

Promis



Lajos Ambrus

HUNGARIAN APPLES IN AMERICA

Calendar for the year 2018

2018

34062
J. A. Little
Cartersburg
Hand

Little's





Lajos Ambrus

HUNGARIAN APPLES IN AMERICA

While browsing through 3855 apple portrayals in the digitalized Pomological Watercolor Collection of the USDA National Agricultural Library, I was given some unexpected surprises. “The USDA Pomological Watercolor Collection is one of the most unique collections in the Rare and Special Collections of the National Agricultural Library (NAL). As a historic botanical resource, it documents new fruit and nut varieties, and specimens introduced by USDA plant explorers from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The collection spans the years 1886 to 1942. The majority of the paintings were created between 1894 and 1916.” The NAL’s collection abounds with internationally well-known varieties of American, Canadian, English, French, German, Russian, Dutch and other apples, some in more than one version: Borovinka, French Pippin, Canadian Rainette, Steyrischer Winter Borsdorfer, Borsdorfer, and so on—in a wide tableau of beautiful watercolor paintings. I happened to be looking for a painting which would depict the Jonathan apple, this proud

and original American variety of the fruit. And I wasn’t disappointed: I found nearly seventy regional varieties—red, green and black ones. Much to my surprise, I found the caption ‘**Magyar**’ under the pastel of a fall apple. According to its data sheet, it was painted in 1904 by Ellen Isham Schutt in South Haven, Michigan. The picture (size: 17x25 cm) presumably depicts the Hungarian Rosemary apple. In such a huge collection it’s pretty hard to identify different varieties on the basis of only one picture. The data sheets have the name of the painter, the fruit’s scientific name, its place of origin, and the date when it was painted, as well as the notice of the digital library on the use of pictures. It is not restricted, but a statement of attribution is required: *U.S. Department of Agriculture Pomological Watercolor Collection. Rare and Special Collections, National Agricultural Library, Beltsville, MD 20705.* Surprise came upon surprise. I came across a fruit called ‘**Hungarian**’—just like ‘**Magyar**’, it is from South Haven, and was painted by another painter

in 1902. Carrying on my systematic investigations, I could identify sixteen further varieties that were undoubtedly of Hungarian origin: Carman pear, then some early and late plums, another plum also called ‘Hungarian’ and originating from the Lyon estate in South Haven, Michigan; White cherry, Badacsony cherry, and Bullock’s Eye of Baltavár (“Baltavári ökörszem”). After having crossed the ocean, they all began to bear fruits by the end of the 19th century. All pictures were painted with scholarly precision—at a time when fruit painting was still in its infancy in Hungary. Girókuti’s first Hungarian pomology (*Fructiculture in Hungary in Colored Drawings; “Magyarország gyümölcészete színes rajzokban”, 1863*) was illustrated with colored pictures of twenty-seven Hungarian fruits: paintings of a certain Doctor Pólya. The pictures almost unenjoyable today were strongly criticized already by his contemporaries. The illustrations in Stoll’s *Oesterreichisch-Ungarische Pomologie* published in Vienna in 1888 are, from an esthetic point of view, very modest,

Little's curiosity



compared to the American paintings. The well-to-do specialist periodicals at the end of the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th century published mostly chromolithographies borrowed from Germany. The domestic varieties were indicated with simple contours (“edge drawings”), or they didn’t have any kind of illustrations. Máté Bereczki’s epoch-making work, the four-volume *Fructicultural Sketches* (“*Gyümölcsészeti vázlatok*”) was published without illustrations (in 1877 and onwards). The *Hungarian Pomology* written during Hungary’s millennial times came out in folio in 1900, and contained some more or less acceptable paintings that depict twelve apple varieties, nine cherries, three sour cherries, four peaches, and two apricots. The pomological works published in the thirties were decorated with Erzsébet Klopfer’s watercolor paintings.

The Hungarian material of the NAL collection would truly deserve a special study. For this calendar, material has been selected that is closely connected with Hungarian history of culture. All the varieties shown here were cultivated in several states of the U.S.A.—in Illinois, Michigan, North Carolina, Virginia, Washington,

Arkansas—in places to where the East European emigrant carried with him or her the seeds of fruits as keepsakes from home, or the seed(ing)s got there through academic exchanges.

The domestic Hungarian connections of this precious material are still unexamined, and waiting to be explored. The existence of this, until now latent, material is something of a silent scientific sensation. The colored picture of the almost unknown Mihályfy apple (a.k.a. Mihályfy’s Peppin) has never been seen by me, and it cannot be seen in the British National Fruit Collection either. The apple varieties Sovar and Sikuli, and the Mirror apple likewise are very attractive, as well as the Kossuth apple which we never have had the luck to take a furtive look at; it is not grown anymore.

The Winter Red Scone apple (“*Téli piros pogácsaalma*”) apparently got painted on two occasions. How difficult the identification of different varieties is can be well illustrated by the data sheet of the apple. Under “Variety” it has only this word:

Keespomet. Since this variety springs from the Hungarian country town Kecskemét (formerly the fruit was called Red apple of Kecskemét), and knowing how strange and funny alterations Hungarian names

can go through abroad, it may be stated almost with certainty that *Keespomet* is nothing else than Kecskemét.

Hopefully it won’t be seen out of place to include, too, although of American origin, the Jonathan apple, since it has become a truly Hungarian fruit over more than a century. King Mathias’ favorite apple, the Dirty or Skinny apple (a.k.a. Pomme gris) is included too, along with the Masánszky apple (a.k.a. Steyrischer Borsdorfer), one of the most popular old fruits of the Pannonian region in Hungary. According to some sources this apple was first transferred to Meissen, Prussia from the Upper Hungarian town Kisszeben (today Sabinov in Slovakia), and then came back under the name of Masánszky. Actually, each and every fruit has its own story. Each has its fine and distinct characteristics to be tasted and enjoyed by all. Apple is an eternal symbol of beauty and harmony. This small sample of apples is meant to demonstrate the unique genetic values of Hungary and the Carpathian Basin at large, and to show the colorful richness of Hungarian fruits justly sought after at home and abroad alike. Remembering them, knowing them, esteeming them enriches the patriotic feelings of Hungarians.

Little's curiosity