

Pioneers in Horticulture

There are many interesting stories dealing with phases of Iowa horticultural history. The following are condensed from *Pioneers in Iowa Horticulture* written in 1941 by Kent Pellett of Hudson, Iowa, for the 75th birthday of the Iowa State Horticultural Society. He is the son of the late Frank C. Pellett, nationally known editor and author from Atlantic.

Lewelling's Travelling Nursery

The beginning of the fruit industry of the Pacific Northwest owes its start to Henderson Lewelling. The Lewelling family, sometimes spelled Leuelling, had been nurserymen for several generations before their arrival at Salem in Henry County, Iowa.

Henderson and John Lewelling prospered in Iowa, selling trees to the thrifty fruitgrowing Quakers settling in their area. Salem became the apple-growing center of early Iowa. The Lewellings made 14 trips to Indiana and other eastern points for new tree stock and plants. In ten years, Henderson acquired a competence at Salem selling fruit stocks to the settlers as Iowa's population doubled and redoubled. He built an imposing yellow limestone house and was a leading citizen.

Lewelling had heard tales of the fertility of the Willamette Valley in Oregon. In 1845 he decided to close out his Iowa interests and made plans to establish a nursery in Oregon. How to get the needed varieties of fruits across the plains and mountains was his problem. His method of transportation made history.

In the spring of 1847, Lewelling prepared his precious cargo of nursery stock by building two boxes, which were set in the bottom of the wagon and filled with a compost of charcoal and earth. Into this he set the grafted trees. There were apples, pears, quinces, plums, cherries, grapes, and common berry bushes—700 in all, from 20 inches to four feet high.

With seven wagons in his party, Lewelling, a partner, and his family set out for the west on April 17, 1847. Beyond the Missouri, the party joined a wagon train.

The plains were hot and Indian-infested, and the oxen grew lame. Lewelling buried his partner on the Platte River. Two of the oxen died on the Sweetwater. Others of the train now rebelled, telling Lewelling that he was holding them back. They were sure he would kill all the cattle with his heavy load and would never be able to get the trees over the mountains. They said he should throw them away. Lewelling answered with a thunderous "NO!" and kept on. After this the family left the wagon train and travelled alone.

He watered his trees every day. It was said he tended them more carefully than he did his own children. Half the trees were dead, but the remainder had leafed out. Later the trees actually saved his little band when Indians attacked. The red men were mystified at the green growth in the schooner. Concluding the party must be under the special care of the Great Spirit, they moved away.

Lewelling reached The Dalles October 1. There he transferred his goods to boats and floated down the Columbia River. On November 17, seven months after they had started, Lewelling with his strange cargo moved into the Willamette Valley. The family settled in a squatter's cabin. The surviving trees had grown three feet enroute. He took as a partner, William Meek, who had come out from Iowa the same year.

The orchard Henderson planted started to bear fruit in 1851 and bore increasingly larger crops. In 1853 Henderson took his crop of apples to San Francisco and sold them for one dollar a pound. The nursery was soon furnishing thousands of fruit trees to the early Oregon settlers. Later Henderson was joined by his brother, Seth, who took over his financial interest in the nursery. In their orchard a sweet cherry tree which had grown from a seed brought across the plains started to bear fruit. The fruit was a large, dark-colored cherry, nearly black, and of excellent quality. Seth decid-

ed to propagate it and named it after a Chinese workman in the nursery by the name of Bing. Today the Bing cherry is the leading variety of sweet cherry grown in the United States.

Henderson moved to California, founded the town of Fruitvale, and planted an orchard and a nursery. His nurseries brought him great wealth. He sold his property at Fruitvale, bought a ship and supplies, and with a band of eager converts set sail for Honduras. Now for the first time luck deserted him. He went broke there. Returning to California he raised fruit, gave up his wandering, and died without regaining his old wealth.

James Hiatt and His Seedling Apple

New varieties of fruits are produced in a number of ways. Today a common method is to carefully select the characteristics desired and by hand pollination combine two parents. The seeds from this cross are carefully planted and the resulting plants allowed to produce fruit. From several hundred plants a few may be saved for further testing and, in a few instances, one that seems superior will be named and introduced as a new variety. Most of the newer varieties of strawberries were developed in this way. But few apple varieties have resulted from such a method. Most commercial varieties of apples originated from either selected or chance seedlings. The leading fall apple of this area, the Wealthy, was the final choice of perhaps a hundred trees grown from a

pound of apple seed by Peter Gideon of Excelsior, Minnesota, in the late 1860's. He named it for his wife whose name was Weltha. Many of our apple varieties came through chance seedlings. A barefoot boy going down the farm lane past the family orchard picked up an apple, ate it, and tossed the core at a bird in the fence row. One of its seeds grew into a tree and finally produced a fruit which, perhaps this same boy, now grown into a man, thought as "the best apple yet." He got a nurseryman to graft some trees from it and gave it a name. This is one possible way for a new variety to get started. It would be called a chance seedling.

It was in some such way that the Delicious apple was started. It originated as a chance seedling in the large farm orchard of Jesse Hiatt a few miles northeast of Peru in Madison County, Iowa.

