Early Camellias in the United States
Florence Crowder

According to Mr R. J. Wilmot in an article in the 1947 Yearbook of the American Camellia Society, John Stevens of Hoboken, New Jersey, imported a single red camellia around 1797 or 1798. Michael Floy came from England to New York and brought a double white camellia for John Stevens. Camellias were soon introduced into New England, for in 1806 John Prince received a small plant of the double white from Joseph Barrell of Charleston, South Carolina. Soon after that, Mr Floy established nurseries in New York, at the corner of Broadway and Twelfth Street and in Harlem. He originated several varieties, among them, ‘Floyii’, which is no longer listed in the nomenclature books, possibly because of its scarcity or extinction, but is listed in Mr Floy’s catalogue of 1832. I have not been able to physically locate it. Mr Floy was among the first to successfully plant seeds and to use the names of people for varieties rather than using Latinized terms, such as ‘Alba Plena’ for double white.

Seeds of *C. sinensis* were attempted earlier in 1744, but failed. According to the U.S. Patent Office report of 1857, tea plants went to Georgia in 1772, but were a failure due to insufficient capital and other circumstances. In 1813, Philipe Noisette attempted to grow tea in Charleston, South Carolina. The western movement came about 1850 to Sacramento, California, by James Warren with plants from Boston, Massachusetts.

Following the Civil War, 1861-1865, interest in camellias waned but after the turn of the 20th century shipments began once more from Japan, Germany, Belgium and France. Shows and exhibitions were being held and publications began featuring camellias so the public, once again, was reminded of these beautiful plants and blooms. The American Camellia Society, founded on October 24, 1945, and now housed at Fort Valley, Georgia, was fostered interest in camellias.

213 varieties were listed in various publications in those very early years, but today, only 28 of those are listed in our nomenclature books. Many are found in other countries and many, not at all. One of the missions in my life is to locate as many of these that I am able to. If I cannot secure the cuttings or plants to return to the United States, at least I will be able to inventory them and establish their locations. This will be my accomplishment, with the assistance of so many others in the camellia horticultural history of the United States.

Other nurserymen began producing and importing varieties. William Prince Linnaeau of New York was one of the first to list in a catalogue the seventeen varieties that he had in his garden. Among these was ‘Lady Bank’s tea leaved sasanqua’. In the years 1931 to 1939 Mr E. A. McIlhenny of Avery Island in my beloved Louisiana imported some 470 varieties from Japan, France, Germany and England and his garden exists today. Through publications such as *The American Gardener’s Magazine and Register* and *The Magazine of Horticulture*, along with exhibitions of camellias, this wonderful plant was brought before the public.

Large collections of camellias found their way south to establishments such as Magnolia Gardens and Middleton Place, both in Charleston, South Carolina. The western movement came about 1850 to Sacramento, California, by James Warren with plants from Boston, Massachusetts.

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, became the centre of producing seedlings and plants. Robert Buist, J. B. Smith, Richie & Dick, Landreth & Co, Robert Sherwood, and others were important growers there. Baltimore, Maryland, was another important area of activities. From greenhouses here, plants were sold in surrounding cities, shipped to Europe and for planting in the southern states. In 1832 an advertisement for F. Newman was placed in the *Louisiana Courier* for camellias, the most splendid of flowers, having been received in a shipment from Tennessee. ‘Feastii’, developed in Philadelphia, is one of the varieties I have not located except here in Pallanza, Italy, at Villa S. Remigio, through the writing of Piero Hillebrand in his wonderful publication, *Antiche Camelie*. I am so hopeful that I will be able to secure some scions from that plant to return it to its homeland.

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*Editor’s note: C. j. ‘Floyi’ appears in the ICS Register.*