



January, 1945

75th
Anniversary

DIAMOND JUBILEE of the ELBERTA PEACH

By H. P. STUCKEY
Georgia Experiment Station

THAT Chinese Cling peach seed planted by Samuel H. Rumph at Marshallville, Georgia, in 1870 which produced the Elberta variety was the real starting point of a great commercial peach industry in Georgia. The growing of the Elberta has since spread to many other points of the world where peaches are grown. The Elberta remains a leading variety in Georgia, and in practically all parts of this country, in the far northwestern states of Oregon and Washington, on the shores of Lake Michigan, as well as in the greenhouses of Amsterdam, Holland.

The following brief quotations will indicate the way in which the Elberta rates as a peach variety in several different sections of this country:

Arkansas Experiment Station Bulletin 414, "Approximately ninety percent of the commercial acreage has been devoted to the Elberta variety. It has also been the leading variety in home orchards."—1941.

Massachusetts Experiment Station Bulletin 399, "Elberta is the most widely grown and best known peach east of the Rocky Mountains."—1943.

Ohio Agricultural Extension Bulletin 252, "Elberta—this is the leading commercial variety for Ohio."—1944.

United States Department of Agriculture Year Book, "Elberta—this is the leading commercial peach in the United States today. It was originated in Marshallville in 1870 and in the 67 years since that time no better peach has been found, when all characteristics are considered."—1937.

Washington Experiment Station Bulletin 359, "Elberta peach trees constitute 55.8 percent of all trees in Yakima County. It was the most important variety in 1936."—1938.

Results of work with Elberta chance seedlings and crosses indicate that the Elberta carries both white and yellow flesh characters in its makeup. There was no doubt a very unusual linkage of chromozones in the creation of this outstanding and long-lived variety which has held its lead over all other varieties for seventy-five years. It is frequently found, in both plant and animal breeding, that superior individuals resulting from crosses are themselves very poor breeders. It is no surprise, therefore, that a very large majority of Elberta seedlings produce fruit inferior to the parent tree.

Elberta seeds from some isolated open pollinated trees at the Georgia Experiment Station produced trees of which the majority bore yellow-fleshed fruit. In the collection, however, of more than five hundred trees, some bore white-fleshed freestone, some white-fleshed clingstone, some yellow-fleshed freestone, and some yellow-fleshed clingstone. It was interesting to note that less than five percent of the trees produced fruit equal or superior to the Elberta.

M. A. Blake at the New Jersey Experiment Station has had a long and fruitful experience in peach breeding. He reports that one objection to the Elberta peach as a parent is that it transmits lack of hardiness. Yet, by crossing the Elberta with more hardy varieties he has produced some with considerable

cold resistance. The Golden Jubilee, he says, is a second generation seedling of the Elberta. His Goldeneast variety, which is still popular in southern New Jersey, had the Elberta as one parent, and a cross between the Elberta and Greensboro as the other parent. The Primrose, another New Jersey variety, was developed from a cross between Elberta and Belle.

Stanley Johnston, a most successful peach breeder at the South Haven, Michigan, Experiment Station, states that the J. H. Hale has been a better parent than the Elberta in his peach breeding work, even though it is thought by some that the Elberta is one of the parents of the J. H. Hale. We lack complete facts on this point.

J. H. Weinberger, of the United States Bureau of Plant Industry, and located at Fort Valley, Georgia, has accepted the results of other peach breeders in their finding that the Elberta is not an exceptionally good parent in the creation of better varieties. He has, however, used several descendants of the Elberta with varying results. Some of these are such varieties as Valient, Vedette, Halberta, Redelberta, Goldeneast, and Golden Jubilee.

The Early Elberta, a bud sport discovered by P. M. Sullivan of Concord, Georgia, is almost identical with the Elberta except that it ripens a week earlier. It is gaining favor in Georgia as a commercial variety.

Records show that in the year 1857 a very progressive banker by
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the name of L. C. Plant lived and did business in Macon, Georgia. He was interested in fruit growing as well as in banking. Mr. Plant was a good friend of the Rumph family, living three miles east of Marshallville, a small town only about thirty-five miles southwest of Macon. At that time most people in Georgia produced their peach trees by planting peach pits (seeds) although nurseries were offering budded trees for sale. A representative of a Delaware nursery dropped in to see Mr. Plant at his bank at Macon and got him interested in trying some budded peach trees. Mr. Plant placed his order for a few trees of the Chinese Cling, Early Crawford, Late Crawford, Mixon Free, Stump the World, and Tellitson. This was only seven years after the introduction of the Chinese Cling to America in 1850 by Charles Downing.

Mr. Plant sent these trees to be planted by his good friend Colonel Lewis Rumph of Marshallville, Georgia. Mr. Rumph grew the trees in his family orchard and considered the fruit of the Chinese Cling especially choice. The blossoms of the Chinese Cling trees, being in a family orchard, were subject to natural pollination by the other varieties of peaches growing there. Mrs. Rumph, wife of Col. Rumph, saved seeds from a Chinese Cling tree and gave them to her grandson, Samuel H. Rumph, who planted the seeds on the Rumph farm in 1870. Of the several seedling trees he brought into fruitage from this planting, one produced excellent fruit which was later named Elberta.

Samuel H. Rumph, who planted the Chinese Cling peach seed and grew the original Elberta tree, married Miss Elberta Moore, a very charming young woman, who as Mrs. Rumph entertained many friends. It so happened that she had a group of friends to spend the day just at a time when the fruit of this seedling peach tree was at its best. Samuel H. Rumph, Elberta's husband, brought some of the choice seedling peaches along with several other sorts into the house to be admired by his wife's friends. Mr. Rumph handed out the fruit from several different trees, and when he came to the most luscious of them all, he announced that it had no name, and suggested that Mrs. L. E.

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Veal, one of the visitors, might name it. Mrs. Veal, it is said, promptly replied, "Let's name it for your wife, Elberta. She is perfect and so is the peach."

It may be of interest to note that Mr. Lewis A. Rumph, son of Col. Lewis Rumph, planted some seeds from the same Chinese Cling peach tree, from which the Elberta came, and produced the Georgia Belle, at one time a very widely planted white-fleshed freestone variety. The site of the original Elberta and Georgia Belle trees on the Rumph farm is marked that future generations may not forget the birthplace of these two well known commercial varieties.

Samuel H. Rumph had faith in the possibilities of a commercial peach industry in Georgia and in the new variety, Elberta, he had originated. He made many experimental shipments of peaches to distant markets, and helped design containers in which to ship peaches. He operated a nursery and supplied his fellow peach growers with good nursery trees. He aligned himself with every forward looking movement for the advancement of the peach industry, including improvements in the shipment of fruit under refrigeration, and he lived to see many of his ideas and personal efforts bear fruit in a big way. Mr. Rumph died on December 22, 1922, at the age of seventy-one.

Citrus Committee Meeting

AT a recent meeting in Washington, D.C., of the Fresh and Processed Citrus Fruit Industry Advisory Committee, called by the War Food Administration, it was decided that an increase in Texas-grower prices for grapefruit for canning be withheld.

WFA officials said that such an increase would not be justified in view of the present indication of present available supplies of citrus fruits and the prospective movement of citrus fruits in fresh form.

The Bureau of Agricultural Economics, U.S.D.A., estimated the prospective Texas grapefruit production, as of December 1, 1944, at 20,150,000 boxes compared with a production of only slightly more than 17,500,000 boxes in the 1942-43 and 1943-44 seasons.