

Richard Wellington

October 10, 1884 — June 15, 1975

Richard Wellington, professor emeritus of pomology at Cornell University's New York State Agricultural Experiment Station, Geneva, New York, died at the age of ninety. For forty-seven years he served the station in horticultural research, twenty-four of these years as department head. Under his leadership, seventy new fruit varieties were introduced, and the department gained worldwide recognition for its accomplishments.

Professor Wellington was born and grew up in Waltham, Massachusetts, on a traditional New England dairy farm with its usual fruit and vegetable sidelines. He obtained his B.S. degree from Massachusetts Agricultural College, Amherst, in 1906. That same year, at the age of twenty-two, he came to the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station, Geneva, as assistant horticulturist to work with U. P. Hedrick. He was the third horticulturist to be hired by the station which, then, was less than a quarter of a century old. In 1911 he earned his master's degree in genetics at the Bussey Institute of Harvard University, after which he was promoted to associate horticulturist at the station.

In 1913 he went to the Minnesota Agricultural Experiment Station as pomologist. Six years later, he was appointed professor of vegetable gardening at the University of Maryland and Vegetable Breeder at the Maryland Experiment Station. In 1920 he returned to Geneva to become associate horticulturist; and in 1929 he was made professor of pomology and head of the division of pomology. He guided the departmental program until his retirement in 1952. He also served as collaborator with the United States Department of Agriculture on fruit breeding projects.

For over thirty years, he served as secretary-treasurer of the New York State Fruit Testing Cooperative Association, which works closely with the Geneva Station in propagating and distributing new fruit varieties originating in the station's breeding programs. He was more influential in developing this association and shaping its policies than any other person.

Richard Wellington was a fruit breeder in the old tradition. However, his very detailed knowledge of varieties and his keen insight into the inheritance of qualities useful for developing improved fruits were excellent substitutes for the modern punch cards and computers. The long list of new fruits that he introduced testifies to the success of his approach.

While working with vegetable crops in his early years, Professor Wellington was the first to demonstrate the hybrid vigor and increased yields attainable by crossing tomatoes and was also the originator of several varieties of hothouse melons. Later he was instrumental in the development of twenty-one apple varieties including Macoun, Lodi, Early McIntosh, and Kendall; the Gorham pear; Newburgh and Taylor red raspberries; the Bristol black raspberry; the Fredonia gooseberry; the Catskill strawberry; the Stanley prune; the Gil Peck sweet cherry; and thirteen grape varieties, including Buffalo, Steuben, and Keuka. The Stanley prune is the plum most widely grown in the world. The Wellington apple, developed at the Geneva Station, was named after this distinguished scientist. After retirement, he maintained an active interest in plant breeding and introduced the outstanding Cardinal crabapple from his backyard breeding program.

Dick Wellington had the unique ability to carry on a lively conversation with the janitors as well as distinguished scientists and administrators. Alert, yet soft-spoken and courtly in the traditions of another age too fast gone by, he readily expounded on subjects ranging from history to the birth of a new kind of grape or apple. He was keenly interested in genealogy. He was a very kind person who was interested in young and old alike.

Professionally, he gained the highest recognition in his field. He was a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and a member of the American Society for Horticultural Science and the American Pomological Society. He was elected to Sigma Xi and Kappa Sigma. Special recognition for his accomplishments in fruit breeding was made on two occasions by the Massachusetts Horticultural Society, once in 1937 when he was given the society's gold medal, and again in 1949 when he received the coveted Jackson Dawson Medal for outstanding fruit hybridization.

Of the honors bestowed upon Mr. Wellington, perhaps the most appropriate were the Wilder Medals. This medal, established in 1873 by the American Pomological Society, is given to individuals and organizations who have rendered outstanding service to pomology, especially for the origination and introduction of meritorious varieties of fruit. The experiment station was awarded the medal in 1947 to recognize its fruit breeding programs. In 1954, Professor Wellington himself was given the medal and, in 1959, the New York State Fruit Testing Association was cited. All three honored the man and his work.

He wrote numerous scientific articles, experiment station publications, and contributions in popular horticultural magazines. Along with U. P. Hedrick and others, he wrote the famous fruit books of New York: *The Grapes of New York*, 1908; *The Plums of New York*, 1911; and *The Cherries of New York*, 1915.

In 1927, he attended the International Genetics Congress in Berlin and spent several months visiting horticultural institutions on the continent and in England. While on a sabbatical in 1941 visiting horticultural research stations in the United States, he helped to select the Idared apple in Idaho, now a prominent, widely grown variety.

During his tenure, the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station at Geneva became known worldwide for its contributions to fruit breeding and cultural aspects of pomology.

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