

A Rose in December; The Goodman's Yellow Rose

Though Shakespeare is famous for saying that he longs not for a rose in December, here in East Texas we are often blessed with Christmas roses. Our October through December weather is mild and perfect for the reblooming roses to show off their color. Generally, our roses are not struck down by hard freezes till January and gardeners in East Texas, and elsewhere in the South, cut their bushes back around Valentine's Day so they can begin to sprout again in March as the weather warms.

This was no different for the Goodman family. Mary Priscilla Gaston Goodman, wife of Dr. William Goodman, was a well-known plants woman and gardener. To the north of her home, she created a large square garden charmingly called "the flower yard" by the family. This formal garden was surrounded by an evergreen hedge and had wide paths bordering the planting beds. The garden was devoted to a variety of blooming plants, but roses were the stars of the garden.

In a letter dated January 10th, 1890, Etta Goodman writes to her sister Sallie, who is at school in New York City. She states that the weather has been so warm that the roses are all blooming. However, it has started to rain, and they know that cold weather is approaching. She says, "Mama wonders who to send a basket of roses to. They are so pretty and will be spoiled by the frost tonight."

In a later letter, Etta relays that they gathered in the roses before the freeze and sent a full basket of "so many pretty Marechal Niels" roses to Miss Cora Alexander.

The Marechal Neil is a Noisette Climbing Tea Rose that was discovered in a garden in Montauban, Southern France, by Louis Castel in 1857. The rose was so lovely and highly fragrant that he took cuttings home with him from the visit. In 1864 the rose was introduced commercially in France by Eugene Verdier, quickly spreading around the world. It has large multi petaled blooms of clear medium yellow and a strong fragrance that some compare to raspberries, violets and tea. The rose is finicky, requiring freeze protection, a hedge-border garden like Mrs. Goodman's would be the perfect location for it to grow. It also does not respond well to pruning but, its lanky climbing habit dotted with heavy headed pendulous blooms is a charming sight.

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