

# HOW THE CAMELLIA CAME TO CALIFORNIA

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**T**HE discovery of gold at Coloma, fifty miles east of Sutter's Fort (Sacramento) in 1848 was indirectly responsible for the early introduction of the camellia to California. Among the adventurers rushing to the gold mines were men with vision and foresight who sensed the business possibilities of the new region. In this group was a man by the name of James L. F. Warren, a New Englander. A biography of Mr. Warren is not available and because of its absence there are a few missing incidents in the story of how the camellia was brought to California, but the honor of its introduction belongs to him.

Boston, Massachusetts, in the first half of the nineteenth century, became the leading camellia center of the United States. Mr. Warren, before coming to California, operated the Warren's Floral Saloon in that city and also the Warren's Garden and Nurseries, Nonantum Vale, Brighton, nearby. In his catalog of 1845 is a list of eighty-seven named varieties of camellias with mention being made of a number of unnamed seedlings.

Mr. Marshall P. Wilder, President of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society, was interested in camellias and had developed a number of varieties. Two outstanding varieties were named Mrs. Abby Wilder and Wilderii. These two were purchased by Mr. Warren in 1847 for \$1000.00 and taken by him to England. While in Europe he visited many of the famous gardens and camellia nurseries in England, France and Belgium. Having disposed of his nursery at Boston, he was free to follow the Gold Rush to California, but instead of going to the mines he established a business at No. 15 J. Street, Sacramento, in 1851, doing business under the name of Warren & Co. He was an energetic man whose operations included a truck line into the mines and a branch store at Morman Island, east of Sacramento. His interest in horticulture was paramount, and the Warren & Co.'s New England Seed Store became a part of his enterprises in Sacramento. Advertisements of the New England Seed Store were printed in newspapers in Janu-

ary, 1852, announcing the expected arrival of a shipment of plants and seed. The anticipated shipment arrived and in the February 7, 1852, issue of the *Sacramento Union* this announcement appeared:

TO FARMERS AND GARDENERS:

3,000 pounds Fresh Garden Seeds.—We have received by the Panama, the finest lot of fresh Garden Seeds to be found in the country. OUR SEEDS ARE WARRANTED FRESH. The assortment contains every kind of seed; many of them entirely new varieties, and to be found nowhere else in this country. Also 3,000 papers FLOWER SEEDS, of new and beautiful kinds. Herb seeds of every valuable kind.

A splendid set of Dahlia Roots, Roses, Camellias, Grape Vines, Bulbous Roots, etc. will be ready for examination in our hall over the store, on Monday.

Warren & Co's. New England Seed Store  
J. Street near Levee.

Marine Intelligence, covering the arrival of the Pacific Mail Company's steamer *Panama*, mentions its arrival in San Francisco on February 3, 1852 "from Panama via Acapulco and San Diego carrying 484 passengers and 40 females."

This advertisement by Warren & Co's. New England Seed Store is the earliest printed information concerning camellias in California. Specific varieties are not mentioned; however, subsequent articles, in Mr. Warren's *California Farmer*, indicate that at least the following varieties were included in the first shipment: Alba Plena, Fimbriata, Mrs. Abby Wilder, Wilderii and Lady Humes Blush.

The origin of the plants has not been established but material on hand indicates the shipment was trans-shipped across the Isthmus of Panama, loaded on the *S. S. Panama* at Panama City, thence to San Francisco, where the portion of the cargo, including the camellia plants, consigned to Sacramento was transferred to river boats.

Mr. Warren's faith in Sacramento and California as a camellia-growing center has been substantiated. His prediction in 1853 that "This truly magnificent plant unsurpassed in loveliness will ere long become acclimated with us to form our pride as an ornamental tree in our gardens," has been fulfilled. A nursery catalog issued by his firm in 1853-54 carried the statement that "we are now constantly receiving collections

from the best establishments in Europe and the States; and our collection will be unequalled. The proprietors have just received a new and superb collection of rare kinds, from the most celebrated growers in Europe. A separate sheet catalogue will be issued in the autumn of 1854, giving a description of their character etc., with their prices, etc."

Mr. Warren was a man sincerely interested in agriculture, and he held annual displays of horticultural products in his Show Rooms at Sacramento as well as in San Francisco, where his activities were being transferred. These expositions led directly to the establishing of the California State Fair, the first one of which was held in San Francisco on October 6, 1854. He was the first secretary and was largely responsible for establishing the fair as an annual event. It is not a surprise, therefore, considering this man's background, to find listed in the floricultural section of the first California State Fair an exhibition of the following varieties of camellia plants: Double White, Fimbriata, Candidissima, Caleb Cope, Duchesse d'Orleans, Double Red and Lady Hume. The Lady Hume is mentioned as being in flower. The exhibitors showing camellias were: W. and J. O'Donnell, C. V. Gillispie, and W. C. Walker.

