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HISTORY OF THE INTRODUCTION OF THREE CALIFORNIA NATIVES

THEODORE PAYNE*

FREMONTIA MEXICANA

While spending a few days in San Diego in 1916, I went to see Miss Kate Sessions at her nursery then on Lewis Street.

During our conversation Miss Sessions said "Mr. Payne, I have a better *Fremontia* than the one you are growing and you ought to grow it." I said "Why don't you grow it yourself?" She replied "I am not specializing in native plants, but you are and you really should have it." I asked her how it differed from the ordinary *Fremontia*, and she said it had larger flowers of a much deeper color, flowered over a longer period, had more attractive foliage and was in every way a more desirable shrub. I asked her if she could get me some seed. She said she had some on hand and would send it to me. A little later I received from her by mail a package containing a Baker & Company Chocolate can marked on the outside "1½ Lbs. *Fremontia californica* 1915." (I still have this can.) When I looked at the seed, I noticed it differed from the ordinary *F. californica* in being smaller, jet black and shiny.

Some time later, I told Dr. Anstruther Davidson about this and he suggested that I write to Miss Sessions and ask her to send a specimen of the flowers and foliage as it might prove to be a new species. I wrote to Miss Sessions and asked her to send me this material, which in the course of time she did. I turned this specimen over to Dr. Davidson together with the letter Miss Sessions wrote me at the time she sent the seed, and which reads as follows:

Mr. T. Payne:

"San Diego, Oct. 11

I am sending by mail 1½ lbs. of that very excellent *Fremontia californica* seed at \$3.00 per lb. As it is not my seed the party would like the money for it. It is without exception the finest tree I have ever seen. I have a *Fremontia* grown from seed collected by Frank Walter that can't compare with this plant. It is a bright canary yellow and without that rich tinge of orange and the foliage is not so good. I hope you can succeed in growing these.

Very resp't.

(Signed) K. O. Sessions"

Typed on the back of the letter is the following:

"25 years ago there were two trees in San Diego of this same color and tint and foliage and they lived under most trying conditions; one at Colorado St. in San Diego. The shrub does grow around Ensenada Lower California. I raised from seed this plant that this seed is from and gave it to the present owner. It is only about 5 or 6 years old. I can't remember when I got the seed.

(Signed) Kate O. Sessions
San Diego"

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This letter together with the type specimen is now in the herbarium of the Los Angeles County Museum.

Dr. Davidson described this shrub in the Bulletin of the Southern California Academy of Sciences for July 1917. As to the locality where it grew, the information given in Dr. Davidson's article was what Miss Sessions gave me at that time. I understood her to say that it grew on both sides of the line.

I was not very enthusiastic about growing this plant as I had found *Fremontia californica* very difficult to propagate. I did not sow any of the seed until 1918, when I found it much easier to grow. I soon had a large stock of young plants on hand, which I introduced to the public through my catalog of 1919. I sold quite a number of the young plants; some of the first of these were planted on the Danziger Estate in Stone Canyon, now known as Bel-Air. Some were planted at Pomona College and grew to a large size. Very soon the plants were being planted all over the country and I sold many thousands of them. I shipped some to Miss Sessions herself. The seed was sent over to England and the plant was grown and described there.

A number of years later, Dr. Carl Wolf told me that someone had talked with Miss Sessions and got rather a different story regarding the origin of this plant. I think it was about this time that Miss Sessions wrote and asked me for the name of the botanist who had described it. Soon after this I happened to have luncheon one day with Dr. Walter T. Swingle, and during our conversation he said there seemed to be some doubt as to where this plant came from and that Frank F. Gander of the Museum in Balboa Park was looking into the matter. On July 19, 1933, I made a hurried trip to San Diego and on my way stopped to see Miss Sessions at Pacific Beach to get the story from her again. She told me that she had never seen the plant growing in the wild state, but that she found one plant in the old Coronado Hotel Nursery and one plant at Fourth and Fir Streets in San Diego and one other plant somewhere else in San Diego. She said she gathered some seed, raised a few plants and planted them out. It was from one of these that the seed was gathered which she sent to me. I asked her if she had any idea where the original stock could have come from. She said she thought it was brought in years ago by Charles Russell Orcutt from Lower California, but did not think there was any record of it.

Soon after this, I talked to Peter Riedel in Santa Barbara, who used to work at the Coronado Nursery many years ago. He knew nothing about this plant and said they did not have it there in his time. Then I talked to Frank Walter, an old time seed collector, to see if he knew anything about it. His story was that someone in the Otay Valley had brought it up from Lower California many years ago.

