

Michael Walsh and His Roses

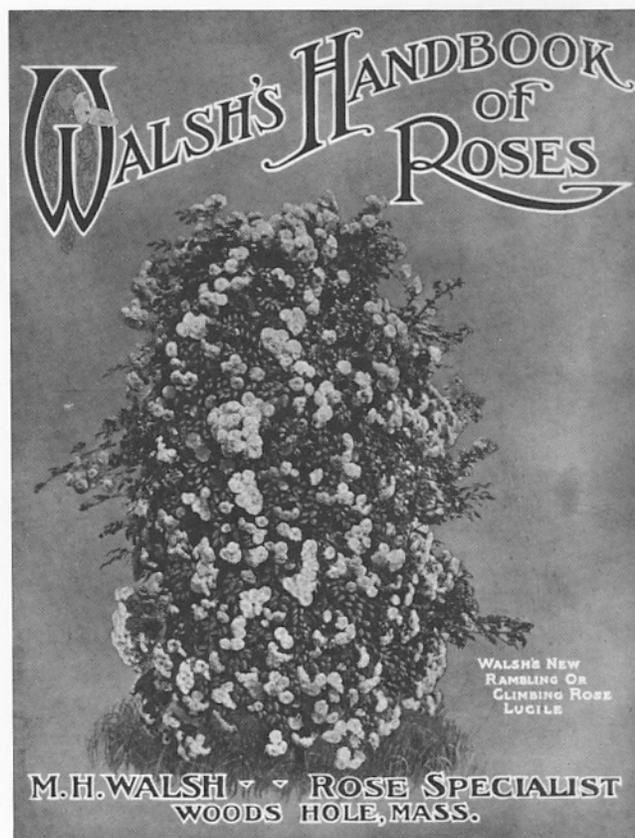
Joan Brown Hulburt

Michael Henry Walsh became famous for his development of the Rambler Rose. Born in Wales, Michael Henry Walsh gained considerable knowledge and experience in horticulture before coming to the United States. His life began in Woods Hole at 27 years of age when he came to work for Joseph Story Fay. He made his permanent home with the Fay family, working with shrubs, trees and flowers as well as roses. His most productive work with roses began in the year 1897 when he enlisted the help and interest of Miss Sarah Fay, daughter of Joseph Story Fay. Without her generosity it is doubtful that his extensive experiments and research could have been accomplished, for it was on the three acres of the Fay Estate, opposite Little Harbor, Woods Hole, that he grew his roses; and, before any varieties could be marketed, thousands of test plants had to be grown. Among the many popular rambler roses he originated, the Hiawatha was the most acclaimed.

Although Michael Walsh became famous, primarily, for the development of the rambler rose, he also cultivated other varieties of roses.

During the three years that he worked on the development of roses, he was the recipient of the first Gold Medal awarded in this country for the origination of the hybrid tea rose Jubilee. He exhibited in the shows of all the leading horticultural institutions and received, besides the Gold Medal mentioned above, four Silver Medals, numerous First Prizes and Certificates of Merit. Within three short years (1897-1900) he had what was considered the most remarkable rose garden in the United States.

In 1901 there occurred a disastrous fire which ruined his entire crop of roses. The most serious loss was the complete destruction of the Lillian Nordica, a hybrid tea rose named for the famous opera singer, Lillian Norton of Martha's Vineyard. This rose was about to be put on the market for the first time. The damage to the plants was caused by the deliberate burning of the Engine House and some small sheds by the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad in the Woods Hole railroad yard. This burning, which continued for three days, produced gases consisting of carbolic acid, pyridine and sulphur, known to be very injurious to plants, which were blown over the garden by the prevailing southwest wind. During the 3-day fire, Mr. Walsh noticed that the leaves on his plants were



Cover of Michael Walsh's catalogue of roses for 1911. The catalogue contains over 300 varieties including "J. S. Fay . . . originated at Woods Hole . . . color is dark crimson enlivened with scarlet. Awarded many first class certificates. 75¢." WHHC Archives, Fay Collection.

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shriveling and went over to the railroad officials to plead with them to stop the fire. The men ignored him. Subsequently, he and Miss Fay sued the Railroad for damages due to negligence. The Railroad settled out of court for a sum of \$20,000.

Mr. Walsh's share of the money enabled him to resume his business and in the following twenty years he became famous, not only in this country, but in England as well, earning in one year Fourth Place in the World for his collection of all types of roses. (A fine example of the rambler rose may be seen along the stone wall of the Woodwell property, on Church Street.)

Michael Walsh was born January 18, 1848 and died in his 74th year, April 10, 1922. He worked for the Fay family for 47 years. In 1943 a stone was erected in memory of Michael Walsh on a bit of land given by the Fays. The inscription on the stone reads as pictured below:

Near this place
lived
Michael H. Walsh
who made
The Rambler Rose
world famous
maintained by the
Falmouth Garden Club

This stone is located opposite Little Harbor, a little east of the Woods Hole Library. The greenhouses and gardens were on the hillside behind it. Several of the ramblers are planted in a little plot which is surrounded by a wooden fence and as you walk by Little Harbor you are reminded of a famous man who originated the Rambler Rose.



Walled rose garden behind the barn of the Homestead near the carriage house. Michael Walsh's rambler roses on trellis. WHHC Archives, Fay Collection.