

# Dill's AG GIANT PUMPKIN ROOTS Is The MAMMOTH Really Extinct?

By: Steve Connolly

Eventually in ones life, the following question comes up. Where did I come from? How did I get here? and...Why am I called that? The pilgrimage to find the answers to these questions must be made. It gives one a sense of being, as they say. I'll bet if a Giant Pumpkin could talk she would want to know the answer to these questions. Of course history can only go back as far as evidence and genealogy allow but believe it or not I found many answers to these, Where, How and Why's. Hopefully you will enjoy reading this brief report as much as I had, digging it up from many sources on the net, in different books, and from several postings by some of our very own home grown, scholarly, well read chat line experts on BP.com. I must say writing it for you was a challenge, since this expansive pertinent knowledge, that abounds was hard to consolidate, and the older records were even harder to find and verify.

Where to start...Cultivated Pumpkins are believed to have originated in Central America and seeds from related plants in Mexico date back to 5500 BC. However the origin of wild forms is uncertain. If it is native to Asia it was introduced to America in prehistoric times. The word pumpkin comes from the Greek word for a large melon which is pepon. Pepon was nasalized by the French into pompon. The English named it pompion, a term which dates back to 1547. The word then evolved around 1640 into an alternation called pumpkins, a Cucurbita pepo or fruit of the gourd family, and a type of Hubbard Squash or Pumpkin--the names of which may be used interchangeably and without botanical distinction. They are now grown with color distinctions of green to orange/reddish hues, all over the world with Antarctica being the sole exception.



Like many evolutionary trails some dead ends occurred, in the development of today's very large maxima cucurbitaceae. Recorded history, in the 1857 edition of the "Magazine of Horticulture" in England stated that in 1798 the first seeds of a large fruit, with a grey/green and some times pinkish or red exterior and tender succulent orange flesh, were transported from Boston to Marblehead England and cultivated for the next 40 years. A lady named Elizabeth Hubbard informed this Magazine of its good qualities, and they named the Hubbard squash after her. In both America and England a larger variety of these Hubbard's were called Mammoths by 1847. "Often weighing over 100 lbs. This is the largest fruited variety known", according to the "The Gardeners Assistant" magazine, dated 1857. They stated: "In a very rich compost, above a large quantity of manure and under favorable conditions of climate, it grows to an enormous size; fruit weighing 120 lbs, is by no means uncommon. At an exhibition in Sutcombe, in Devonshire, England "...one weighing 245 lbs was produced. This was the heaviest fruit on record, and it may be preserved into the winter months in a dry airy place suspended by a strong net." Additional records of evolutionary trails of an agricultural pursuit or

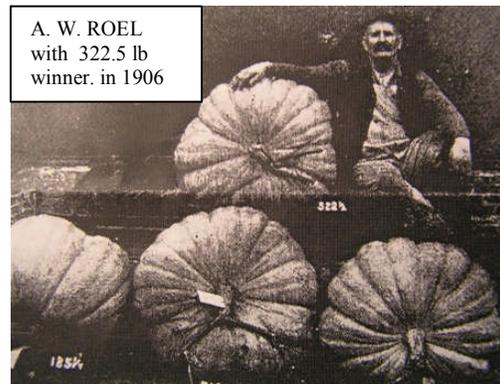
obsession to produce even bigger Mammoth Giants in Europe dwindled. But back in North America, the seed stock of the Mammoths, and sense of achievement of growing these behemoth squashes err pumpkins, to higher weights, survived.

A Burpee's catalog reference to these squash giants, states that in 1883 and 1884 that the achievements of a Canadian Nova Scotia grower, followed by a United States grower were big news in agricultural circles. Weight records were being broken again with these Mammoth seeds, and looked like we were off to the races. But surprisingly a lull occurred again, until, 9 years later, something really special started to happen, in Goderich Ontario, Canada. A small town Canadian Carriage maker and machinist/farmer named William Warnock appears on the map, in a big way, with some admiral weights for his time, as he unknowingly began an international sport. Using seed names like Rennies Mammoth, Mammoth Tours and Genuine Giant, and some amazingly familiar, common sense, techniques shown later in this Newsletter. When you see it, you may not believe Warnock's Growing methods were written in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, instead of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Here are some old records.

