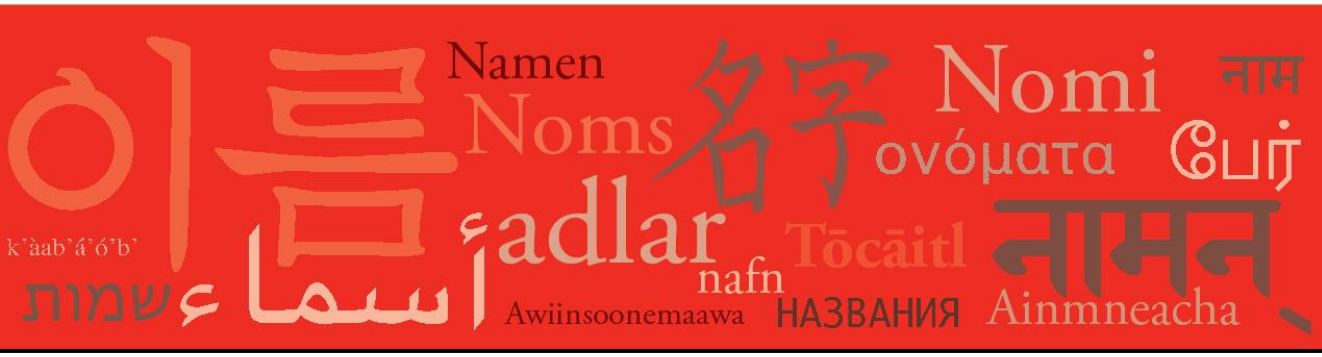
Names | A Journal of Onomastics



Book Review

Wild, Tamed, Lost, Revived: The Surprising Story of Apples in the South. By Diane Flynt. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. 2023. Pp. 286 (Hardback). $35.00. ISBN 13: 978-1-4696-7694-4.

Due to their biological structure, apples, one of the most common fruits, are unique in their naming history. As heterozygous plants, they do not replicate by seed but only by tissue propagation, from runners that sprout at the base of an existing tree or by grafts grown from scions, the wood of a parent tree. With deliberate human intervention, desirable species are thus cultivated and preserved. Greatly prized, they are also given names, names marked by an abundance of creativity and precision: *White Winter Pearmain*, *Albemarle Pippin*, *Golden Delicious*, *Summer Banana*, *Carolina Red June*, *Razor Russett*, *Equinetelee*, and hundreds of others.

With equal creativity and precision, Diane Flynt takes up these names in *Wild, Tamed, Lost, Revived: The Surprising Story of Apples in the South*. Surprising, indeed. She chronicles 200+ years of apple cultivation from Virginia to Mississippi and marks it with the names of people, places, and, above all, apples in this multi-state botanical geography.

Flynt brings her personal history to the work. An English major who spent her first career in corporate finance, she turned to apples for her second, and in 1997 she committed to planting an orchard and opening a cidery with her own fermented juices. A determined Southern apple pioneer, she became a recognized pomologist and multiple-time nominee and finalist for the James Beard Award for Outstanding Beverage Professional. Her 2017 retirement from Foggy Ridge Cidery so that she could devote herself full-time to heirloom apples was covered by *The Washington Post*, where Dave McIntyre praised her as "advocate and ambassador for the craft cider moment, promoting the revival and use of traditional cider apple varieties

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common in colonial days but nearly forgotten in the modern marketplace" ("It's Last Call for the Virginia Cider That Launched The Industry's Craft Movement", *The Washington Post*, 16 November 2017). With evident pride, *Richmond Magazine* has called her "one of the finest cider makers and apple growers in the country" (Stephanie Ganz, "Godmother of Southern Cider", *Richmond Magazine*, 31 January 2022).

If botanists read *Wild, Tamed, Lost, Revived* for its details of apple cultivation and production, and foodies read it for its gustatory descriptions of apples' crunch and flavor, onomasticians can read it for the hundreds of names seeded into its pages. These names, Flynt says, are a critical point of origin for her:

> When people ask me, "Why apples?" I'm tempted to tell the truth—I fell in love with apple names. It wasn't flavor, at least at first, or the thrill of planting a tree that will outlive me. It was names like Magnum Bonum, called "Maggie Bowman" on my home turf. Or Sheepnose, which makes perfect sense once you see the pointed end of this apple. The names quickly led me to stories, often constructed to romanticize what might be a grittier tale. (28)

To relate the sometimes romantic, sometimes gritty stories of apples, Flynt structures her text in four unnumbered sections after the four descriptors in her title. The four sections are further divided by topical headings, also unnumbered, such as "Roots" and "Blooms" or "Planted" and "Shared". Loosely chronological, the book opens with a short history of apple cultivation in the South and ends with the status of Southern apple orchards in the twentieth-first century. In "Wild" (1–57), Flynt sketches the botany of apples and the work that goes into their reproduction, work that, once neglected, leads to their decline. In "Tamed" (58–119), she elaborates on apple orchards, including the selection of desirable varieties and their purposes. It is human labor that, in her word, tames apples, while she insists in parallel, "Naming apples tamed them" (55).