In my conversation with Dr. Swingle, I remember he said that this plant had appeared in Europe before it was sent over there as *Fremontia mexicana*. This may possibly be explained in this way. When Miss Sessions sent me this seed there was a lot more than I needed for myself. I had an order from Messrs. Vilmorin-Andrieux & Company of Paris, France, for seed of *Fremontia californica*, and I sent them part of this seed. I thought there would be no complaint if it turned out to be a superior form. Miss Sessions sent me another lot

of seed in 1917, and I made another shipment to this firm in Paris, so this would account for quite a lot of stock appearing in Europe under the old name of *Fremontia californica*.

Later on Frank P. Gander did locate this shrub growing in Woodwardia Canyon, Otay Mountain, San Diego County.

Several of the plants planted at Bel-Air in 1919 were still growing there a few years ago, and had reached a large size. One plant which I saw a few years ago at La Cañada was almost 30 feet high. In coming up from the ground, it had branched into two trunks so that the diameter at the base was about two feet one way and one foot the other. As far as I know this tree is still there.

CEANOTHUS CYANEUS

In his book on *Ceanothus* published in 1942, page 23, M. Van Rensselaer, referring to *Ceanothus cyaneus* writes as follows: "This remarkable flowering shrub was introduced into horticulture by Kate Sessions of San Diego less than twenty years ago."

That Miss Sessions was responsible for this shrub being brought into horticulture, there is no doubt whatsoever. But I hardly think it can be said that she actually introduced it and was the first to offer the plants for sale. I grew a large quantity of seedlings of this shrub in 1921 and offered them for sale in my spring catalogue for 1922 where the description appeared as follows:

"*Ceanothus cyaneus*. A rare species from San Diego County and now offered for the first time. A splendid shrub with dark green foliage and large trusses of dark blue flowers, which appear late in spring after other kinds are over."

This was the first description of the plant ever published and was exactly 20 years before M. Van Rensselaer's book appeared in print.

The history of the finding and naming of *Ceanothus cyaneus* is rather interesting. Various stories have been published. These do not exactly agree and there seems to be some confusion regarding this subject. So, I will write down the history as I know it.

I was spending a few days in San Diego. This must have been in the late spring or early summer of 1920. I went to see Miss Sessions at her nursery which at that time was located on Lewis Street. While there, she showed me a hand painting of a new *Ceanothus*. I asked her what it was and where it came from. She said she was giving a lecture. After her talk, a young lady (Miss Philbrook) brought her a specimen of a shrub in bloom and wanted to know if she could identify it. The young lady said it grew near her home at Lakeside. Miss Sessions had never seen anything like it. She arranged to have a picture painted of it. This she showed to Miss Alice Eastwood who named it on the spur of the moment *Ceanothus cyaneus*, choosing the specific name on account of the color of the flowers.

In the summer of 1920 Frank Walter, a seed collector, asked me if I would like to have some seed of the new *Ceanothus* from Lakeside. He had heard about it from someone working in Miss Sessions' nursery. I told him I would like very much to have some of the seed, so he made a trip to Lakeside and collected it. He brought me two ounces if I remember rightly. He afterwards told me Miss Sessions was rather incensed when she found he had been to Lakeside and collected this seed.

In the summer of 1921 I went to the Coolidge Nurseries in Pasadena. Douglas Coolidge was a real plant enthusiast and was always eager to show anyone new plants with which he was experimenting. He took me into the field and after showing me a number of rare exotics, he pointed to three shrubs about three feet high. "Here Theodore" he said "is something that will interest you." "Oh," I said "*Ceanothus cyaneus*." "What," he exclaimed, "you know it." "Yes," I replied, "I have over 500 young plants in pots almost ready for gallon cans and these will go on the market soon." He seemed quite surprised that I knew about the plant and more so that I had a stock of young plants. Where Coolidge got these three plants has always been a mystery to me. I have often wished that I had asked him at that time. It may be that he obtained a little seed from Frank Walter for trial. If he sowed the seed early and put the plants out when small, they could easily make a growth of three feet in a few months.

I sold many of the young plants; shipped them all over the state and planted some out on estates in Montecito and Santa Barbara. The same description appeared in my 1923 and 1924 catalogues. The wording of this should of course have been changed after the first season. But the type was held from year to year and unless there was a change in price, things like this were apt to escape notice.

This shrub soon became very popular; the demand increased each season and other nurseries began growing it. In correspondence from Professor H. E. McMinn, he urged me to publish a description of *Ceanothus cyaneus* in a scientific journal, for until such a description is published a name has no recognition among botanists.

