Book Review

Fruits and Plains: The Horticultural Transformation of America. Philip J. Pauley. 2008. Harvard University Press. 352 pages, 37 halftones, 6 line illustrations, 11 maps. \$46.00, Hardcover. ISBN 9780674026636.

Fruits and Plains is a book about the ideas that shaped the history of horticulture in America. It is not a “complete history,” nor does it attempt to be. Yet, there is much history revealed and examined in this relatively small, but somewhat dense book. The author is a historian, but he speaks the language of horticulture with familiarity. His discussion is dispassionate, and referenced sources occupy 56 pages in total.

The information contained herein complements other books such as *American Horticulture* from The Brooklyn Botanical Garden, *History of Gardening* by Penelope Hobhouse, *Grandmother's Garden* by May Brawley Hill, and other horticultural history books. But the author does not present a timeline or a linear discussion of events.

Rather, he presents ideas that shaped American horticulture and uses original documents to elucidate the thoughts, arguments, and reasons that people pursued particular courses of action. This presentation makes it very different from the other history books.

In pursuing ten different issues, one thread that passes through all of them is the idea of Culture and its interconnectedness with Horticulture. This idea is presented in the first chapter, which explores Thomas Jefferson's hope for America as a land of pastoral occupation. In this chapter, Pauley examines the tensions between “culture and degeneracy” in America in the early years of European colonization, with particular emphasis on the challenging climate in which to grow introduced European plants. He brings an insightful discussion about the control of pests by highlighting the Hessian fly in chapter two, and picks up the discussion bringing more detail on the development of plant quarantine in chapter six.

Other issues that are examined in this book include philosophies guiding landscape design, development of horticulture in Florida, fruit culture in America, and tree-planting campaigns in the Great Plains. Terms that are still being discussed in a modern context such as “naturalized” and “exotic” are shown to

have long-aged applications. The roots of a rift between horticulture and allied fields are presented. The result was a splintering of groups as diverse as botanical gardens and arboreta, Land Grant college professors, landscape gardeners (who re-positioned themselves as landscape architects), and specialized plant societies. Throughout the book, one gets a sense of struggle and the inherent difficulty of accomplishing political change.

In the final chapter, the author once again visits Culture and Horticulture, suggesting that “culture was a more important element in the history of America than in that of northwestern Europe or eastern Asia.” He contrasts the technical and scientific aspects of horticulture with its creative, “artisanal” aspects.

All in all, the book provides a close and thorough examination of the stated issues, bringing new perspective to them. Because of the wealth of history revealed, I would recommend this book for those interested in horticulture, as well as anyone interested in American history.

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