

Among the Builders

Over the past 100 years several hundred men and women have made outstanding contributions to the Iowa State Horticultural Society and to the development of horticulture in the State. The names of many of these individuals will be found in the various lists included as a part of this issue. However, the activities of the following men were particularly noteworthy:

SUEL FOSTER: In 1941 a plaque was placed in the entrance to Curtiss Hall on the campus of Iowa State College, Ames, to memorialize a man who has been called the "Father of Iowa State College"—Suel Foster of Muscatine. Foster first proposed a farmers college and an experimental farm to the General Assembly in 1856. He made the proposal in an article written for the *Iowa Farmer and Horticulturist*. This appeared a year before the first agricultural college was established in Michigan and six years before President Lincoln signed the Morrill Act providing Federal help for such colleges. In 1858 the General Assembly created Iowa Agricultural College by passing the act as Foster had written it. He was appointed a member of the first Board of Trustees and later served as its president. In picking a site for the

College the choice narrowed to one near Des Moines and another near Ames. Foster cast the deciding vote for Ames.

Suel Foster was born in New Hampshire in 1811. He came west and settled in what is now Muscatine in 1836. He bought over 3,800 acres of land for \$500 and started a nursery. Foster was active in many of the programs of the day. He planted trees of all types, secured seed of the Catalpa tree and planted it, discovering that some kinds would withstand Iowa winters while others would not. For years he advocated the planting of the hardy Catalpa. When the Wealthy apple was introduced by Gideon about 1870, Foster secured a few trees and by 1874 was its champion, doing a great deal to popularize it in Iowa. He knew Abraham Lincoln and was a delegate to the convention that nominated him.

When the call was made by Mark Miller to form an Iowa State Horticultural Society in 1866, Suel Foster and Dr. Weed of Muscatine attended and both became charter members of the Society. He became very active and served the Society many years as director and as president in 1872.

GUSTAVUS BENSON BRACKETT: A charter member of the Iowa State Horticultural Society was Colonel G. B. Brackett. In 1841, when he was 14 years old he came with his father from Ohio to Denmark in Lee County, Iowa. The fall before, he had washed out a half bushel of apple seeds from

a cider mill near Cincinnati which were brought to Iowa. The father and son established a nursery and orchard which they were associated with for 56 years. The younger Brackett completed his formal schooling at Denmark Academy. In 1848 he planted the first Osage orange tree in Iowa and began the promotion of the Osage "hedge fence" which was widely used until the advent of barbed wire. During the Civil War he became chief engineer on the staff of General U. S. Grant.

After the war Brackett returned to Denmark and to his neglected nursery and orchard. In 1866 he joined with others in founding the Iowa State Horticultural Society. Brackett served four years as its president and later as its secretary. During his presidency it was decided to send an exhibit to the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia in 1876. To Brackett, exhibits and fruits were inseparable. Iowa's fruits, however, would not be ripe until autumn when the Exposition would be more than half over. Brackett solved this problem by preparing, with the assistance of a Mrs. Greenland, a remarkable collection of lifelike wax models of 300 varieties of fruits grown in Iowa in 1875. The reproduction of form and color was so perfect that Exposition visitors often reached into the cases to feel and smell the apples, pears, and peaches. Iowa won first prize for the largest and best exhibit.

Brackett — the fruitgrower, nurseryman, and army engineer—now became Brackett—the artist.

A collection of 1,000 models was exhibited at other expositions, including two in Paris.

For years the wax apples were displayed at the Horticultural Society rooms in the Capitol but later most of them were discarded through lack of storage space. A few specimens are preserved in the Horticultural Department of Iowa State University.

When the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago was in the planning stage, the United States Department of Agriculture decided to send an exhibit of wax models of fruit. Brackett was called to Washington and worked for three and a half years in the preparation of this exhibit. It proved a notable success and further enhanced his reputation as an artist and expert pomologist. In 1896 Brackett again was called to Washington to continue modeling fruit for the Division of Pomology in the Department of Agriculture. A year later he became chief of the division. He was then 70 years of age—ready and able to start a new career which was to last 18 years until his death in 1915.

CHARLES GRANDISON PATTEN: "The Burbank of the North." If one man had to be named who contributed more to the early development of horticulture in Iowa, it would have to be Charles G. Patten of Charles City, Iowa. For over 40 years he labored to produce hardy fruits that would withstand the northern Iowa climate. He introduced several varieties of apples, pears, and plums,

some of which are still being grown in northern Iowa and southern Minnesota.

