

Esopus Spitzenberg Apple*

R. A. NITSCHKE
Birmingham, Michigan

In the fall of 1790, Thomas Jefferson returned to his beloved Monticello after serving three years as Minister Plenipotentiary to France. One of his first acts was to order a long list of trees and shrubs from the famous William Prince Nursery at Flushing, Long Island. Included were twelve Esopus Spitzenberg apple trees.

Known before the Revolutionary War, this famous apple is one of the classics of American pomology. According to Downing, it originated among the Low Dutch at Esopus on the Hudson River.

In the first American book on fruit written in 1817, Coxe remarked on its "great beauty and exquisite flavor." In 1824, Michael Floy, another pomological writer, sent a group of trees to the London Horticultural Society, including Spitzenberg, which he described as "the finest eating apple in the world when perfectly ripe." In 1835 Kenrick could refer to Spitzenberg as a "celebrated fruit." Downing, in the last half of the Nineteenth Century, said it was "unparalleled as a dessert fruit." In the third decade of the Twentieth Century, Hedrick was still able to describe it as "unexcelled in quality . . . about the best to eat out of hand."

As grown in Michigan, the apple is more broadly ovate than conic, as were specimens I have had from Oregon; but it has the same irregular, slightly ribbed features. The skin is brilliant red-orange with gray spots. The flesh is hard, crisp, juicy and

yellow (Leroy called it "croquante"), with a rich aromatic apple flavor, most nearly resembling the flavor of Jonathan, of which it is supposed to be a parent. European writers say it does not develop the fine flavor in Europe as do apples of this variety exported from the United States. Mine ripen about October 20 to 25.

In 1958, after a long hot fall, the skin had a slightly bitter, unpleasant taste. I found this same characteristic one year in some from the Hood River Valley in Oregon.

Spitzenberg is now grown commercially only in a few orchards on the West Coast where it is used principally as a pie apple to be sliced and canned for sale to bakeries.

Pears in Kentucky

The Maxine pear is highly recommended for trial in Kentucky by W. D. Armstrong, of the University of Kentucky. It has shown very little blight, has been productive, and the fruit is of high quality.

Armstrong also reports that Tyson is an early-ripening, medium-sized pear of good quality, which is also blight resistant. Waite (U. S. D. A. originated) appears blight resistant, but has not been productive and lacks quality. Richard Peters, a Kieffer type pear, produces well and early, is more blight resistant and has higher quality than Kieffer. Orient is blight resistant, but is poor in quality. Ewart, from Ohio, has excellent quality.

*Another in a series of articles by Mr. Nitschke on old, high quality apple varieties.