

## Seed Distribution and Testing

Another important aspect of the work in the Agriculture Section of the Patent Office was the distribution of seeds. A considerable part of the money appropriated by Congress for agricultural purposes was spent for the procurement and distribution of seeds, roots and cuttings. The object was the introduction of new and useful crops and vegetable products, hitherto unknown in the United States.

American consuls, missionaries and others procured from all quarters of the globe those products which might be successfully cultivated in the United States. These seeds and plants were in turn placed in the hands of persons most likely to try the experiment fully and fairly.

Only small quantities of some seeds were distributed. Small packages, weighing two or three ounces, could be conveniently sent through the mails. By this means, too, the chance to experiment could be extended to a great many more people than if the seed had been distributed by the bushel.

Charles Mason concluded his summary of this activity in 1854 by saying, "If the seeds distributed through this office can fall . . . into the hands of



persons in all sections of the country . . . it may be expected that the most substantial benefits will result from such a course."

Many Iowans received seeds of various kinds, planted them, and frequently reported the results to the Patent Office. In some cases these reports were published so farmers could benefit from knowledge of a new or improved crop.

On July 9, 1853, Mason sent out a circular announcing that "many thousand volumes" of the agricultural and mechanical reports of the Patent Office, "as well as a large amount and variety of seeds," would be available for distribution. He asked for the names and addresses "of some of the more enterprising and practical residents of your county, to whom these reports and seeds can be sent."

O.H.P. Parnell replied that Malcolm McBane of Quasqueton would thoroughly test grains, vegetables, grasses or flowers. Garden vegetables and flowers would best suit Isaac F. Hathaway. Parnell said he also would give vegetables and flowers "a thorough trial."

George Stover, Samuel Haworth, James Green and Albert Randolph of Indianola were described by P. P. Henderson as "good practical farmers" who would particularly give grapes a fair trial. Dr. B. J. Noble had just opened a large farm and "would pay attention to the grapes and other fall crops." Henderson asked for "some of Each kind



of your seeds—flowers, Garden, and Cultivated grapes” for himself.

In his letter of September 30, 1853, Robert Coles of Chariton wrote:

You may forward to my address if convenient such samples as you may think best, of flowers, garden vegetables, cultivated grasses, field crops or grain as I am in a situation where I can devote some attention to a thorough trial of their qualities, &c.

On December 17, 1853, Laurel Summers reported on seven kinds of seeds that had been sent to him—“Long green cucumber,” “Landreth’s Large York Cabbage,” “Landreth’s Extra Pea,” “Brown six week Beans” (bush variety), “Olive Shaped Red Beet,” “Indian or Ice Lettuce,” and the “Flat Dutch Cabbage.” He said they all exceeded anything of the kind “that I have ever seen in Iowa. They seem to be well adapted to our soil and climate and the peas and beans yield abundantly and come early.” He described the Flat Dutch Cabbage as being as solid as an “Oak Knot” and very sweet and brittle.

Bernhart Henn of Fairfield, on November 22, 1854, wrote that corn raised by D. P. Inskeep of Wapello County had averaged 136 bushels on five acres. At the time he wrote, the ears of corn were about 14 inches in length, although he thought they were at least one inch longer when first picked.

A Japan Pea was raised by Abram Weaver of



Bloomfield in 1854. He wrote of his experiment as follows:

I planted 23 peas out of which number 18 grew. They were cultivated in my garden last summer, planted on 20th May & ripened last of August & first of September, say from Middle of August to 15 of Sept. before all were ripe. . . . From the few produced the past season, I am of the opinion that more bushels of Peas can be raised to the acre than of Corn. I also had about a pint of them cooked when green when about at their largest size, and found them of delicious flavor. I am fully of opinion that a few acres raised for the purpose of turning hogs . . . would be a valuable crop.

Senator Dodge sent G. P. Walker of Nine Eagles 76 grains of the improved "King Philip Corn" in 1854. Walker wrote Mason, "I assure you that I was much better pleased with my present than to have received a California letter with a slight sprinkling of the precious gold dust." He planted the corn in his richest ground on May 9. When the ground became too dry, he watered it. The corn was fully ripe before the middle of August, and the yield was abundant.