In April of 1926 the Garden Club of America visited this coast and spent four days at Santa Barbara. I went with the Club visiting different estates. Alice Eastwood joined the group and rode in my car a good deal of the time. When we were at Mrs. Knight's place in Montecito, I asked Miss Eastwood why she had never monographed her *Ceanothus*. I said "I have been growing and distributing this shrub now for four years and it has never even been christened." "Why," she said, "I have no material from which to write the description. I named it from a picture." "Well," I said, "I can get you specimens right here on this place in about a month from now, unless you want a specimen from the type station, in which case of course it must come from Lakeside."

The following October, I received another letter from Professor H. E. McMinn as follows:

"Mills College, California
October 18, 1926

Mr. Theodore Payne
345 South Main Street
Los Angeles, Calif.
My dear Mr. Payne:

I am writing you in regard to *Ceanothus cyaneus*. I feel very confident that you were the first one to recognize this plant as a distinct species of *Ceanothus*, therefore you should have full credit for recognizing it. In order for a species to be recognized as such, it must be published in a scientific journal. I therefore suggest that you send a paragraph of the description of this species of *Ceanothus* to the Southern California Academy of Sciences, and request that they publish this in their next bulletin.

I have learned that others have recognized this species, and that one at least is contemplating a description of this plant in a publication to appear before many months. Inasmuch as I have looked into this species during the past two years, and am sure of its validity, and also am desirous that you have full credit for being the first one to recognize it, I therefore write you this letter.

If you do not publish this please inform me.

Very Sincerely yours,

(Signed) H. E. McMinn"

I wrote and told Professor McMinn, that while I had introduced this shrub into cultivation, Alice Eastwood was the one who gave it the name of *Ceanothus cyaneus*. I could not very well steal her thunder and it was up to her to publish a description of this plant. Miss Eastwood must have obtained the specimens she wanted, for in the Proceedings of the California Academy of Sciences April 27, 1927, appeared her description of *Ceanothus cyaneus*. Thus this plant received recognition as a species seven years after it had been discovered and five years after it had come into cultivation.

Charles Francis Saunders in his book "Western Wild Flowers" has attempted to record the history and naming of this shrub. He says that Miss Sessions had an autochrome made and sent it to Miss Eastwood who named it at once from the autochrome and two years later published a written description. This is in error because it was a hand painting, not an autochrome that Miss Sessions showed me and it was seven years later, not two that the written description was published.

This shrub became very popular and has probably been planted, at least in Southern California, more than any other species of *Ceanothus*. Some people complain that it is short-lived, but I do not think this is true when planted under the right conditions. It is not suited to heavy clay soils, but thrives best in rocky or gravelly places. Some shrubs which I planted in 1928 in disintegrated granite soil are still doing well. These shrubs are growing under natural conditions and never receive any water other than the natural rainfall.

THE PLAYA DEL REY SALTBUSH

On the bluffs at Playa del Rey there is quite a colony of a species of *Atriplex* or Saltbush, which for several years puzzled a number of botanists. Among others was Dr. Carl B. Wolf, then botanist at the Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden. He showed me a specimen of this plant and described the location where it was found. I told him I thought it might be an introduced species but could not offer any suggestion as to what it was or where it came from. So, after consulting with other botanists he decided to describe it as a new species, his description appearing in a publication of the Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden under the name of *Atriplex Johnstonii* Wolf (Occasional Papers I: 3-16, 1935). Later someone from the Boyce Thompson Arboretum in Arizona saw the plant growing at the Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden and recognized it as *Atriplex nummularia*, a species from Australia. When Carl Wolf gave me this information, the name *Atriplex nummularia* seemed familiar and I knew that sometime, somewhere, I had heard of this plant. I looked through several Australian catalogues but could not find it listed. Then I remembered that Ernest Branton had a Flora of Queensland, so I

went over to his house on Elgin Street and told him what I was looking for. He said that many of his books were stacked away in the garage and it would be a great deal of trouble to find this. However, I finally persuaded him to get it for me, so we went out into the garage with a light and dug out the volume I wanted. I found what I was looking for. There it was, *Atriplex nummularia*, *Old Man Saltbush*. The moment I read the name Old Man Saltbush, the whole matter came back to me like a flash.

In April of 1896 I went to work for the Germain Fruit Co., Seed Department (now Germain Seed Company). At that time the firm had listed in their catalogue several introductions from Australia, among which was the Old Man Saltbush described as especially valuable for dry places. Now, there was a man who owned some land on the hills at Playa del Rey. If I remember rightly his name was Barbour. He was doing quite a little experimental planting there and was always looking for plants for dry places. He was a good customer and came into the store quite frequently. On one of these occasions, I remember he bought several packets of seed of the Old Man Saltbush. So that is how this plant got started there. It has become well naturalized and no one can be blamed for mistaking it for a native. But I do blame myself for not remembering this at the time Carl Wolf first called my attention to the matter.