Throughout, Flynt also relates the names of people and, later, farm cooperatives and corporations integral to the rise and fall of apple agriculture in the South. She memorializes the Cherokee, Monacan, Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and others among the Indigenous peoples who cultivated a wide variety of apples; when their lands were stolen, with warfare and the Indian Removal Act of 1830, so were their orchards and applestock. She recognizes the enslaved people whose work in grafting, tending, harvesting, drying, juicing, and cooking thousands of acres of apples ensured crops of taste and texture. She tells tales of long-ago apples and their discoverers all but lost to history, such as the *Nickajack* apple, which was "named for a North Carolina creek but was likely cultivated by Cherokees and introduced to nursery trade by a white slave owner, Silas McDowell" (17). As she observes:

> Southern apple names trick us with gauzy back stories, like the Mattamuskeet apple from coastal North Carolina said to have been found in the gullet of a wild goose by members of the Mattamuskeet tribe [. . .].
>
> More tantalizing for me are the partial stories, the left-out narratives [like that of the Toby apple]. This apple carries parallel and opaque narratives: Is Toby named for a wounded Confederate soldier who planted a seed from an apple he ate on the way home from Gettysburg? Or did an enslaved man named Toby replicate a seedling tree that he believed bore valuable fruit? (18)

Flynt continues her account with "Lost" (120–175), which traces the economic history of Southern apple agriculture, where more than two thousand varieties in the nineteenth century were pared down to a handful a hundred years later. Their decline is evident in the catalogs of prominent orchards: "On the eve of the Civil War in 1861, Fruitland Nurseries offered over 300 apple varieties; the 1934 catalog for this Georgia nursery offered just 18" (174). In South Carolina, a similar arc played out at Pomaria Nurseries, which in 1860 listed 500 apples and shipped as far away as Mississippi and Arkansas but whose 1878 catalog, its last, offered only 39 varieties (97, 152). Meanwhile, the modern apple industry, built around refrigerated storage and transportation, shifted from the eastern half of the US to the Northwest, where today Washington produces 65% of US-grown apples (155). The final section of the book, "Revived" (176–245), sweeps through the transformation of farm orchards into commercial orchards and agritourism, and then stretches toward the future, with hopes for revitalized apple horticulture and fresh appreciation for the wealth of apple diversity.

Unlike Stephen B. Heard in *Charles Darwin's Barnacle and David Bowie's Spider: How Scientific Names Celebrate Adventurers, Heroes, and Even a Few Scoundrels*, reviewed for *Names* by I. M. Nick (2022), Flynt does not detail Linnean names. Although she notes *Malus domestica*, imported from Europe, and with it North America's four native species (15)—*M. fusca* 'Oregon crabapple', *M. ioensis* 'prairie crabapple', *M. coronaria* 'sweet crabapple', and *M. angustifolia* 'southern crabapple'—she concentrates instead on the fruit's popular names, often in connection with the people and places that enliven its history. She relates how families grew their own specialty apples for generations: "the Covingtons shared the Glass apple; the Dixons kept Bud Wolf. The Smiths saved Pinky, and the Nolens passed along their namesake, the Nolen apple" (89). George Washington and Thomas Jefferson wrote of apples in their letters and journals

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(75); a US ambassador brought Albemarle Pippins to Queen Victoria, a gift that helped convince her to remove the tariff on apple imports (75). Quaker minister Ann Jessup brought apple grafts from Scotland in 1792 (149); Henderson Luelling brought North Carolina woodstock to Indiana, Iowa, and ultimately Oregon, point of origin for the Northwest apple industry (150–151). Humans have helped the transplanted *Malus domestica* thrive.

Flynt's own story, the account of her "audacious plan to plant the first twentieth-century cider apple orchard in the South and to build the first modern southern cidery" (13), becomes part of a greater apple history. Memoir-style personal reflections, highlighted by a change of font, appear intermittently throughout, although, since much of the text involves first-person narration, her apple-inspired interactions are part and parcel of the entire project. The result, as Tammera Race notes in her review, is a blend that is "part botany, part biography, part horticultural history, and part human history" (2024, 23) and, I would add, part autobiography. By the close of the book, in its Coda (246–253), having introduced the South of today to commercial fermented cider, Flynt has given up her career as cider-maker in order to pursue her real passion, saving Southern apples from extinction. In Dugspur, Virginia, she maintains the orchard that she began over thirty years ago and sells its produce to discerning entrepreneurs who keep the cider industry alive in the South too.

Twelve and a half pages of endnotes (259–271) and eight of bibliography (273–280) attest to the diligence that Flynt has applied to her work, her archival research augmented by personal interviews—leading to long-term friendships—with orchardists, cider-makers, vintners, and production specialists. A helpful six-page index (281–286) completes the book. Pre-publication, she was honored as keynote speaker at CiderCon2022 in Richmond, Virginia, where she received the year's Award for Significant Contribution to the Cider Industry from the American Cider Association; since publication, the book has been widely reviewed in the industry and short-listed for the Nach Waxman Prize for Food and Drink Scholarship, Kitchen Arts & Letters.

Full-color photographs by Angie Mosier complement Flynt's text with close-ups of apples that approach the art of portraiture and wide-angle shots that capture orchard-splashed mountain vistas. Interspersed among them are historical photographs from the Library of Congress, the University of Georgia, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and other large and small historical holdings. Included as well are reproductions of apple lithographs selected from the 7,497 watercolor paintings, 3,810 of them apples, commissioned by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) from 1886 to 1942 ("USDA Pomological Watercolors", USDA National Agricultural Library, 2025), eye-catching and mouth-watering visual additions to Flynt's narrative.

John T. Flanagan, who in 1966 published what may be *Names*'s only full-length article on apple names, would certainly have delighted in this 2023 publication. For her part, Flynt, who turns research and entrepreneurship into friendships, would have found in him a kindred soul. Prospective readers who delight in names like *Brushy Mountain Limbertwig*, *King David*, *Father Abraham*, *Yellow Transparent*, or *Winter Jon* may find ready kinship in her pages too.

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