of this country. Coxe's book, 253 pages long and containing over 200 engravings of fruits "of the natural size" as the title-page boasts, describes 136 apples, 65 pears, plus 21 listed as "grown in my own orchard" but of inferior quality (he adds that in his collection "I have upwards of 100 kinds"); 18 plums, mostly European, and 38

peaches, of which probably only the Heath Cling and Oldmixon would be familiar names today. It is apparent that Mr. Coxe either grew all these fruits, or was completely familiar with them.

Among the apples are a few which were first described by Coxe and thus brought into prominence by him that are still in our orchards: Yellow Bellflower, Rhode Island Greening, Early Harvest, Maiden Blush, Fall Pippin, Newtown Pippin, Summer Rambo, Esopus Spitzenburg and Winesap. Among newly described pears prominently looms the Seckle. Among fifteen cherries one finds the May-duke*, Oxheart (?), the Mazard or Common Black "used for stocks as well as much used for bounce with rum or brandy"; and the Morello, of which "there are several varieties: some of them of very great size; all of them of great sprightliness and richness."

In this old book the prominence given to the quality of the fruit above all other considerations is in striking contrast to the present point of view.

The author sometimes describes the growing habit of the tree, but seldom its productivity, and scarcely ever its degree of health or hardiness. Thus, of the Michael Henry Pippin Mr. Coxe observes, "the tree has a handsome regular form, and strong growth, the limbs running straight, with an inclination upwards, which is usually called beesom-headed", but not a word as to whether one may expect large or small crops, yearly or biennially.

In the list of "Table apples for the orchard of an admirer of fine fruit" among the 26 are perhaps eight that are still grown to some extent: Sweet Bough, Summer Queen, Maidens Blush*, Fall Pippin, Bellflower, Spitzenburg (Esopus), Newtown Pippin and Lady Apple (the only foreign variety included). The Winesap is considered primarily a cider fruit.

The author's selection of "20 pears ripening in succession for a private garden" is as follows (though he only gives 16):

1. Green Chissel	9. Yellow Beuree*
2. Early Catherine	10. Holland Green
3. Early Bergamotte	11. Crasanne
4. Fin or d'Ete*	12. Orange d'Hive
5. Julienne	13. St. Germaine
6. Red Bergamotte	14. Virgouleuse
7. Spice	15. Muscat Allemand
8. Seckle*	16. Ambrette

How many of these are grown today, and how many still exist? And how would they compare with the pears of today?

Not surprisingly, among the apples are a good many of New Jersey origin—Yellow Bellflower, Summer Rose, Bullock, American Summer Pearmain, Ortley, and the two old famous cider apples, Newark Sweeting or Campfire, and Harrison. The high dessert quality of some of these fruits is known to all who have had the privilege of eating them. There is also listed the Tewksbury Winter Blush, "brought from Tewksbury in Hunterdon county, N. J.—it is a very handsome fair fruit, with more flavor and juciness than is to be usually found in keeping apples; I have eaten them in good condition in August of the second year, preserved without particular care, perfectly plump and sound"—which would be a good home orchard fruit if a source for it could be discovered.

As a further example of Mr. Coxe's descriptive style, here are his, the first accounts ever printed of two famous fruits:

WINESAP

This is one of our best cider fruits, and is much esteemed as a good eating apple: the size is middling, the form round, lessening a little towards the crown: the skin is smooth, the color a dark red, with a small portion of yellow, and sometimes a few streaks—the flesh is rich, yellow, and tolerably juicy, pleasant, and sweet; the cider produced from it is vinous, clear, and strong; equal to any fruit liquor of our country for bottling. The apples hang late, and make good cider without hous-

ing; they will however repay all the expense of complete maturation in an airy loft, by the increased flavor of the liquor—the tree is well adapted to light soils: of 100 trees I planted on a sandy blowing knoll eight years ago, and well cultivated, not one has died—every tree bears fine fair apples; it is becoming the most favorite cider fruit in West Jersey. The form of the tree is irregular, the branches often grow downwards, and render it difficult to train in a handsome shape; it bears more uniformly than any fruitful kind with which I am acquainted.

