

The Lost Pears of New York

JOSEPH D. POSTMAN¹

Abstract

"The Pears of New York" published by U.P. Hedrick in 1921 for the New York Agricultural Experiment Station, was the standard American reference work on pear cultivars in the United States during the twentieth century. No other publication since has covered pears in such a comprehensive fashion. Hedrick described many hundreds of pear cultivars grown in America, and selected the 78 most important cultivars for complete, detailed, historical treatment including full page color illustrations. The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service, National Clonal Germplasm Repository in Corvallis, Oregon is growing 62 of Hedrick's 78 select cultivars in their preservation orchard. This paper describes the 16 remaining cultivars in an attempt to locate the lost germplasm.

In 1921, Ulysses P. Hedrick presented the manuscript of 'The Pears of New York' to the Board of Control of the New York Agricultural Experiment Station (4). This became the sixth in the classic series of books published by the Geneva, New York station describing hardy fruits known primarily in the northeast United States during the late 19th and early 20th century. The director of the Geneva Station, R.W. Thatcher, predicted that Hedrick's latest work would "find an extremely useful place in the literature of fruit-growing... welcomed by the fruit growers of the State and by horticulturists the world over." 'The Pears of New York' has indeed become the essential and unsurpassed North American reference on pear history and cultivars.

One of Hedrick's goals was to describe in detail and provide accurate color illustrations of the most important cultivated pears of the day. He also provided brief descriptions and attempted to document names of many hundreds of less valuable cultivars. Hedrick presented full page color plates, complete historical accounts and detailed descriptions of 78 important pear cultivars. How many of these essential early 20th century pears are still with us today? The gene bank at the US Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service, National Clonal Germplasm Repository (NCGR) in Corvallis, Oregon is growing 62 of Hedrick's 78 select pears. Several others were once at this Repository in name, but the trees were discarded when they were found to be misidentified.

Andrew Jackson Downing Jr. was another esteemed New York pomological authority from the century before U.P. Hedrick. Downing's 'Fruits and Fruit Trees of America' appropriately subtitled "Descriptions of All the Finest Varieties of Fruit, Native and Foreign, Cultivated in this Country" was first published in 1845. In the first edition of his book, Downing described 233 pear cultivars worthy of cultivation (2). The 1859 revised edition divided pears into 3 classes. The highest class contained 27 cultivars (Table 1) "which were well known to be of unexceptionable quality, and have been found to thrive in almost every situation suited to the cultivation of the pear." Twenty of these Class 1 pears were also included in Hedrick's select group, and 20 of the 27 are present today at NCGR. Early American works such as those by Downing (2, 3) and by William Coxe (1) contained black and white drawings and very brief descriptions compared to those of Hedrick (4).

During the past several years we have located a few missing Pears of New York including 'Bloodgood', 'Le Conte', 'Onondaga', 'Souvenir du Congres' and 'Winter Bartlett'. But what has become of the remaining 16 cultivars that are yet unaccounted for? Are they lost for all time? Will any of the readers of this journal be able to help locate trees that can be recovered and made available again? We hesitate to call these the 16 "most wanted" pears because some may have vanished for good reason. The centennial anniversary of

¹US Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service, National Clonal Germplasm Repository, Corvallis, Oregon 97333. jpostman@ars-grin.gov

the publication of 'The Pears of New York' will soon occur and it would be a fitting commemoration to locate and preserve those pear cultivars considered essential a century ago. Names and brief descriptions of the missing pears are presented below. Descriptions are adapted from Hedrick (4) with additional synonyms from Ragan (6). All 78 cultivar illustrations from 'The Pears of New York' are available at the NCGR website (5).

1. **'Ansault'** – Raised in France, where it first bore fruit in 1863 and was given the name 'Bonne du Puits-Ansault'. The American Pomological Society shortened the name. A small, green pear similar in quality to 'Seckel' and ripe in late September to early October. Too unattractive for commercial production, but it was suggested that 'Ansault' "should find a place in every collection of pears for home use."

2. **'Brandywine'** – A chance seedling found on the farm of Eli Harvey, on the banks of the Brandywine River, Delaware County, Pennsylvania about 1820. Fruit is medium in size, pyriform and ripens in late August. This might have been considered the best pear of that season, except that 'Tyson' was more widely planted, had a more manageable tree, and was more productive. 'Brandywine' has a more interesting flavor than other pears of this ripening season.