Camellias appeared in San Francisco at an early date and the *California Farmer*, issue of February 2, 1854, carries an advertisement of W. C. Walker, San Francisco, calling attention to his stock of camellias, roses and geraniums. The Golden Gate Nursery, in August of 1854, advertised seventy varieties of camellias for sale.

Interest in camellias in Sacramento was well established, and when Warren moved his headquarters to San Francisco the planting of camellias continued. Mr. A. P. Smith established a sizable outdoor planting and proved that this plant was adapted to the climate and soil of the Sacramento area without resorting to artificial protection. Mr. Warren, in the *California Farmer*, March 26, 1858, had this to say about Smith's Gardens:

"among all the most gorgeous and beautiful gems in fair Flora's realm none can surpass L'Camellia, and however much we esteem its beauties, and worship its loveliness, we have never seen it bloom to such perfection in any country as this our adopted State, California. We have gazed for hours upon the finest blooms in England, in France, and in Belgium, as well as in various parts of

the Union, yet, we are free to say, we have never seen such perfect blossoms in a group of the different kinds and colors as we saw, two weeks since at Smith's Gardens, Sacramento. We have seen the grand collection at Walker's Garden, at O'Donnell's, and those of Sontag on the Mission Road; but they were under glass, while those to which we now allude were grown by Smith's Gardens, out door culture, and we confess we were astonished and delighted. These had been grown, quite exposed in a southwestern view, and for clean foliage, well formed buds, and perfect blossoms, we never saw them excelled, although we have had a thousand blossoms open, in our own collection, within two weeks at a time, in former years, and have observed them closely. These facts, this blossoming of the Camellias at Smith's is a guarantee that the Camellia will flourish perfectly with us, as an ornamental tree, and we hope, in years to come, we shall have the pleasure to sit under the shade of this magnificent tree and gaze upon its beauties."

Smith's Pomological Garden and Nursery, containing a collection of over forty varieties of camellias, was completely destroyed by floods in 1861-62, never to be reestablished.

Camellias were now a part of Sacramento floriculture, and it is possible that specimen plants from these original collections may still be found in our gardens. Unfortunately, the origin of our old plants has been lost and their exact age is merely a guess. There is one specimen near Courtland, approximately twenty miles below Sacramento, that is known to have been planted in 1860. It is a form of Warratah. The tree is healthy and produces an annual crop of several thousand blossoms. This tree is considered the oldest camellia of record in California.

Three excellent specimens of camellias are to be found at Hood, fifteen miles below Sacramento. The oldest of these, planted about 1874, is a Tricolor (Wakanoura). It is 22 feet in height, has a trunk circumference of 40½ inches and a branch spread of 29 feet. A Purity<sup>1</sup> close by was planted a few years later. It is crowded and has made a tall slender growth reaching a height of 28 feet 8 inches. A Frau Minna Seidel (Pink Perfection)<sup>1</sup>, in the same group, and planted about the same time as the Purity, is 26 feet tall, has a trunk circumference of 38 inches and a branch spread of 26 feet. The measurements were made in December, 1946. (Fig., p. 9.)

<sup>1</sup>These were evidently direct imports from Japan because Frau Minna Seidel (Pink Perfection) was not named in Europe until 1890 and it is established that Purity is a renamed Shira-giku.—EDITOR.

The planting of camellias during the nineteenth century was limited to specimen trees, with little thought being given to collections. In the 1880's, many homes sported camellias and it became a custom, according to Judge Peter J. Shields of Sacramento, for the "gentry to drive their buggies and phaetons on Sundays and on afternoons and early evenings just to see the beautiful blooms. A fashionable dancing club gave an annual camellia dance and the blooms were much in demand."

Interest in camellias diminished toward the turn of the century but a small group of men alert to the value of the plant brought about a renewed interest in it, and they were able to establish the use of the name Camellia City for Sacramento early in the 1900's. This slogan was quickly made use of by many business firms, and Camellia City markets, stores, establishments, apartment houses, etc., came into being. The term Camellia City was never made official because of legal complications; however, the camellia was made the official flower of Sacramento through resolution of the city council on February 7, 1941.

The holding of an annual Camellia Show was originated in 1925 at a dinner given by the Sacramento Chamber of Commerce, where a number of baskets of camellias were exhibited and prizes awarded for the best display. The following year, 1926, the show took definite form and has been an annual event ever since. The show will be greatly expanded in 1948, with facilities being made available at the Sacramento Municipal Auditorium by the City Government.

The exact number of camellias in Sacramento is a matter of guess; however, an estimate of 35,000 trees does not seem too far out of line, considering the fact that annual plantings of camellias in Sacramento during the past seven years have averaged close to 4000 plants. The largest single planting is in Capitol Park, where 900 camellias are to be found representing 450 varieties. One feature in the park is a grove of camellias dedicated to early Sacramento pioneers. This grove at present contains 153 plants.

Present-day plantings and the wide use of camellias in California are truly a complete fulfillment of the early predictions of a man with visions, Col. James L. L. F. Warren (the title of colonel was conferred upon him by General Sutter).