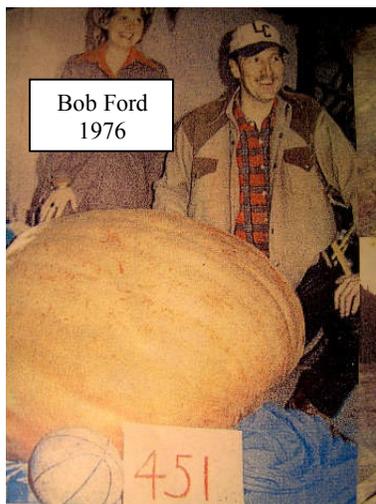
<u>Year</u>	<u>Grower</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Weight (lbs)</u>
1857	Sutcombe	Devenshire, England	245
1883.	Charles Hewitt	Halifax Dominion Exhibition	292
1884	Joseph Dunn	Bryantsville, Kentucky	226
1893	William Warnock	Chicago Worlds Fair	365
1900	William Warnock	Paris Worlds Fair	400
1904	William Warnock	St Louis Worlds Fair	403
1905	A.W. Roel	Brattleboro, VT	289
1906	A.W. Roel	Brattleboro, VT	322.5



William Warnock arguably ushered in the 20<sup>th</sup> century with a new style of Giant Squash or Pumpkin devotion. He wasn't just growing to feed his family, with knowledge gained by generational hand me down no-how, he had something heretofore less-known; a little extra time, to focus, learn, and refine his growing skills, and probable selective seed crosses, to become the worlds best, and, if you will, compete against imaginary competitors, who weren't born yet and couldn't step up to his 1900-1903 podium stands until 1976! He proved he was ready to exhibit on an international scale. If alive today, he would almost certainly be a formidable foe, for today's world class growers. In an article in "The Vermonter" dated 1906, another grower named A.W. Roel who had "regularly competed, for 21 years, at the Brattleboro Vermont fair, using the Mammoth Proterion variety, won, vs. twenty big fellows, averaging 200 lbs each", with a 322.5 pound squash.



A. W. ROEL  
with 322.5 lb  
winner. in 1906



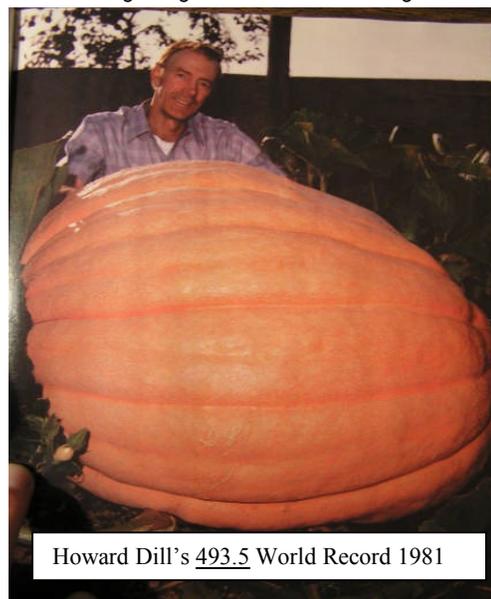
Bob Ford  
1976

No one really knows why Warnock's records, were not broken for 72 years, but amongst other things, tough times followed, including the great depression and a couple World Wars. So slowly the pure Goderich Giant seed was becoming virtually extinct. (Although a few reports of the Gancarz era line (1986-1990) descending from these Warnock fruits exist). But the ever durable Mammoth was not done yet. In 1976 Bob Ford, a first year grower from Croatsville, PA crossed some Hungarian Mammoth Giants and Mammoth Chile cucurbitis, using seeds provided by a local grower in Churchville, PA. His results raised the bar to 451 pounds, using a fertility program, custom built for him by the founder of Peters Professional fertilizers. It had a pale orange shade, wide shoulders, and looked like a miniature version of many of today's behemoths. I spoke to Bob last week. He's still in the same home, and at 71 likes tending to plants as a commercial nurseryman in his green houses. He was glad someone remembered his 15 minutes of fame like it was yesterday, and he recalled the fun he had fielding "close to 300 calls per day" for a while, until the excitement died down. At another 1976 Giant Pumpkin weigh-off, in Circleville, OH, a new grower, named Howard Dill was competing. He didn't win the overall world title that inaugural year, but when he learned about Bob's accomplishment, he made a trip to pay homage to the new Champ. (Bob reciprocated with a Nova Scotia trip a short time later).

But Howard was learning, and creating something new. The Atlantic Giant! One of his first objectives was to eliminate the "mottling gene". Second of course was to breed for color, shape and size. To do this, he primarily crossed the Mammoth Chile first, then Renie's Giant seeds (Renny Seed developed these from the Goderich Giant seeds, which they acquired originally at the St Louis Worlds Fair in 1904). 1981 was the year of the 493.5 record and it was a perfect example to set the standard for the copyrighted Dill's Atlantic Giant. Howard brought us the better looking orange color. Dill made some great selections, kept in-line breeding going and made some excellent crosses. In case you didn't know who ruled the roost for the next few years, these worldwide overall records of the beginnings of the new era of weigh-off leaders speak volumes.