3. **'Dearborn'** – Found in 1818 at the home of General H.A.S. Dearborn in Roxbury, Massachusetts. Also known as 'Dearborn's Seedling', 'Dones', 'Nones', and 'Wheeler's New St. Michael' (6). It was once a favorite, but in Hedrick's time was already being lost to cultivation. The fruit is small, round-pyriform, symmetrical, pale yellow with numerous russet dots, and ripe in late August before 'Bartlett'. The tree is easily managed with little attention and is almost free of fire blight. Hedrick notes that 'Dearborn' "is too good a variety to be lost, however, because of splendid fruit- and tree-characters." This is not the same as the 'Dearborn' of Van Mons from Belgium, which is larger and ripens later.

4. **'Duhamel du Monceau'** – Raised by Andre Leroy in Angers, France and named in 1865 in honor of a famous French author and pomologist. Known in America as 'Duhamel' and in Germany as 'Duhamel's Butterbirne'.

It is a winter pear similar to 'Winter Nelis' but with more uniform shape, better quality and longer storage life. Fruit is above medium in size, and round-pyriform shape. Skin is greenish-yellow and covered with russet.

5. **'Elizabeth'** – A seedling sent from Belgium by Van Mons to Massachusetts in 1835 or 1836. Robert Manning found seedling No. 154 to be worthy of a name, and called it 'Elizabeth (Van Mons)'. It was disseminated as 'Manning's Elizabeth' later shortened to 'Elizabeth'. Fruit is small, obovate-obtuse-pyriform, skin glossy, bright yellow with red and brown blush. Ripens in late August. Hedrick considered 'Elizabeth' to be one of the best summer pears for eastern America. Downing (1859) described 'Elizabeth' as shaped like a small 'White Doyenné'. A tree of 'Elizabeth' obtained by NCGR from the Oregon Experiment Station in Medford in 1981 turned out to be incorrect.

6. **'Fontenay'** – A seedling found growing on an estate near Fontenay, France and propagated by M. Lévêque in 1828. Distributed in France as 'Poire de Fontenay' and later as 'Jalousie de Fontenay' under which name it came to America. Known as 'Birne von Fontenay' in Germany. Hedrick considered 'Fontenay' to be mediocre, but included it in 'The Pears of New York' because it was often used as a standard against which other pears were compared.

7. **'Koonce'** – A summer pear that has good quality, but decays quickly after maturing. Once grown throughout the United States, the fruit is better quality than other pears of its season, including 'Early Harvest' and 'Lawson' but the small, unattractive fruit prevented 'Koonce' from becoming more popular. It originated in Illinois sometime before 1889. Fruit medium, obovate-obtuse-pyriform, skin pale greenish-yellow with reddish-brown blush. 'Koonce' is presently in the list of pears growing at National Fruit Trials in England.

8. **'Léon Leclerc (Van Mons)'** – Not widely grown in America due to extreme susceptibility to scab, but heralded in Europe early in the 1800s as the best of all pears. Originated by M. Léon Leclerc in Laval, France, where it first fruited in 1828. Fruit is large, oblong-pyriform, tapering to a long, narrow neck; skin is thick and tough, dull yellow, covered with dots and faint russet and slight reddish

blush; ripe in late September and October. Hedrick considered this cultivar to be suitable only for collections. One of its chief values was the ripening period in late fall when few other pears were ripe. Not to be confused with similarly named pears 'Léon Leclerc de Laval' or 'Léon Leclerc Louvain'.

9. 'Lincoln Coreless' – Originated in Lincoln County, Tennessee, near the Alabama border about 1830. Hedrick's description begins, "The product of Lincoln Coreless is worthless for dessert, and but a coarse makeshift for culinary purposes. The variety receives attention only because the pear is a monstrosity and a curiosity. The fruits are enormous in size, outweighing all other pears unless it be those of the Pound. They are unique in having a very small core and few or no seeds. They are further characterized by very late maturity, ripening later than those of any other pear on the grounds of the Station and keeping until April. While usually rather dull greenish-yellow in color, the cheek is often enlivened by a bright blush which makes the fruits rather attractive despite their grossness."

10. 'Margaret' – Originated in Cleveland, Ohio, about 1850. Probably a seedling of 'Seckel'. Fruits are attractive, but tend to be small and not remarkably desirable in quality; oblong-obovate-pyriform in shape, with thin, tender skin that is dull greenish-yellow with a dull reddish-brown blush. Ripens in late August, and was widely planted and popular in the late 1800s as a summer pear.

