

THE SAVIGNAC PEARS

Claude Jolicoeur 197 Aberdeen Québec, QC, G1R 2C9 Canada
(418) 524-6833 cjoli@gmc.ulaval.ca

Brother Armand Savignac is one of our pionners for grape cultivation in Québec, and a true fruit explorer. From what I was told, he would now be over 90 years of age and was still in good health the last time I heard about him. He has tested some 300 varieties of grape between 1945 and 1965 at Joliette, about 30 miles North-East of Montréal, in climatic zone 4. But grape is not the object of the present article. What I would like to talk about is the fact that Brother Savignac also had 4 pear trees in the land around his residence. Over the years, 2 of them died, but the remaining 2 have definitely proven hardy in a cold climate. They were rediscovered about 10-15 years ago by some nurserymen of the region of Québec who got quite excited with them and started propagating the 2 varieties. Unfortunately, Brother Savignac had lost the tags of his trees and couldn't remember the names of the varieties, and the nurserymen sold their trees under different names: Savignac #1 and #2, Round and Pointed Savignac, Savignac and Frère Armand, and maybe a few other variations. My feeling at the time was that all these names were wrong anyway because Brother Savignac's trees were surely named varieties, so I didn't care too much about the Savignac pears, thinking that I might as well wait until I learn which variety they really were. But I was wrong.

Some time later, I learned a little more: Brother Savignac had obtained his 4 trees around 1947 from the Ottawa Experimental Farm and, at the time, the cultivars were not commercially available. I did a bit of literature review at the University and found that, in 1947-48, the Ottawa Experimental Farm released 5 pear cultivars: Enie, Menie, Miney, Moe and Phileson. My conclusion was that the coincidence was too strong and that the 4 pear trees of Brother Savignac had to be, in reality, 4 of these 5 cultivars that he would have recieved just prior to their release. So, again, I didn't care too much about the Savignac pears, thinking that I might as well get the true cultivars when I feel I need them. But, again, I was wrong.

I got the last word on this story a little while later when I talked with Raymond Granger of Agriculture Canada Research Station at St-Jean-sur-Richelieu. He had made some research on the subject and found that the trees

sent to Brother Savignac were numbered selections that have never been named. These selections possibly were from the same crossings from which the Enie-Menie-Moe series was issued (i.e. Zuckerbirn x Clapp and Kurskaya x Flemish Beauty), but they are distinct varieties, and thus have the right to have distinct names.

So now remains the problem of finding adequate names for these 2 Savignac pears. As I mentioned above, different nurserymen sold trees under different names and someone who bought one of these trees might have difficulty to know which one of the 2 varieties he's got. Among the proposals I'm aware of, the one I prefer (this is my personal preference) was done by Mr. Jean Parisot, NAFEX member and owner of the nursery Pépinière Lotbinière, near Québec: he suggested to call one of the cultivars "Savignac" and the other "Frère Armand". I understand that Brother Savignac has agreed with this suggestion.

Following Mr. Parisot's naming suggestion, the Savignac is a small to medium round pear of good taste. Season early. Does not keep. Tree very productive and very hardy in zone 4. The Frère Armand has a pear shape, medium size, greenish-yellow, mid-season to late, not quite as good quality as Savignac. Does not keep. Tree erected that can be difficult to manage, hardy in zone 4. These descriptions are given after information I gathered. I haven't yet seen these fruits! And since Nafexians always tend to be a bit overoptimistic, I will also give you the opinion of Mr. Granger, who I mentioned earlier: he told me that he thought neither of these two pears are of premium quality. However, they can be useful to people that want to grow pears in cold areas.

P.S.: Please do not write to ask for grafting wood - I don't have any because, for a long while, I didn't care very much for the Savignac pears... I was told that Saint Lawrence Nurseries at Postdam NY have at least one of these pears, but I don't know which one.