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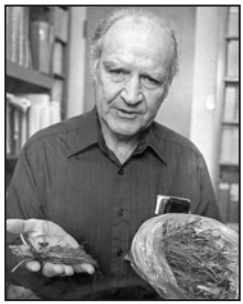
Book Review:
Yielding Fruit: The Life and Times of Royce S. Bringhurst



Written and published by John R. Bringhurst. ISBN-13:9781732936102. Hardcover $25.00.

This book is a biography of the strawberry breeder and geneticist, and Wilder Medal recipient, Royce Bringhurst. It was written by his son John, who is a retired physician. In the introduction, John explains that following his father's death, as he organized Royce's personal papers and professional materials to donate to Utah State University, he decided to use the materials to write a history of his father's life and work as a keepsake for his family and as a supplement to his papers. For much of his life, even before college, Royce kept a detailed journal. John quoted extensively from these journals, professional writings and letters. Taken together they provide unique insight into Royce's thinking and his self-assessment as a husband, father, friend, colleague, church member and scientist. This is a long book with 561 pages of text and another 142 pages of notes and references.

Royce grew up on a family farm in Utah and was a lifelong active member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. His college education was interrupted by service in the Army Air Force in Europe during World War II, where he flew on 65 combat missions in a B-52 bomber. The combat had lifelong effects on his hearing and his temperament. Royce was married to his wife, Pearl, before entering the Army. Upon his return to civilian life he completed his degree in Agronomy at Utah State University. The family moved to Wisconsin where he earned M.S. and PhD degrees and worked on breeding and genetics of sweet clover. His first job was as an avocado breeder at UCLA and after a few years he transferred to UC Davis to take over the strawberry breeding program. At Davis he teamed up with Victor Voth and together they spent the next 36 years studying strawberry genetics and breeding and introducing new cultivars, and developing new cultural practices that would transform the strawberry industry in California as well as other countries. Some of the cultural practices they introduced to the industry included: overhead irrigation to mitigate salinity of furrow irrigation, the use of plasticulture with clear plastic, annual planting rather than fruiting a planting for two or more years, and they worked out chilling requirements and planting dates to enhance plant vigor and yield in different regions of California. Some of their scientific accomplishments included determining the chilling requirements for strawberry seeds to improve germination, developed a leaflet grafting technique for virus indexing, the use of tissue culture for strawberry plant propagation, and the use of isozyme electrophoresis to study strawberry genetics and evolution and to identify genotypes that were to be patented. Royce had an international impact on strawberry production because he received frequent invitations to visit other countries to speak to scientists and growers, where he introduced his new cultivars and cultural practices. Under Dr. Bringhurst's leadership, the UC strawberry program released more than 30 new cultivars and two, 'Chandler' and 'Camarosa', were selected for the Outstanding Fruit Cultivar Award

by the American Society for Horticultural Science. Royce considered the introduction into commercial strawberry lines of the day neutral trait, acquired from wild strawberries in his native Utah, to be his most significant accomplishment in plant breeding.

While the book chronicles Royce's professional activities in detail, it blends them with his family life and activities in the Church. Frequent and extensive quotes from some of Royce's journal entries show that he wrestled with the seeming conflicts between the religious and scientific aspects of his life. Royce was a fine tenor and performed with the Sacramento symphony, in operas and at other events. He served on many university, state and national committees, including the committee for germplasm repositories at Corvallis, OR and the Wolfskill Experimental orchards in Winters, CA.

As a pomologist who has worked with strawberries, I found this book to be more than a biography of an extremely successful fruit breeder. Through the eyes of Royce Bringhurst, the reader will learn about the evolution of techniques used in plant breeding, plant genetics and strawberry physiology and culture. During Royce's career there were also many changes in the academy, such as declining public support for research and the increasing reliance on grants and/or industry support, the evolution of plant patents and the associated bureaucratic and the political challenges associated with maintaining a good relationship with the industry, as well as the growth of the University of California agricultural research system as well as the transition of agricultural research from UCLA to other campuses, such as Davis and the transition of the strawberry breeding program to the next generation of researchers. In his journal Royce also chronicles his complicated relationship with his longtime collaborator, Victor Voth, especially the challenges of assuring appropriate credit for their successes.

Although John Bringhurst is not a professional author, he wrote a book that is interesting and easy to read. As a physician, John has biological training, but he must have spent many hours talking with Royce's colleagues and reading papers to learn the details associated with strawberry culture and plant breeding and genetics in enough detail to explain them in terms that non-breeders can understand. This is not a textbook to be used in a course, but it will be of interest to many pomologists, berry growers, members of the berry industry, and scientists with strong faith.

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About The Cover:

In 1983, 'Chandler' was one of the last strawberry cultivars released by Royce Bringhurst and Victor Voth of the University of California at Davis. 'Chandler' (USPP5262) is a short-day type and was planted for early fruit in both winter and summer plantings in south and central cost California. 'Chandler' resulted from a cross of 'Douglas' x Cal 72.361-105 made in 1977 and first fruited at the UC Wolfskill Experimental Orchards near Davis in 1979 and was selected as Cal 77.32-103 and was later tested as advanced selection C24. 'Chandler' dominated fresh-market production in southern California in the late 1980s and early 1990s and it performed well in the southeastern US, but was difficult to transport. In 1989 it received the Outstanding Fruit Cultivar Award from the American Society for Horticultural Science.