

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Potpourri of Roses

This truly has been a year for roses! Everywhere one goes the roses are blooming in abundance. A trip through the Mother Lode a few weeks ago was highlighted by the hundreds of rose bushes everywhere and the profusion of their blooms.

A visit at San Juan Bautista a few Sundays since was repaid a thousandfold when we beheld the many varieties of old roses in the garden at the rear of the Zanetta House and in the many private homes in the old town.

The gardener at the state-owned buildings around the old Plaza had planted and cared for the many old roses as a real gardener and rosarian would but had also marked the varieties and the dates of their first known existence – all of which made them that much more interesting.

Last week we paid a visit to the Lester Rose Garden in Brown's Valley near Watsonville. This charming place is situated in the mountains among the redwood trees and beside a rushing stream, with old roses of many colors climbing over the fence and among the trees and down the banks.

There are also neat rows of bush roses with such fascinating names as Rose of Castile, one of the oldest roses known to history, truly ancient. Worthy of an honored place in every old-fashioned garden.

We saw a Chestnut rose, originated in China in 1825. Probably the most unique rose in our gardens and one of the most beautiful. The green foliage resembles the leaves of the locust tree and both buds and hips are so covered with bristles as to closely resemble a chestnut burr.

We have before us a charming old book entitled "Old Time Gardens" by Alice Morse Earle, published in 1901. Its author tells of the Rose Tavern near Bethlehem in Pennsylvania, which stands on land granted for the site of a tavern by William Penn, for the yearly rental of "one red rose." In England the payment of a rose as rent was often known. The Bishop of Ely leased Ely house in 1576 to Sir Christopher Hatton, Queen Elizabeth's handsome Lord Chancellor, for a red rose to be paid on the midsummer day, ten loads of hay and ten pounds per annum, and he and his Episcopal successors

reserved the right of walking in the gardens and gathering twenty bushels of roses yearly. In France there was a feudal right to demand payment of roses for the making of rose water.

The making of potpourri was common in our childhood. While the petals of the cabbage rose were preferred according to Alice Earle, all roses were used. Recipes for making potpourri exist in great number. We have seen several in manuscripts in old recipe books, one dated 1690.

The hips of wild roses are a harvest – one unused in America in modern days, but in olden times they were stewed with sugar and spices, as we do other fruits. Sauce Saracen, or Sarzyn, was made of rose hips and almonds pounded together, cooked in wine and sweetened. These are still cooked by some folks in England. Many old cook books have references and rules for cooking rose hips. Parkinson, an old Rosarian says: "Hippes are made into conserve, also a paste like licoris. Cooks and their Mistresses know how to prepare from them many fine dishes for the table."

The rose bush in the old days also furnished another comestible for the children's larder, the red succulent shoots of common garden and wild roses. These were known by the dainty name of "brier candy" a name appropriate and characteristic, as the folk names devised by children frequently are.

In June children in New Hampshire used to gather rose petals in homespun bags, baskets, milk pails and other containers, take them home and pack them carefully in stone jars with alternate layers of brown or scant maple sugar. Soon after conglomerated into a gummy brown, close-grained not over alluring substance to the vision, which was known by the unromantic name of "rose tobacco." This cloying confection was in high repute. It was chipped off and eaten in tiny bits, and much treasured as a love token, or reward for good behavior.

"Enter then a rose garden when the first sunshine sparkles in the dew and enjoy with thankful happiness one of the loveliest scenes on earth."