

## Roses in American History

The indigenous peoples of the Pacific Northwest held roses in high esteem and would gather regional rose species for food and medicinal purposes. The rose hips were valued for their nutritive and tonic qualities, and rose leaves were often used as poultice or tea. Washington State has three native roses: the Baldhip rose, Nootka rose and Clustered wild rose.

When New England settlers came to North America they found the native roses appealing and sent *Rosa virginiana* to England in 1725. The settlers also brought slips and cuttings of their favorite Old Garden Roses. Varieties such as Damask, Alba, Gallica, Centifolia and Sweetbriar roses were planted as a reminder of home. Concurrently, roses were being introduced in America from China. This set off a revolution of new rose introductions in the New World and abroad.

Almost a century later, in 1803, Thomas Jefferson would cultivate roses in his garden at Monticello and send many bushels of native rose seeds to a friend in France. John Champneys from Charleston, South Carolina introduced a new class of rose around 1811. This new rose, which was a cross of *Rosa moschata* and *Rosa chinensis*, produced America's first hybridized rose which was named 'Champney's Pink Cluster.' Mr. Champney gifted Philippe Noisette, a nurseryman and acquaintance, with this new rose. Philippe cultivated the seed hips of Champney's Pink Cluster and sent a unique specimen seedling and seeds to his brother Louis Noisette in France. These were placed in the hands of French growers who crossed the variation of Champney's Pink Cluster with 'Parks' Yellow Tea Scented China. 'Noisette' would become the official name of this new rose class.

One of the earliest American rose nurseries was established in Philadelphia by Robert Buist, who notably published the first official manual on roses around 1844. Several decades later, in 1867, Hybrid Teas would be introduced, when the Chinese 'Tea' roses were cross-pollinated with hybrid perpetual roses. The Tea rose had the much desired trait of repeat bloom. The name 'Tea' was given to this variety of China rose as it was descriptive of the rose's tea-like fragrance.

Hybrid Tea roses exploded in popularity, and The Massachusetts Horticultural Society held the first exhibition of flowers solely dedicated to roses in the 1870s. Standardization of rose classification was set by the work of H.B. Ellwanger, called "The Rose". He evaluated almost one thousand varieties in his publication. Ellwanger sought to find roses suitable to the variable climates in the United States. As an established nurseryman, he experimented with native roses, using them as rootstock to grow hardier, more suitable rose plants. One type, *Rosa multiflora*, became popular as a rootstock and hedge plant, until it was discovered to be quite invasive.

It wasn't until *Rosa wichuraiana* was collected in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century that sturdier rose plants were successfully developed. The *wichuraina* rose, native to Asia, was adaptable to extreme climates and different soil types. It was often referred to as 'Memorial Rose', as it was used for cemetery plantings. The sturdiness of this plant prompted American rose growers to breed more Asian roses with familiar rose cultivars. Today, 'Dr. Huey', a cultivar of *Rosa wichuraiana*, is a common rootstock (or understock) for many roses. 'Dr. Huey' is both loved and loathed, as its dark maroon flowers are the dominant growth when a grafted rose dies back.

The Plant Patent Act, which was passed by the U.S. Congress in 1930, was a significant triumph for rose breeders. It gave much needed protection to American hybridizers, who previously had no rights to exclusively grow and sell their own new varieties. As a result of this act, breeders were able to retain patent rights for seventeen years.

The 'Peace' Rose is one of the most important and treasured hybrid tea roses since its introduction in 1945. It has a remarkable history that started in France just before the



**Peace, Hybrid Tea**

German Occupation in World War II. Francis Meilland, a third generation rose breeder, managed to send bud wood of a promising new rose known only as '3-35-40' to the United States, Germany, and Italy. In the United States it was grown in the Conard-Pyle Nursery where it was cultivated and recognized as an exceptional rose. The new rose was given the name "Peace" as this was the hope for the world at that time. Coincidentally, the same day of the naming ceremony for 'Peace' would be the same day Berlin fell in World War II. 'Peace' is known as 'Mme. A. Meilland' in

France. Today 'Peace' continues to be a popular rose for gardens, with over 50 million 'Peace' roses planted around the world.



**Gemini, Hybrid Tea**



**Peace, Hybrid Tea**