11. 'Mount Vernon' – Originated in Roxbury, Massachusetts in the 1840s. Hedrick considered this a unique winter pear that should have "a prominent place in the list of worthy American pears." The fruit is medium in size and distinctly top-shaped with an attractive reddish-russet color and spicy flavor. The tree has a compact shape that is easily maintained. Ripe in late October and November.

12. 'Ontario' – Originated as an open pollinated seedling of 'Canadaigua' in Geneva, Ontario County, New York, and introduced in 1856. Fruit similar to 'Bartlett', but slightly smaller, ripens later and the skin is completely dull yellow without any blush.

13. 'Reeder' – Originated in 1855 in Varick, New York as a seedling of 'Winter Nelis', probably pollinated by 'Seckel'. It was

originally known as 'Doctor Reeder'. Fruit is small, globular-obtuse-pyriform, with dull-yellow skin streaked with russet and a faint brownish-red blush. It ripens in October and November just after Seckel is finished. The tree is very resistant to fire blight. Hedrick did not consider 'Reeder' to be exceptional, but thought it too good to discard.

14. 'Riehl Best' – Discovered in Godfrey, Illinois and introduced by Stark Brothers Nursery in their 1912 catalog. Fruits are not attractive, but of excellent quality and the tree is "nearly blight-proof." Fruit is medium in size, obovate-conic-pyriform, irregular, with thick dull-yellow skin overlaid with russet and a slight pinkish-red blush. Hedrick suggested that this may be an old European cultivar because of its good fruit quality and because the original tree was located in an old orchard that had been planted about 1870 with cultivars imported from France. Mr. Riehl, who discovered it, noted that this was the only tree out of several hundreds that had not been ruined by blight.

15. 'Rutter' – Raised by John Rutter, Westchester, Pennsylvania about 1860 from seed of 'Léon Leclerc'. It was widely grown in the vicinity of Geneva, New York in the early 20th century. Fruit is large, round-obtuse-pyriform, yellow covered with light russet, and matures in late October to early November. Hedrick considered 'Rutter' an excellent late autumn pear that was attractive, shipped well, and sold well to those who knew it.

16. 'Souvenir d'Espérén' – Originated with Major Espérén, Mechlin, Belgium in the mid 19th century, and brought to America about 1850. In 1869, Andrew Jackson Downing noted that this old French pear was one of the best for either amateur or commercial grower. The tree is vigorous and productive, and the fruit is attractive, but mediocre according to Hedrick. Fruit is large, oblong-obovate-pyriform, greenish-yellow often covered with russet. Ripe in late November and December.

17. 'Onondaga' – A possible tree of 'Onondaga' has been located in western Oregon near Eugene, but the identity has not been confirmed and additional sources are being sought. Introduced as 'Swan's Orange' by Elwanger and Barry, fruitiers in Rochester, because they obtained it from Mr. Swan of

Onondaga Hollow, in New York. It has been traced back to a tree growing in Farmington, Connecticut in 1806. Renamed 'Onondaga', it was widely grown in the northeast United States for more than a generation in the late 1800s. The fruit resembles 'Bartlett' in flavor, but ripens later and is superior in overall quality. The tree is very susceptible to fire blight. Fruit is medium to large, obovate-obtuse-pyriform, pale yellow skin with many russet spots, yellowish flesh and is ripe in early October.

Please contact the author if you have information that may lead to the apprehension of any of these pear cultivars.

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Table 1. Class 1 pears from A.J. Downing (3), synonyms from Ragan (6).

1. Bartlett (H*)	15. Doyenné White or White Doyenné (H*)
2. Beurré D'Anjou (H*)	16. Doyenne Gray or Doyenne Gris (*)
3. Beurré Diel (H*)	17. Flemish Beauty (H*)
4. Beurré Bosc (H*)	18. Fondante d'Automne or Belle Lucrative (H*)
5. Beurré Easter or Easter Beurre (H*)	19. Kirtland
6. Bloodgood (H*)	20. Madeleine or Citron des Cames (H*)
7. Buffum (H*)	21. Ott
8. Church	22. Rostiezer
9. Dearborn's Seedling (H)	23. Seckel (H*)
10. Dix	24. Sheldon (H*)
11. Doyenne Boussock (H*)	25. Tyson (H*)
12. Doyenné d'ete or Summer Doyenné (H*)	26. Urbaniste (H*)
13. Doyenne d'Alençon (H*)	27. Winter Nelis (H*)
14. Doyenne Sieulle	

H – also considered important by Hedrick (4).

* – present at NCGR-Corvallis



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