

The 'Sombreuil' Saga Revisited



Back around 2006, the American Rose Society (as the world registrar of roses) made this announcement:

"The ARS Classification Committee has concluded that the rose sold in the United States and elsewhere as 'Sombreuil' is not the same as the cultivar named 'Mlle. de Sombreuil' originally introduced as a tea rose by M. Robert in 1850. The cultivar currently grown and purchased in the United States under the name 'Sombreuil' is, in fact, a Large-Flowered Climber introduced into the United States, circa 1880, that does not have the typical Tea fragrance, shrub growth form, and the winter tenderness of the 1850 cultivar. To correct this confusion, the Classification Committee has ruled that the name 'Mlle de Sombreuil' (Synonym La Biche) will be retained as the approved exhibition name (AEN) for the 1850 shrubform Tea, and that the name 'Sombreuil' be used as the AEN for the LCI, typically grown and sold in the United States. With this change, 'Sombreuil' (LCI) will no longer be eligible for the Dowager Queen award, and must be exhibited in the Climber class. ("AMERICAN ROSE" MAGAZINE, NOVEMBER, 2

When the news arrived in November, 2006, we were very pleased. At LAST, ARS was recognizing the true creamy white Tea Rose introduced by Robert (in France) in 1850 or 1851. The confusion was ended! Yippee!

Introduced in France, 1851, the Tea Rose, '**Mlle. de Sombreuil**' may have been the third rose named for the family Sombreuil. This one honored a heroine of the French Revolution – Mlle. de Sombreuil, daughter of Charles François de Virot, marquis de Sombreuil.

Its' parentage was un-recorded, but contemporary descriptions hinted at Bourbon parentage on at least one side of its pedigree. It was described as being the hardiest and most vigorous of the white Teas, and free from mildew. (per Brent Dickerson, The Old Rose Advisor).



'Mlle. de Sombreuil'

Within a few years, the name of the rose was shortened in common usage to **'Sombreuil'** and so it was grown, and known, for the better part of a century. It is one of the roses documented under that shortened name by Ethylene Emory Keays, (Mrs. Frederick Love Keays) in her book **OLD ROSES**, published in 1935.

In the mid-20th-Century, however, (probably sometime around 1945-1947) the original **'Mlle. de Sombreuil'** was somehow replaced in commerce by a vigorous, fragrant, undoubtedly modern climbing rose of un-recorded origin. A lovely rose indeed . . . but distinctly NOT **'Mlle. de Sombreuil'**.

The climbing imposter bloomed in a color similar to the original rose, but its bloom form and fragrance were very different – all of its physical characteristics hinting at Wichurana genes. It was not a bush, but a climber, and distinctly **not** a Tea Rose. The original rose was considered to be fairly hardy for a Tea. The imposter, even hardier, was adopted enthusiastically, and eventually distributed globally as **'Sombreuil'**.

At that point, nursery descriptions of **'Sombreuil'** changed from “*vigorous bush*” to “*Climber*”. (Those who grow Bush Form Tea Roses in mild climates understand just how vigorous they can be, without being Climbers!).

And so it continued until 2006.

Most Old Rose people had known for a long time that the handsome climber, with its Wichurana characteristics, could not be the original Tea Rose, christened **'Mlle. de Sombreuil'**. Discovery and research then showed us that the found rose which was in commerce as **'La Biche'** [Noisette, 1832, Woollier, France] was the true **'Mlle. de Sombreuil'**.

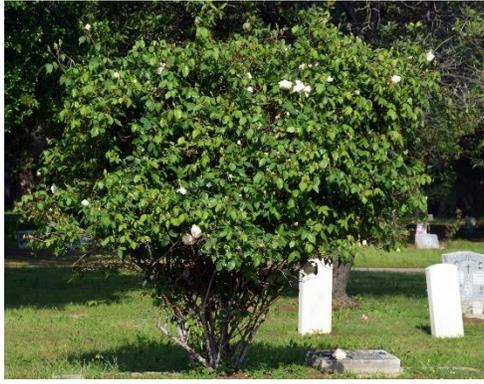
These changes were announced in the November, 2006, American Rose Magazine. The climber will now be classed as a Large-Flowered Climber (LCI) named **'Sombreuil, Cl.'**. The Tea Rose can be exhibited in the Dowager Queen class.

'Sombreuil' / La Biche / “George Washington Richardson”

But wait! There's MORE!

Phillip Robinson's discovery of the true **'Mlle. de Sombreuil'** was made in Santa Rosa, CA.

A few years later, a second discovery of this lovely Tea Rose was made a few miles away, in Esparto, CA, and there appears to be a family connection between the two discoveries.



'Mlle. de Sombreuil' planted circa 1896



So, ARS has now, for the most part, fixed this thicket of confusion. Just one questionable issue remains.

The “*Colonial White*” Problem

“*Colonial White*” is the final loose end in this saga.

If you go to the [HelpMeFind Roses](http://helpmefind.com) website, you can look up Melvin E. Wyant (1920-1998), of Mentor, OH. [Wyant, Melvin E. \(helpmefind.com\)](http://helpmefind.com) The late Mr. Wyant appears to be the source of at least some of the confusion.

In 1959, Mr. Wyant introduced as his own seedling, a vigorous, white, climbing rose with a rosette form, and rich Wichurana fragrance. He named “his” rose “*Colonial White*,” claiming to have bred it from '*New Dawn*' x '*Mme Hardy*'. (That breeding is impossible. '*Mme Hardy*' is sterile.)

Mr. Wyant is known to have, on another occasion, introduced another breeder’s rose as his own, with fictional breeding. It’s an easy guess that he did the same in this case. We just don’t know for sure who REALLY bred the rose in question. (I have my suspicions!)

Today, there is widespread agreement that Wyant’s fraudulent 1959 “*Colonial White*” is identical to the newly-re-classed Large-Flowered Climber, '*Sombreuil, Cl.*'. Accordingly, the AEN2. The name “*Colonial White*” was invalidated.

We were happy to see the real '*Mlle. de Sombreuil*' restored to her rightful name, and glad that a lovely Climbing Rose at last has an identification of its own. We are sorry, though, that more than a decade after correct identification, there is still confusion between '*Mlle. de Sombreuil*' and '*Sombreuil, Cl.*'

Have always wished that the American Rose Society would not take one more step to eliminate the confusion, and call the dang Climber *Colonial White*. At least it’s a name that belongs to that climbing rose – not some other rose.

Text and Photos by Jeri Jennings, Dec. 12, 2006; revised, July 2021.

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- ⚡ La Biche (Noisette, 1832, Toullier, France) White with a pink heart . . . Flesh-white, large and full Form cupped; growth vigorous. A fine Pillar Rose. Globular. Stem purple; bushy, very vigorous; alternate leaves, petiole sharp purplish bract. long thorns which are very thick and pointed, light red in youth and brown in age, sometimes recurved, looking like the beak of a parakeet. . . stipules long and narrow, glabrous, finely ciliate with glandular hairs; . . . (Dickerson, Old Rose Advisor, Pg. 215)
- ⚡ The true 'La Biche' is not in commerce in the U.S. at this time (and may not be in Europe).
- ⚡ If you purchased 'La Biche' in the U.S. in the 20th or 21st Centuries,
 - ⚡ CONGRATULATIONS! You have 'Mlle. de Sombreuil'.

*' . . . And I will make thee beds of roses,
And a thousand fragrant posies,
A cap of flowers, and a kirtle
Embroidered all with leaves of myrtle . . . '*

■ Christopher Marlow

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