

THE PALIMPSEST

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Early Iowa Horticulture

Long before Iowa became a state there was considerable interest among the new settlers in the growing of fruits, vegetables, and flowers. It was an interest that developed naturally because of the need for fruits and vegetables as food. In addition, many of the newcomers planted flowers and trees to beautify their simple homesteads.

Actually, horticulture had its beginnings in the Spanish Land Grants, prior to permanent white settlement in 1833. Julien Dubuque is credited with planting the first apple tree. It was planted before 1795 in what is now Dubuque County, Iowa. This tree was 14 inches in diameter in 1835. Louis Honoré Tesson planted the first apple orchard on his Spanish Land Grant near present-day Montrose in Lee County in 1799. The last trees in this orchard were cut down about 1895. At the present time this site is covered with waters of the Mississippi River which were backed over it by the dam at Keokuk.

The early pioneers had flocked into Iowa fol-

lowing the opening of the territory to settlement on June 1, 1833. As they cleared the land for farming they began to plant orchards and gardens. The first apple orchard in Scott County was planted by Antoine LeClaire in 1833. It covered six acres and contained 400 trees. Onions and potatoes were grown in quantities in Scott County as early as 1842 and were shipped to St. Louis by boat. By 1846, when Iowa was admitted as a State, there were less than one hundred thousand people living in the eastern counties.

The early settlers asked for fruit trees. Eastern nurserymen sent salesmen into Iowa. Soon, however, several nurseries were started within the Territory of Iowa. Probably the first one was established by Robert Avery in 1836. He moved to Burlington and started a business which he and his son successfully carried on for nearly half a century. Another family, the Leonard Brothers, started a nursery near Burlington in 1837. In this same year Henderson Lewelling moved from Indiana to Henry County. There he started the town of Salem and a nursery with thirty-five varieties of apples and some plum, peach, and cherry trees. A few years later, in 1841, Reuben Brackett moved from Cincinnati, Ohio, to Denmark, Iowa, and started a nursery. Gustavus, his son, known as Colonel Brackett, was destined to become one of Iowa's leading horticulturists. These are but a few of the many who established nurseries.

At this time people interested in horticultural pursuits met to talk over their mutual problems. Soon they formed local or county-wide societies. Early records state that the first horticultural society in Iowa was organized in Burlington in the 1850's by "the Averys, Leonards, James W. Grimes, and a few others." A Northeastern Horticultural Society was in existence in 1857. The Scott County Horticultural Society was organized April 26, 1859, and later that year held two exhibitions of fruits, vegetables, and flowers.

Previous to these organizations many county agricultural societies had been formed. One of the most active, the Jefferson County Agricultural Society, spearheaded the formation of the State Agricultural Society on October 13, 1853. It was organized primarily to sponsor a State Fair, the first of which was held at Fairfield in October of 1854. Included at this first fair were exhibits of apples, pears, potatoes, and a few other vegetables.

During the fair held in Oskaloosa in 1858, fruit exhibitors met one evening in the First Presbyterian Church to talk over their fruitgrowing problems. A Dr. Shaw was appointed to the chair and Suel Foster, an active Muscatine nurseryman, was called upon to tell of his experiences in growing fruit in this new land. This was, perhaps, the first meeting of fruitgrowers ever held in Iowa on a state-wide basis.

Such meetings became a yearly custom during

the State Fair, but the Civil War put a stop to them. By the end of the war in 1865, prices for apples and all fruits were very high. This stimulated increased interest in fruitgrowing. In eastern states and especially in Wisconsin, Illinois, and Missouri, state horticultural societies had been formed. As interest mounted in Iowa for a statewide association, growers formed the Iowa State Horticultural Society at a meeting in Iowa City on June 26, 1866. There were 28 charter members. After 100 years of continuous service, hundreds of members will celebrate its Centennial in the Memorial Union at Iowa State University in Ames, October 19-23, 1966.

H. E. NICHOLS