

# Ontario Garnet and Yukon Gold

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Not too fast ( $\text{♩} = 170$ )

The musical score is written for a single melodic line in treble clef, 4/4 time, with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The tempo is marked 'Not too fast' with a quarter note equal to 170 beats per minute. The score consists of 12 staves of music, each with a corresponding line of lyrics. Chord symbols are placed above the notes to indicate the harmonic accompaniment. The lyrics tell a story about a man named Garnet Johnston who worked on a farm in Ontario and later moved to Yukon to mine for gold.

I was lea-fing through a news-pa-per to see what was in - side,  
When I turned a new page o-ver, and I no-ticed some-one'd died.  
Now, his name was un-fa - mil-iar, but I'm sing-ing this be - cause  
I com - ple-ted the o - bi-tu-a - ry, learn - ing who he was.  
With his re - cent M. S. Ag. de - gree, in nine - teen - fif - ty - three  
He was hi - red by the C D A to work at O A C,  
Where the Col - lege'-s po - ta-to farm, on grey-brown loa-my sand,  
Could be found in what's now Cam-bridge, in the val-ley of the Grand.  
Have you heard of Gar-net John-ston? Do you re-cog-nize his name?  
Let us raise him from ob - scu-ri - ty to well - de - serv - ed fame,  
For one dime of ev-ery too-nie when Ca - na-dian spuds are sold  
Goes to pur-chase his most po-pu-lar cre - a - tion, Yu-kon Gold.

Complete words overleaf

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I was leafing through a newspaper to see what was inside,  
When I turned a new page over, and I noticed someone'd died.  
Now, his name was unfamiliar, but I'm singing this because  
I completed the obituary, learning who he was.  
With his recent M.S.Ag. degree, in 1953  
He was hired by the CDA to work at OAC,  
Where the College's potato farm, on grey-brown loamy sand,  
Could be found in what's now Cambridge, in the valley of the Grand.

Have you heard of Garnet Johnston? Do you recognize his name?  
Let us raise him from obscurity to well-deserved fame,  
For one dime of every toonie, when Canadian spuds are sold,  
Goes to purchase his most popular creation, Yukon Gold.

Though the Longlac's skin was purple, and the Rideau's skin was red –  
Those were two of the varieties his research program bred –  
They were white below the surface, as potatoes mostly were,  
Although red and blue and yellow flesh in nature all occur.  
Now, in Holland there was Bintje. It looked lovely on the plate,  
With a creamy yellow flesh, but its maturity was late,  
And Canadians who missed it generated a demand  
For a yellow-fleshed potato that would do well in our land.

As a species, the potato had developed in Peru,  
Where some very tasty yellow-fleshed varieties still grew.  
There was one whose name meant "egg yolk". It already had been crossed  
With Katahdin, out of Maine, without its yellowness being lost.  
This in turn was crossed with Norgleam, something else Katahdin-based.  
The resulting seed made tubers at mid-season. Both their taste  
And their colour were appealing. It was fortunate that chance  
Had selected from a pedigree the genes for useful plants.

It was 1967 that the tubers first were grown,  
Then the eyes were used to make more plants, each one a perfect clone.  
It resisted mild mosaic, was susceptible to scab,  
And was low in glycoalkaloids, as measured in the lab.  
He had planned to name it "Yukon", for the river, as his work  
Had already honoured Huron, Simcoe, Nipigon, and York,  
But his colleague Charlie Bishop said that "Gold" would add cachet.  
It was launched in 1980 with the name we know today.

He created his varieties the good, old fashioned way,  
By transporting grains of pollen, not fragmented DNA,  
And those conscientious eaters who avoid all GMOs  
Can consume successful candidates that Garnet Johnston chose.  
In the roster of Canadians who've improved our staffs of life,  
He should have the fame of McIntosh, of Saunders, and of Fife.  
And in Cambridge, where the guides to local heritage still lack  
Any hint of the potato farm, there ought to be a plaque.

## Primary references

Johnston G.R., Rowberry R.G. Yukon Gold: A new, yellow-fleshed, medium-early, high quality table and French fry cultivar. *American Potato Journal* 58, 1981, 241-244.

Johnston G.R. Yukon Gold [a copy of a letter he wrote to a colleague in 1998, telling the story of Yukon Gold in his own words], retrievable from the Internet at <http://www.plant.uoguelph.ca/research/potato/history/yukongold.html> on 6 June 2009.

Toronto Star. Obituary of Garnet (Gary) Johnston, 13 October 2000, available on the Internet.

University of Guelph. Mr. Garnet (Gary) Johnston (1916-2000), retrievable from the Internet at <http://www.plant.uoguelph.ca/research/potato/history/johnston.html> on 6 Juen 2009.

## Verse notes

1. CDA is the Canadian Department of Agriculture. OAC is Ontario Agricultural College, part of the University of Guelph. Its Potato Farm was later named the Cambridge Research Station; it is no longer in use.

2. Bintje is pronounced "BEN-jee".

3. The Spanish potato name "Yema de huevo" translates as "yolk of egg". Katahdin was first bred in 1931 and named after the most prominent mountain in Maine. The accent in "Katahdin" is on the second syllable. Norgleam has only four great-grandparents, as its immediate parent, ND 457-1, was self-pollinated to produce Norgleam and Nordak. Of those four great-grandparents, one was Katahdin, while another was Houma, of which one parent was Katahdin.

4. Mosaic and common scab are potato diseases, the former being viral, the latter bacterial. Glycoalkaloids are a family of bitter and potentially toxic substances, primarily solanine, found in potatoes; when potatoes turn green after exposure to light, their glycoalkaloid content as well as their chlorophyll content typically locally increases. Low, non-toxic levels of glycoalkaloids contribute to the flavour of potatoes. Longlac, Rideau, Huron, Simcoe, Nipigon, York, and Yukon are all Canadian bodies of water, either rivers or lakes (Nipigon and York are both).

5. John McIntosh discovered an attractive eating apple on his farm near what's now Morrisburg, Ontario in 1811. David Fife, farming near what's now Peterborough, recognized a promising strain of wheat, originally from Poland or Ukraine, and bred its seed as Red Fife, the most popular variety of wheat in Canada for the last 40 years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Charles E. Saunders developed a descendant of Red Fife as the earlier-maturing Marquis, which dominated western Canadian wheat production for the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century but was susceptible to rust; a subsequent, rust-free variety was named Saunders in 1947. Saunders' job title was "Dominion Cerealist".

Chorus. There are no easily-obtainable statistics about the wholesale or retail value of Canadian potatoes by variety. However, in a report dated 2006, about 6% of the area planted in potatoes was planted in Yukon Gold. A dime per toonie, or 5%, is an approximation.