

BOOK REVIEWS

LESTER ROWNTREE. 2006. **Hardy Californians: A Woman's Life with Native Plants. New Expanded Edition.** (ISBN 0-520-25051-6, pbk.). The University of California Press, Berkeley, CA 94704, U.S.A. (**Orders:** California Princeton Fulfillment Services, 1445 Lower Ferry Road, Ewing, NJ 08618, U.S.A., www.ucpress.edu, 609-883-1759, 609-883-7413 fax). \$19.95, 391 pp., 81 b/w photographs.

Like the very native California flora she sought out to find, 52 year old Lester Rowntree was tenacious. A self-proclaimed "lady-gypsy," who traveled California's backroads and walked its mountain trails, often alone, sometimes with a pack animal to carry her camera and collecting equipment. Lester carved out a unique and soul nurturing authentic life—the life of a field botanist, writer, lecturer, and gardener. In her book *Hardy Californians*, she describes landscapes and places that would soon disappear, a rural and pastoral California that would fall victim to postwar "progress."

The original *Hardy Californians* published in 1936 became a classic over the years. Unfortunately, it also became a rare book after the bookplates were sacrificed to the 1940s war effort. In 1980, a year after Lester's death at age 100, *Hardy Californians* was reprinted as a paperback, yet this edition also is now scarce.

This new and expanded edition is a reprint of Lester's original version as well as new material: a biographical sketch of Lester by her grandchildren, Lester B. Rowntree and Rowan A. Rowntree. Also included is an essay by Judith Lowrey, an award-winning writer and native plant horticulturist who, despite never having met Lester, captures much of Lester's essence by illuminating her prolific writings and professional contributions with added photographs of Lester at different stages of her life. The sixty-four photographs of native plants have been reproduced anew from Lester's original negatives, taken in the early 1930s with a large-format camera. Also included in the back of the book is an updated species list of plants referenced by Lester in the original 1936 edition of *Hardy Californians*.

Often described as a female John Muir, she was both a free spirit and a recluse living for months in the mountains on beans and bread. In her words:

"The best places of all were in the high mountains, where I knew no one was camping above me. I used to love sleeping at the edge of snow banks during thaw time to watch the alpine open with the rising sun.

Up in the Sierra, after the flora and fauna and the silva—the forest trees—have accepted you, you climb to the top of a peak in a thunderstorm, take off your clothes and dance in the rain. Soon you know that the elements have accepted you, too."—Linny Heagy, Linny/Designer, Illustrator, email: a0005835@airmail.net.

WILLIAM W. DUNMIRE. 2004. **Gardens of New Spain: How Mediterranean Plants and Foods Changed America.** (ISBN 0-292-70564-6, pbk.). University of Texas Press, P.O. Box 7819, Austin, TX 78713-7819, U.S.A. (**Orders:** <http://www.utexas.edu/utpress>, 512-471-4032). \$24.95, 375 pp., illustrated, 6" × 9".

William Dunmire discusses how plants and animals from the Mediterranean world arrived in the Americas, and how they were cultivated in this new setting. It is a fascinating story, for it involves the many cultures and geographic regions (the Middle East, Asia, and Africa) that gave so much to Spain. The story also involves the many people who brought these crops and animals to the Americas. The introduction of these new plants and animals forever changed the face, and taste, of the land.

Written in the tradition of historical and cultural geography, the reader will learn about each new crop and animal, its use and habitat in the Old World and the challenges facing its introduction into the New World. Many crops were first introduced into Mexico, and then later spread to New Mexico, Arizona, California, and Texas. When the Spanish left for the New World, they brought along the plants and animals of their homeland—wheat, melons, grapes, vegetables and a cornucopia of Mediterranean fruit. Watermelon and cantaloupe seeds were among Pueblo Indian trade items imported from Mexico, which means a European presence was felt here long before the Spanish themselves appeared. Some of their offerings thrived and became staple crops alongside the corn, beans and squash that had traditionally sustained the original Americans. Other imports couldn't adapt or didn't please local palates. This intermingling of Old and New World plants gave rise to many of the culinary dishes and foods we enjoy today.

His earlier works include: *Wild Plants of the Pueblo Province* (1995), *A Readable Guide to Southwestern Native American Ethnobotany* (1997), and *Wild Plants and Native Peoples of the Four Corners* (1997).

Gardens is recommended for anyone interested in plants and their uses. It is a good read and well organized with an index, glossary, and extensive bibliography.—Gary Jennings, Library, Botanical Research Institute of Texas, 509 Pecan Street, Fort Worth, TX 76102-4060, U.S.A.



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