

ANOTHER EXCERPT FROM EGAN PAPERS

Second of Series Is on "Robert Douglas, Father of Evergreens"; Details

Here is another interesting excerpt from the writings of the late W. C. Egan of Highland Park, the second of the series arranged for publication by Mr. Jesse L. Smith; it is entitled, "Robert Douglas, Father of Evergreens":

The haberdashes lost a good tailor when the late Robert Douglas of Waukegan discarded the threaded needle for the pine needles. Their loss is our gain, and we of the Middle West and especially those along this north shore should rejoice in the change, for to him we owe a debt of gratitude for the many interesting forms of evergreens he has introduced to our grounds.

Born at Gateshead, England, in 1813, he came to America in 1836 working as a tailor in New England. In 1844 he started overland in a buggy for the great West. Reaching Chicago in June he found the population mainly a floating one owing to the swampy condition of the soil. Pushing on for dry land his horse gave out at Waukegan where he settled and started a small nursery.

His first venture was raising apple and pear seedlings, most of the supply at that time being imported from Europe, as were all exotic species of evergreens. Open air raising of evergreen seedlings had proved a failure, and our gardens had to depend upon seedlings collected in the woods for their supply of native forms. His experiments in this line gave free play to his genius and proved successful. Studying the conditions under which the forest seedlings thrived—partial overhead shade and an even condition as to moisture—he erected arbors covered with brush, under which he raised his seedlings. His successful method is the first on record and is now the accepted way.

He was an enthusiast in his chosen profession and loved his business. In order to obtain dependable seed he explored the forests of the Far West and soon gained the experience that the seed of conifers gathered from trees on the Pacific Coast did not prove hardy in the northern portion of the Middle West; while seeds from the same species from trees growing on the cold and bleak promontories of the Rocky Mountains were hardy. Thousands of dollars were lost by him and others until he discovered this fact.

As an indication of the hardships he underwent in his search for seed and the enthusiasm he displayed I will quote from a letter written in October, 1896: "My last experience was four years ago with the Weeping Spruce. I had written to collectors to get me the seeds at any cost. My son, who was there in California, tried every way to get some one to collect it, so I wired him in August, 1892, that I would come out and we would have it. A small group of these trees stands

on the summit of the Siskiyou Mountains where they cross the Coast Range, and I thought that trees on such an exposure would stand like those on the bleak promontories in Colorado. After leaving the railroad at the highest point we went 40 miles in a hired carriage, left it there and another day brought up to the summit of the peak of the Siskiyou Mountains on horseback, but such a day—how can I describe it? I was in ecstasies from the waist up, but in ajeet misery from my waist down. Such noble grand trees, varying in species as we ascended, but when we reached the summit in the evening the fog was such as I had never experienced. I have seen the heaviest London fogs and the heaviest fogs of the Red Woods on the coast, but I never saw a fog like that Siskiyou fog."

Mr. Douglas introduced to our gardens many of the Rocky Mountain evergreens, including the popular Colorado Blue Spruce (*Picea pungens*) also disseminating the Douglas Fir (*Pseudotsuga Douglasi*). Many people presume that the tree was named after Robert Douglas, but they are mistaken. It was discovered by Menzies in 1795 when accompanying Vancouver on his western journey, but it remained for David Douglas, a collector for the Royal Horticultural Society of London, England, who landed on the banks of the Columbus River in April, 1825, to introduce it to the gardens of England through seeds sent home. For this service it was named in his honor. Robert Douglas was one of the first

to take advantage of Dr. Warder's discovery that the Catalpa (*C. speciosa*) of the west was a different species from that found in the east, and was hardier and much better fitted for a timber tree. He raised seedlings in great quantities and it is said that in Scott County, Kansas, alone over three millions of his seedlings were planted. He has been called the apostle of tree planting in the west and was a co-worker with Parry, Engel-

mann, and Sargent, visiting the Rockies in company with the latter. He was so fond of trees that he wanted everybody to grow them and willingly gave them to any of his fellow citizens who would plant them as street trees. He filled the sandy flats bordering the lake near Waukegan with a varied assortment of evergreens in order to test their adaptability for the situation, and we of today reap the benefit of this experiment.

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