Jesse Hiatt, the youngest of 12 children, was born February 19, 1826, in Indiana, of Quaker parents. His father, William Hiatt, owned a farm and orchard and was known among his neighbors as an authority on fruit. Jesse married Rebecca Jane Pearson, sold his farm, and moved his family to Madison County, where he bought two half-sections of land. His brother, Aaron, already lived there and had laid out the town of Peru.

One of Jesse's half-sections, on Clanton Creek, was in good timber. The other, north of Peru, was prairie with 40 acres broken and a one-room log

cabin. In this cabin, with the addition of only one room, he raised ten children. Jesse went through the usual pioneer hardships of scrimping, toiling to break land, splitting rails, sawing lumber, and putting up buildings.

In the meantime, he had not neglected fruit-growing. He had bought a few trees from Indiana. He and his brother hauled a wagonload of fruit trees from Oskaloosa. He kept adding trees until he had a large orchard.

Jesse, with the help of his growing family, gradually accumulated land and property. As he grew older, most of the farm was turned over to his children. Jesse spent his time puttering around with grapes, melons, apples, and vegetables.

During these years, a seedling had been growing in his orchard, a seedling that was to be famous although it would not bring Jesse fame. Nobody knew just what kind of a seedling it was, although its fruit later had some of the qualities of his apples—Hiatt Sweet and Hiatt Black. He cut the seedling down in 1870—it was out of the row! That might have been the end of the Delicious, but the next spring it was up again, larger than before.

He looked at it and said, "If you must live you may." He had sympathy for anything withstanding adversity. He trimmed off some thorns, cut off the top, and left it. When he saw it again it was making some progress, with a round, bushy

top. When the tree was ten years old, Jesse said, "Ma, there is bloom on my new apple tree."

One apple hung on to maturity. It was large, streaked, and of strawberry color. He took his pocketknife, carefully pared and tasted the apple and exclaimed, "Ma, this is the best apple in the whole world!" He never changed his mind. After that the tree produced every year, until it was filling a barrel. He named it "Hawkeye."

For years after this seedling tree started to bear fruit, Jesse tried to interest local nurserymen in it. All of them refused as they did not think the apple had a future. Jesse Hiatt did not give up. He still was certain he had the world's best apple.

After 11 years, in 1893, he sent four specimens to a fruit show at Louisiana, Missouri. There they fell into the hands of a man who was looking for just such an apple. He was C. M. Stark, senior member of Stark Brothers Nursery, who staged the annual show.

Stark always carried a little red notebook in his pocket. In it he was continually jotting down names he thought might be appropriate for new fruit varieties. He did not trust to memory. He noted the names as they occurred to him. So when Stark discovered a new variety, he usually had a name available in the little red book that would be suitable. For years his book had contained the name Delicious. He was holding the name for a fruit that would be worthy of it. When he bit

into an apple from the Madison County lot, Stark had a sensation he never forgot. This was it. This was what he had been seeking. Here was the Delicious apple! Stark would have written Jesse Hiatt at once, but in the confusion of the show's closing the name and address from the lot had been lost. Nobody knew where the apples had come from because exhibits for the show had arrived from all sections of the country.

Stark could do nothing but wait for another show on the bare chance that the unknown exhibitor would enter again. While he waited, the fate of the Delicious apple hung in the balance. But not really, if there was one thing the old Quaker had learned it was patience. He forwarded more apples to the Missouri show the next year.

Stark went through the exhibits anxiously. He knew the apples with their streaked strawberry color the moment he unwrapped them. Now he wrote to Hiatt. The old man replied:

I am nearly 70 years old and have raised apples all my life and would not willingly overestimate this apple . . . but if it is not a better apple than any in your large list, it will cost you nothing . . . Once you introduce it there will be little call for Jonathan. The original tree is now about 22 years old . . . Both fruit and tree are perfect models . . .

The Starks purchased rights to the tree and in 1894 renamed it Delicious. Hundreds of trees

were immediately propagated, and the new variety was given nationwide publicity. The Starks made a large commercial exhibit of the fruit at one of the horticultural expositions held in Council Bluffs in 1909 or 1910. It is said that the Stark Brothers spent three-quarters of a million dollars to introduce the Delicious apple and during the next 25 years sold nearly eight million trees. By 1922 the variety had gained so much fame that a monument was dedicated to it. The monument, a large boulder suitably inscribed, stands today in the city park in Winterset. The Armistice Day storm of 1940 killed the tree to the ground, but several sprouts grew up from its roots. R. S. Herrick, then secretary of the State Horticultural Society visited the site and selected two sprouts that he developed into trees. These two trees can be considered the original tree. Both have been bearing fruit for many years. Surrounded by a fence, the trees stand in a cornfield today. The farm is presently owned by Margaretha Tracy and her brother, Raymond E. Tracy.

The fruit of the original Delicious apple tree was heavily striped. After it had been planted in large numbers, especially in Washington, a limb or an entire tree bore fruits of a solid red color which developed early in the season. These are mutations but more commonly called bud sports. Today over 80 different bud sports of the Delicious have been found and many of them commer-

cially propagated. The modern commercial orchardist prefers to plant these solid red sports, as they not only have more eye-appeal, but much higher solid red color on the crops as a whole. Today, in 1966, there are nearly twice as many Delicious trees and its sports grown in commercial apple orchards of the United States than of the McIntosh, the second leading variety. Today 36.1 percent of the nation's commercial apple crop is Delicious, and the original tree still stands on an Iowa farm.

H. E. NICHOLS