The report of D. B. Dixon of Muscatine on Hungarian millet was considered important enough to be published in 1856. Dixon wrote:

It is luxuriant in its growth, and produces hay of the finest quality. Horses and cattle eat it with avidity. Farmers in every part of the country should give it their attention, as it will make more and better feed than any other kind of grass now known in the United States. Our



Western farmers, in particular, should learn its value; for its destiny is to change the agricultural products of this portion of the Union, and substitute cows, horses, mules, and sheep in place of hogs. We have raised hogs, heretofore, from necessity, simply because our only reliable crop was corn, and other domestic animals required hay, or its equivalent, which we could not produce with cheapness and certainty.

A number of Iowans were trying Chinese sugar cane in 1857. J. W. Raynolds of Newbern got 30 gallons of good molasses from the sugar cane seed he received. Part of this he sold for \$1.25 a gallon. He also harvested nearly a bushel of ripe seed. Although he had found such experiments generally unprofitable, "the cane has more than paid all that I will expend for years to come," he wrote.

At West Union the sugar cane was cultivated "with very general success," according to R. H. Spencer. He added that "several specimens of syrup were exhibited at our county fair which compared favorably with any in our market."

J. W. Cattell of Springdale was asking for "King Philip," "Smutty-white" and "Wyandotte" corn, as well as some of the Chinese sugar cane in 1857. From Anamosa, J. S. Dimmitt wanted "Chufa" or "Earth Almond" for his own experimenting. He reported that "King Philip" corn appeared "to be the best adapted to this climate."

Seeds were not the only things tested by Iowans for the Patent Office. On May 6, 1857, the Office



sent two cans of guano to Legrand Byington of Iowa City. Two-thirds of a can of Peruvian guano was applied to one square rod of his timothy and clover meadow. Two-thirds of a can of Baker's Island guano was placed on an adjoining square rod, and the remaining one-third of each can was mixed and applied to another parcel of land.

Byington reported as follows:

I estimate the relative product as follows:

The rod which received the unmixed Peruvian Guano showed an increased production of about fifty per cent;

That on which the mixture was applied showed an increase of about thirty per cent;

While that which received the unmixed Baker's Island showed no perceptible increase.

Not all products or seeds were sent only from the Patent Office to Iowans. In some cases Iowans were ready to furnish seeds or show the results of their own activities to the Federal Government in Washington. A. N. Harlan of near Croton sent a sample of a potato to Mason on March 11, 1857. Harlan wrote that it had been sent to him in California in 1851 from Hobart Town, New South Wales. He continued, "I bought and raised a few near Sacramento City in 1851 and of those I raised I brought to Sweet Home one small potato from which I stocked this section of country." The potato was below yield in comparison with the Long John and others, "but when on the table they speak for themselves."



From Townsend McConnel of Pleasant Plain the Patent Office received a sample of "Squaw Beans." McConnel provided this background on the bean:

A neighbor of mine while on an excursion to the Indian [Sauk and Fox] country about fifty miles N.W. from this place came upon an encampment of those Indians and found a quantity of bean vines from which after much hunting he obtained about one dozen beans. These were nearly all distributed among the "old women" of the neighborhood, three only being reserved to plant himself. . . . They are very prolific, yielding six beans to the pod and may be gathered—ripe—from the middle of July until frost kills the plant. A single plant has been known to yield a gallon of clean beans. They cook easily either green or dry and are in every respect a superior variety of beans.

Seeds of wild flowers native to Iowa were sent by A. E. Chandler of Lyons. One he called "Black Hawk's Plume" which "grows some 3 or 4 feet high, on a single stalk—bearing a peach-glow colored flower encircling the whole stalk in divisions. It abounds in our unreclaimed prairie soil." The other was a "wild locust" which grew "some 15 inches high—leaves resembling our common locust but bearing a very pretty yellow flower."

H. L. Wolford of Moravia in Appanoose County proposed on May 5, 1856, that birds and animals should also be imported:

As the most desirable I recommend the importation of various songbirds—the Sky-Lark—the little robin red-



breast—the Blackcap and others, who, besides enlivening and beautifying creation would render themselves very useful by consuming innumerable insects, injurious to agriculture.

All these and other useful animals could be easily procured in large quantities and be set at liberty at suitable places, so that in a short time they could become indigenous to our continent and spread over our domain in the same manner we have done our own race and all our domestic animals. Eleven years ago there were no robins, nor thrushes, nor blue and redbirds to be seen in the State of Iowa, and now they are becoming very numerous; they are following, it seems, emigration and civilization.