

Man Who Ate Wolf Peaches

By: Doane R. Hoag

Salem, Mass., Sept. 28, 1820 - To the surprise of everyone in this city, Col. Robert Gibbon Johnson is still alive. Several weeks ago Johnson, whom many considered to be totally bereft of his senses, announced that at high noon on Tuesday he would personally mount the steps of the county courthouse and, in full view of all interested parties, eat a wolf peach.

Now everyone knew that the wolf peach was deadly poison. Dr. James Van Meeter warned that if the colonel actually went through with his insane proposal, he would almost instantly begin to froth and foam at the mouth and double over with intense abdominal cramps which would terminate within minutes in his death.

"He's either an eccentric old fool who's going to kill himself, or he's just bluffing," people decided. In all likelihood, they thought, it was just a put-on, and the colonel wouldn't show up at all. Nevertheless, as the noon hour drew near last Tuesday, an immense crowd of more than 2,000 persons gathered in front of the courthouse. Noon arrived. No Col. Johnson. People began to hoot and jeer. But at 15 minutes past the hour, who should appear but the colonel himself.

Dressed as usual in a black suit with white ruffled blouse, black shoes, black gloves, and a three-cornered hat, he mounted the steps of the courthouse and faced the crowd. On his arm was a basket of wolf peaches which he had grown on his own property.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "for many years I have been trying to convince you that the much maligned wolf peach - *Solanum Lycopersicum* is not a poisonous plant but a delicious and highly nutritious fruit which deserves a place on every table. "Having been unable to convince you by argument, I shall now attempt to do it by example. If I am right, I will live. If I am wrong, I will die. My friends, I shall now eat the wolf peach!"

With this, he reached into the basket, drew out one of the scarlet colored wolf peaches, and put it to his lips. Some were skeptical, suspecting it was only a trick, that he wouldn't actually eat it. But he did. Those close enough to him could see clearly that he actually took a large bit out of the fruit, chewed it up, and swallowed it. People gasped with horror. A woman fainted. Everyone watched to see Johnson begin to froth at the mouth and double over with cramps. He did neither.

It is now Friday, and Johnson is still alive and well. People around here have decided to start planting wolf peaches in their own gardens, for they really are a great delicacy. But they have stopped calling them wolf peaches. Tomatoes sounds much better.

Source: Atlanta Journal/Constitution