Patten was born in Theresa, New York, in 1832 and died in Charles City, November 28, 1921. He came to Charles City in 1864. After spending his first two years in farming and lumbering, he started a nursery in 1866. Patten said that although he had had no experience in nursery work he was impelled to start his business because of a love for trees and fruits. At first he planted seeds of fruits and made selections from them. From these early plantings came a variety of apple he named Patten Greening. After 22 years of fruit breeding by "selection" he began to cross selected parents by hand pollination. This method had just been suggested as a means of improving fruits and Patten was the first Iowa grower to try it. He became a member of the Iowa State Horticultural Society in 1876, and throughout the rest of his life was active in its projects. From 1876 through 1920, he participated in a total of 112 talks, discussions, or read learned papers at its annual meetings. He served it as president in 1887 and 1888.

In 1883 he secured an appropriation from the General Assembly for \$1,500 for experimental work by the Society. The previous legislature had granted an equal amount to Iowa State College for experimentation in horticulture and agriculture. One of the Society's experiment stations was on his farm. By 1917 Patten had developed and

accumulated so much material that the State Experiment Station took over the management of 17 acres of his plants when the Society discontinued their stations. Patten maintained a keen interest in these trees until his death. For his achievements as a plant breeder and pioneer leader, Iowa State College, in 1915, conferred upon him the Certificate of Eminent Service, the first honor of its kind ever awarded by the College.

Patten never gave up. His neighbors thought the only fruit that could be raised were crab apples and wild gooseberries. Although he knew nothing about growing fruit when he started in 1866, Patten kept at it "through failure, ill health, and financial handicaps for 50 years." He lived to see some of his productions achieve popularity, such as the Patten Greening, Brilliant and Eastman apples, the Patten pear, and Patten plum.

FRANK CHAPMAN PELLETT: A person noted as an author, editor, beekeeper, world authority on honey plants, and a lover of all nature was Frank C. Pellett. He was born on a farm northeast of Atlantic, Iowa, and died there April 12, 1951. As a young man he staged bee demonstrations at local teachers' institutes and Chautauquas. He was the author of 13 books on beekeeping including, *American Honey Plants*, which gave him a worldwide reputation. He was appointed Iowa's first apiarist and for over 40 years served as editor of the *American Bee Journal*.

During his life he received many state, national, and international awards. Included among these were the 1947 National Skelly Award for superior achievement in agriculture, an award from the National Association of Garden Clubs and the Honor Award of the Iowa State Horticultural Society.

Over 50 years ago Pellett set aside a portion of his farm as a wildlife preserve. Later he developed it into a Honey Plant Test Garden, which at one time contained 475 different plants. In 1954, after his death five acres were set aside as a permanent preserve. Two stone markers, with descriptive plaques, have been placed at its entrance.

Pellet became a life member of the State Horticultural Society in 1908. He served as the first president of the Iowa Beekeepers Association when it was organized in 1912 and as president of the Iowa State Horticultural Society for three years—1936 through 1939.

SPENCER AMBROSE BEACH: The first professional horticulturist to be elected president of the State Horticultural Society was Professor S. A. Beach. He served for five years (1918-1922) in that position and guided the reorganization of the Society, which took place during this period.

Born in Cayuga County, New York, on September 15, 1860, Beach died in Ames on November 2, 1922. Like many other budding horticulturists of the day, he went to Iowa State College

to study under J. L. Budd. At this school he received his bachelor's degree in 1887 and his master's in 1892. He was appointed head of the Department of Horticulture at the New York Agricultural Experiment Station, Geneva, New York, in 1890. It was here that Beach prepared and published *Apples of New York*, the first of a monumental series of fruit monographs issued by that station.

In 1905 he was called back to Iowa State as head of the Department of Horticulture and Forestry and Vice Dean of Agriculture. He served in this capacity until his death.

At Iowa State he expanded and developed the horticultural work of both the College and the Experiment Station. As a leading authority in plant breeding, he expanded apple breeding work, introduced a number of new apple varieties, initiated experiments in cold storage of fruits, and introduced the first Chinese Elms grown in Iowa.

The first Midwest Horticultural Exposition was planned and staged during his years as president of the Society.

BETHEL STEWART PICKETT: The one man most responsible for the guidance and policy of the Iowa State Horticultural Society from 1924 to 1948 was Professor B. S. Pickett. He worked closely with the secretary, R. S. Herrick, during these years in developing and expanding the programs of the Society.

Professor Pickett came to Ames from the University of Illinois to head the Department of Horticulture and Forestry in 1923. He was born in Canada and received his college education at Ontario Agricultural College, Guelph, and the University of Toronto. He moved to the United States in 1905 and was naturalized in 1924. Prior to going to Ames, Pickett held positions in horticulture at Guelph, Ontario, New Hampshire University and the University of Illinois.

Now retired, Pickett has been active in many national horticultural organizations. He helped organize and was the first president of the Federated Garden Clubs of Iowa. He served as director and as president of the Iowa State Horticultural Society. He was general manager of the 1930 and 1932 Midwest Horticultural Expositions.

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