

Carnation CAPITAL

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Photo courtesy of US Dept of Agriculture, "After a Hundred Years: The Yearbook of Agriculture 1962" page 77 Profiles of Farming - Harold J. Patten - Massachusetts. This 700-page book covers 100 years after Pres. Abraham Lincoln established the Dept. of Agriculture in the US in 1862.

"Tewksbury, Massachusetts, is the Carnation Capital of the World. Currently producing more than 2,000,000 gorgeous blossoms each year..."

Yankee Magazine
March of 1976.



Photo courtesy of Tewksbury Historical Society showing North Street along the bottom, the Patten family home on the left, water tower at middle left and the greenhouses, circa 1950.

Tewksbury Carnation

The cultivation of carnations in Tewksbury can be traced to Marcellus Adams Patten. Born in Lowell, he owned two florists' shops and greenhouses in that city starting around 1870, and then he decided to move his greenhouses to Tewksbury in 1880.

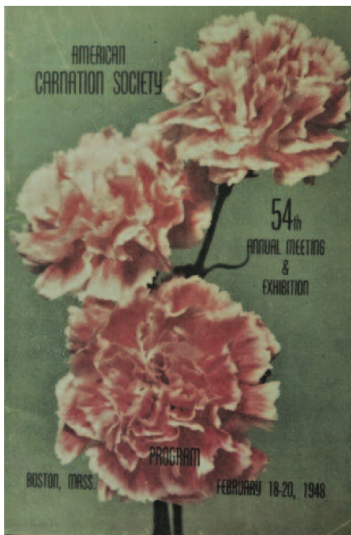
These former Patten Greenhouses, on North Street and other greenhouse locations were all within one mile of Tewksbury Center. The choice of sites was dictated by two facts, according to the Tewksbury Town Crier, August 1984. Tewksbury's Center railroad station was at the grade crossing of the Boston & Maine line, at North Street and there was level ground, with loam over sand, good for cultivation within one mile of that rail station.

Harold J. Patten, son of Marcellus, was part of the firm by 1912. At that time, there was a botanical adventurer, known for being the best at the hybridization of carnations, named William Sim of Saugus, Massachusetts.

Also, in 1912, Marcellus produced the Princess Dagmar carnation. The Dagmar, named for a Danish princess, was an immediate success. "Visitors to the Horticultural Show who have feasted their eyes upon the new carnation

'Princess Dagmar,' exhibited by M.A. Patten of Tewksbury unanimously hail it as the reigning sensation," the Boston Journal proclaimed, according to the Town Crier 1984 article.

It was some time after that William Sim, had to move to Maine to continue his business. His



1948 American Carnation Society Annual Meeting pamphlet cover, courtesy of Tewksbury Historical Society


son, Alan would make the trip south and bring their carnations to the Boston market.

From time to time, Alan would visit the Patten greenhouses in Tewksbury and visit with Harold Patten. On one occasion Alan and Harold discussed the possibility of growing some of the Sim plants in the Patten greenhouses. One thousand seedlings from William Sim would be sent to Tewksbury. There would be 250 varieties in those thousand plants.


William Sim still hoped to produce the carnation that would be recognized as the best in the country by the American Carnation Society. Harold Patten cultivated the Sim plants. He prevailed upon William Sim to discard many of the varieties, and to concentrate on the 10 plants which seemed to show the most promise.

In one of those plants, Harold noted that a certain petal was always white. He cultivated the flower and successfully created an all-white carnation. Harold named it 'White Sim.'

Then, after nearly 40 years of work, William Sim produced an all-red carnation that satisfied him, and the American Carnation Society as



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Tewksbury Carnation

being the plant for which they had been looking. The year was 1939.

William Sim passed on after that. He never knew the sensation his latest red carnation was to produce. It had been the flower for which he had worked so many years. It was Harold Patten who asked the Sim family if the flower could be named the 'William Sim.'

The flower was first shown at the Patten greenhouses, at the yearly New England Carnation Growers carnation show called, "New Varieties Day." This show was held in Tewksbury for many years and featured carnation growers from all over the United States and Canada, with new varieties being staged and judged. The 'William Sim' was awarded top honors. It proved to be the finest carnation ever grown, and as of the Town Crier article of 1984, there were varieties grown all over the world which were descendants of the William Sim carnation. According to the Yankee Magazine article of 1976, the William Sim carnation had the largest bloom, the strongest stem and had superior keeping qualities. Also, according to the Yankee Magazine, by 1976, the cuttings from the William Sim varieties hybridized at the Patten greenhouses

accounted for about 95% of worldwide production.

Harold Patten, in agreement with the Sim family, patented, in 1945, the 'William Sim' flower.

Back in 1920 the Patten Greenhouses covered 50,000 square feet, and the family was looking at other sites and greenhouses near Tewksbury Center, for more greenhouse space. About that time, there were other firms growing carnations near Tewksbury Center. According to Harold Patten's 1964 Tewksbury history book, 'Ask Now of the Days that are Past,' some of them were: Crystal Greenhouses, John T. Gale & Sons, Harold F. Smith, Mark Ropers Sons, William A. Smith, Arthur Peterson Inc., and Arthur Trull.

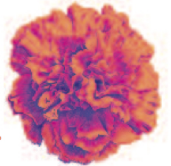
With the high fuel prices of the late 1970's, greenhouses in New England could no longer compete with growers in other parts of the world. Today, most of the greenhouses in town have been replaced with condominiums and other businesses. The hybridization and production of carnations holds a prominent place in the history of Tewksbury, one that is well documented in local and national periodicals and Patten's Tewksbury history book, as above.

Additionally, according to the 1962, U.S. Department of Agriculture Yearbook, which featured an entire page on the Patten's family greenhouses and their carnation cultivation techniques, in their Profiles in Farming section on Massachusetts, "New Varieties Day, established in 1938 by the New England Carnation Society, has been held nearly every year in Tewksbury. Its purpose is to stimulate interest in hybridizing 'the divine flower.'"

The Pattens feel that by growing flowers they have delighted the eye, gladdened many hearts, and beautified man's surroundings, according to the Yankee Magazine of 1976.

The Patten legacy of specialized knowledge of growing techniques, hybridization, automation, and year-round attention to the needs of the carnations is something that revolutionized and grew the industry, and earned Tewksbury the title of Carnation Capital of the World!

Visit Tewksbury's online news source at www.tewksburycarnation.org. Subscribe to the Carnation's daily e-newsletter. Follow the Carnation on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.



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