

## **Heirlooms: Seeds with a Face, a Place and a Taste**

By CR Lawn, *Fedco Seeds*

The note came scrawled on an order from California. *"I enjoyed reading about John Withee (a famous bean collector who amassed nearly 1200 varieties and formed an organization called Wanigan Associates to help him maintain them)". Back in the 70s I had correspondence with him - I gave him a number of seeds to add to his collection - among them the black seeded Blue Coco I found growing in the row. . . I was one of those 10%'ers he wrote about. I still have his newsletters and some correspondence from him. I've long had correspondences with Will Bonsall and Glenn Drowns. Wish you'd offer Buxton Buckshot dry beans - ask Will Bonsall about them."*

In one of those wonderful coincidences, Will Bonsall happened to be in our office meeting with our purchases Nikos Kavanya and me when the note arrived. Bonsall, himself a noted collector of thousands of varieties, was there to give us ideas about heirloom varieties we might want to add to the Fedco catalog in the future. Bonsall told us that Buxton Buckshot is an heirloom pole bean from the town of Buxton, Maine, so named because the small seed looks like buckshot. Bonsall also told us about the Stimson pole bean, another Maine heirloom, described by its lone lister in the 1997 Seed Savers yearbooks as having "a long stringless pod, excellent for eating raw, taste unsurpassed." And he told us about another superior pole bean which he got from Gail Flagg of Fort Kent, ME, alternately known as the Vermont Horticultural Lima (although not a lima bean) or the Chester Bean, after its presumed origin in Chester, Vt.

Russell Libby, MOFGA's Executive Director, likes to refer to locally grown organic produce as "food with a face, a place and a taste." How much more true to food grown from heirloom seed varieties!

**Taste?** Anyone who has bitten into a vine-ripe Brandywine or Aunt Ruby's German Green tomato can attest.

**Place?** Consider the Long Island Pie Pumpkin, which looks like an overgrown green zucchini in the garden, doesn't turn orange until well into storage, yet makes pies which can only be described as "divine." Said to have originated on the Isle of St. George in the Azores and brought to Nantucket in 1832 on a whaling ship, it was at first known as the Nantucket Pumpkin as it migrated north to Maine. By the 1930s Long Pie had long been the pie pumpkin of choice among gardeners and growers in Androscoggin County, who may not even have been aware that in other parts of the country pie pumpkins were round.

**Face?** Many faces enter into the Long Pie story. Were it not for John Navazio, the variety might well be extinct today. Navazio, a cucurbit aficionado had a booth at Common Ground Country Fair where sometime in the late 80s LeRoy Souther Jr. of Livermore Falls brought a specimen of the pumpkin. Navazio saved seeds and touted the virtues of the variety. Later, he turned his avocation into a vocation, going to the University of

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Wisconsin to study breeding, and turning up at Garden City Seeds where, as their breeder, he introduced Long Pie into their catalog. Long Pie was a standout in the Fedco trials for years, but we could not secure enough seed to offer it until this year when Wini Moyes grew a marvelous crop of 16.5 pounds

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