

September Starts The Summer-Autumn Change

By DR. ALFRED MORDECAI

September marks the end of summer for Blowing Rockites. The autumnal equinox arrives on the 21st. The slanting sun-rays flood the hills with golden light. The air is cool and invigorating. Shadows lengthen. They are colorful and dreamy. The nights call for extra bedspreads. A vast stream of luminous star clouds, which we call the Milky-way, gently curves across the sky from northeast to southwest. Cygnus, the Swan, spreads over the village at 9 p. m. In this constellation we find the "Northern Cross". On rare occasions we may even see the shimmering lights of the Aurora borealis, for now the sun swings low around the Arctic Circle and the snows are starting in Eskimo land. Before the month has passed we shall see frost in the Blue Ridge mountains. The Katydid and other insects even now, are singing farewell to the halcyon days of summer. On still nights we may also hear the baying of 'possum dogs far off in the distance. The closed gentians bloom. The little blue asters and the golden-rods give color to the roadsides. Added to this are the scarlet leaves of the sumac, the yellow and orange colors of the sassafras and the sparkling dew drops on the jewel-weeds. Red apples appear in the orchards. Blueish patches of cabbage plants await to be harvested on the farms and the yellowing stands of tobacco are arranged like parading troops in battalion formation. The great Broadwing Hawks are on their way from Canada to Central America. The movement commences about mid-September and for about ten days thousands of these stately birds will pass over the Blue Ridge in daily echelons. The flight is made in short stages. Early afternoon each day flocks of these birds will settle in wooded coves for food and a night of rest. At sun-rise they will soar to a high altitude and resume the flyway down the Appalachians, until it's time to feed again and rest.

September also is the month that our humming birds leave for more southern regions. On a recent occasion as many as 25 or 30 of these tiny birds were found buzzing and chirping about a large patch of jewel-weeds in our neighborhood.

This is likewise the season for snakes to bask dreamily in the sunshine prior to seeking their rock dens for winter sleep. The vast majority of these reptiles are perfectly harmless. Despite all the snake-tales commonly passed around, poisonous reptiles are seldom encountered at this high altitude.

At this season of the year many interesting plants may be found in fruit along the waysides. Beautiful clusters of elderberries now replace the white flowers that adorned the bushes during July and August. In former times elderberry wine was regarded as a very palatable beverage.

In the fence corners and particularly in the moist low grounds we find abundant displays of the shiny, purple pokeberries. The botanical name for the Pokeberry bush is *Phytolacca*, which word means "Lake Plant". The root is perennial. It sprouts up very early in the springtime and these tender shoots are often gathered and served on the table as a boiled green like spinach. The mature leaves and the roots of this plant are poisonous to a mild extent and should be regarded as harmful. Extracts of the root were at one time used as medicines for many different ailments such as chronic arthritis and even cancers. It is also interesting to know that the first reducing agent marketed in the United States was a proprietary remedy called "Anti-fat". It was said to have been a concoction of pokeberry juice. Indeed, at the present time, it is not uncommon to find "Granny-doctors" in the hill country, who prepare a pokeberry wine which they highly recommend for the treatment of rheumatism and obesity.

The Witch hazel is now almost ready to bloom. The small yellow blossoms will be full blown and abundant before our first snow falls. They will remain fresh and hardy well into bleak December. The North American Indians regarded this shrub-tree as a valuable source of medicine. So did our pioneer settlers. In fact the bark and leaves of the tree became officially recognized in the U. S. Pharmacopia. As a useful remedy for any disease

however, the preparations had little to offer. But to the crude dealers and patent medicine venders they proved to be a great pecuniary success. Witch hazel extracts, salves and lotions, flooded the market for several generations. They were highly advertised for both internal and external use—as gargles, mouth washes, up-set stomachs, sprains, bruises, burns, skin irritations and shaving lotions. In September many tons of the witch hazel leaves are still collected hereabout and passed on to the pharmaceutical trade.

In the woods, particularly in the laurel thickets, we may still find small sweeps of that lovely little evergreen, listed in the books as *Gaultheria*, but commonly known by such names as Wintergreen "Tea-berry", "Ground holly", and "Love-in-Winter". The small glossy green leaves redden or become bronzed in the fall and each plant yields two or three small, bright, red berries. In former times tons upon tons of these plants were gathered for the market. Distillation of the leaves yields the Oil of Wintergreen which was extensively used in the manufacture of flavoring extracts for candy and chewing gum. Also for the preparation of rubbing lotions and liniments.

One thing not so nice about September is the swipe of tropical storms. At this season the sun beats hot and furiously over the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea. Oceans of water are taken into the atmosphere as vapor. The hot moist air rises and forms dense clouds. Cool air sweeps in and sets up a whirl of motion and off it takes as a hurricane.

When such storms strike our coastal areas the Blue Ridge Mountains are very prone to wind, rain and fog. But following these equinoctial disturbances comes the Autumn Wonders—blue sky overhead and a riot of colors through the land. Nothing more delightful, unless it is the first snowfall in the mountains followed by Indian Summer, which may last until the corn is shocked and the pumpkins are in the

Horn Group To Hold Meeting

The annual fall meeting of the Southern Appalachian Historical Association, sponsors of Boone's outdoor drama Horn in the West, will be held October 14 at 6:30 p. m. in the Daniel Boone Hotel. Dr. I. G. Greer, president of the organization, will call the meeting to order.

A report on the 1963 operation of Horn in the West, as well as other activities of the association, will be the highlight of the evening. An entertaining and informative program will also be given, details of which are to be announced at a later date.

Also on the agenda are elections of the Board of Directors and other officers of the association. Anyone, member or not, who is interested in the Southern Appalachian Historical Association and desires to attend this meeting, is invited.

Fred Blair, 67, Dies Friday

Fredrick McDonald Blair, age 67, of Rt. 1, Vilas, died Sept. 13 at Watauga Hospital after an extended illness. He was born in Avery County to the late Colbert and Mary Williams Blair. He was a farm owner and had lived in Watauga county for 60 years.

Funeral services were conducted Sunday at 2 p. m. at Willowdale Baptist Church by Rev. E. O. Gore, assisted by Rev. Maurice Cooper and Rev. C. O. Vance. Burial was in the Dugger cemetery.

Surviving are the widow, Annie D. Blair of Vilas; two sons, Eugene Blair of Jacksonville, Fla. and Linwood Blair of Charlotte; one half brother, Boyce Blair of Charleston, S. C.

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