By which it is apparent that the Winesap trees on his "sandy blowing knoll" were Mr. Coxe's favorites, for of few others does he give so complete a description.

SECKLE PEAR

So called from Mr. Seckle of Philadelphia, the proprietor of the original tree now growing on his estate near that city—it is in the general estimation of amateurs of fine fruit, both natives and foreigners, the finest pear of this or any other country—it is believed to be a native fruit, produced from the seed of a fine pear (of which the original proprietor owned many varieties) accidentally dropped where this tree now grows. The form and appearance vary with aspect, age, and cultivation—the size generally is small, the form regular, round at the blossom end, diminishing with a gentle swell towards the stem, which is rather short and thick; the skin is sometimes yellow, with a bright red cheek, and smooth; and other times a perfect russet, without any blush—the flesh is melting, juicy, and most exquisitely and delicately flavored; the time of ripening is from the end of August, to the middle of October. The tree is singularly vigorous and beautiful, of great regularity of growth and richness of foliage—very hardy and possessing all the characteristics [sic] of a new variety.

Now that the Experiment Stations have taken over the work of testing

new varieties of fruits with a view to their commercial value, the circle has swung round again to men like William Coxe, and in "private gardens" must be collected, grown and evaluated—not only the new fruits, but the old ones as well—from the point of view of quality.—I. G.

★Coxe's spelling:

MAIDENS BLUSH—like that. Of course he means the possessive noun. "Maiden Blush" would really mean *First* blush. The name was "given to it by Samuel Allinson, Esq., late of Burlington who first brought it into notice" Coxe explains, and that it has "a yellow ground with a bright red cheek, whence it derives its name."

SECKLE. Hogg, in his Fruit Manual, has a long note on this and says he uses Coxe's spelling rather than that of the Horticultural Society's Catalogue which Downing follows, "because Coxe resided at Philadelphia, and must have known Mr. Seckle; and as the only reason assigned by Mr. Thompson for altering it is, that *it is supposed* that Mr. Seckel was of German descent, and there is no name known among the Germans spelt *Seckle*. In my opinion, this is not a sufficient plea for the alteration."

I believe Coxe was right; but long usage has changed it.

YELLOW BEUREE is how Coxe has it; of course this is a printer's error for *Beurre*, the masculine form of the adjective, (pear being a masculine noun in French) *Beuree* is wrong.

Beurre means butter, and the Dictionary tells me "Beurre" means "butter-pear."

FIN OR D'ETE is what Cox has. This he translates elsewhere as "Fine Gold of Summer."

May-duke. He did not capitalize the d. But this is an old book with queer spelling, and the rules in those days were quite different, or perhaps writers were more independent.—I. G.

Varieties and Information Wanted

Propagating wood of the following varieties of apples wanted: Swazie, Pomme Grise, Early Strawberry, Reinette Carpentin (Carnation Apple), Thomas Hawkins, Tewksbury Winter Blush. Request for information on the origin of the Golden Winesap apple. Is anyone growing medlars? Kindly communicate with the editor of the Fruit Gardens column.



New Beach Plum for New Jersey

One-year-old trees of the new beach plum—RARIBANK—recently introduced by the Agricultural Experiment Station of Rutgers University are now available to New Jersey home owners, according to Franklin A. Gilbert of the Department of Horticulture.

RARIBANK was selected from wild trees growing near Old Bridge and has been established on the Horticultural Farm at New Brunswick since 1932. It is a large tree, as large as a medium-sized peach tree. It is vigorous and bears purplish-red free-stone fruit of good quality.

It has been very resistant to brown rot and Japanese beetle, Gilbert re-

ports. The fruits make excellent jelly or may be canned as whole plums. Gilbert believes the plum should do well throughout New Jersey and the Atlantic Seaboard.

The one-year-old trees, planted early this spring, should begin to bear in three years and should produce a heavy crop in four years, according to Gilbert. Since Raribank is self-sterile it is necessary to plant another plum with it that blossoms at the same time. Two good pollinizers for Raribank are N. J. 29 and N. J. 30.

Raribank is available from the Small Fruits Industry Committee, C. H. Steelman Fruit Nursery, R. D. 1, Princeton, N. J.