Year	Grower	Location	Weight (lbs)
1976	Bob Ford	Pennsylvania	451
1977	Howard Dill	Windsor, NS	287
1978	Edgar Van Wick	Roland, MB	382
1979	Howard Dill	Windsor, NS	438.5
1980	Howard Dill	Windsor, NS	459
1981	Howard Dill	Windsor, NS	493.5
1982	Howard Dill	Windsor, NS	445
1983	Owan Woodman	Falmouth NS	481
1984	Norm Gallagher	Chelan, WA	612
1985	Michael Hodgson	River Phillip, NS	531
1986	Robert Gancarz	Wrightstown, NJ	671
1987	Don Fleming	Morrisville, VT	604.5

The Dill AG seeds produced the first 600 pounder (612 Gallagher'84). Norm Gallagher grew it, and he was one of the first hardcore growers, using careful pruning techniques, and utilizing heated water, and green house shelters. Next came the first 700 pounder (755 Thompson), which was a beauty, out of the 575Dill'88, also the 575 Dill'88, grew Holland's 827lb world record. The 575



Howard Dill's 493.5 World Record 1981

Dill, by the way, was the grandmother of the 567 Mombert'92, where all of today's "orange genes" can be traced.

The other line that still probably lingers is "Gancarz era" pumpkins. It is likely that the "pumpkins" grown by Gancarz, Wright and Ford in the 60's-80's were grown from the Goderich Giant, Genuine Giants, Mammoth Chile's and/or Hungarian Giants. The Gancarz era seeds are likely, as close as today's growers will ever get to the genetics of the pre- Dill era. These old red pink gray colored ones do pop up here and there. Check out the 653 Marko Red/Green/Gray squash brought to the Big E weigh-off in 2005, on BP.com. Not all of the Gancarz seeds produced off color fruit. The 671 Gancarz'86, was a nice blocky orange fruit, but its progeny were all green squash.

So what's up here. Howard revived the sport with his dynasty, gave us something to build on and Norm Gallagher marched into that 1984 Half Moon Bay weigh-off, and shocked the world by shattering the 500 lb barrier and started the lore of the modern day challenge, because from that day on records kept falling and the bar had to be raised year after year, as shown below.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Grower</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Weight</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Grower</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Weight</u>
1989	Keith Chappel	Upper Granville, NS	651	2002	Charlie Houghton	Goffstown, NH	1337.6
1989	Gordon Thompson	Hemmingford, PQ	755	2003	Steve Daletas	Canby, OR	1385
1990	Ed Gancarz	Wrightston, NJ	816.5	2004	Al Eaton	Ontario, Canada	1446
1991	Ray Waterman	Collins, NY	780.5	2005	Larry Checkon	Altoona, PA	1469
1992	Joel Holland	Puyallup, WA	827	2006	Ron Wallace	Greene, RI	1502
1993	Donald Black	Winthrop, NY	884	2007	Joe Jutras	N. Smithfield, RI	1689
1994	Herman Bax	Brockville, ON	990	2008	Jake VanKootan	Port Alhini, BC	1536.5
1995	Paula Zehr	Lowville, NY	963	2009	Christy Harp	Massillon, OH	1725
1996	Paula,Nathan Zehr	Lowville, NY	1061	2010	Chris Stevens	New Richmond, WI	1810.5
1997	Chris Anderson	Moraga, CA	977	2011	Jim Bryson	Ormstown, Quebec	1818.5
1998	Gary Burke	Simcoe, ON	1092	2012	Ron Wallace	Greene, RI	2009
1999	Gerry Checkon	Spangler, PA	1131	2013	Tim Mathison	Napa, CA	2032
2000	David Stelts	Leetonia, OH	1140	2014	Beni Meier	Pfungen Switzerland	2323
2001	Geneva Emmons	Sammamish, WA	1262	2015			

Take a look at these numbers; about 19 consecutive world record years. Amazing progress! And it was all capped off with another milestone. That of course being the 2323 grown by Benni Meier. This can be attributed to improved genetics, increased scrutiny on the part of today's growers, and their ability to sort out and find seeds with "World Class" potential, that if grown to new levels, morph into a "proven seed", which attracts tremendous attention the following year, and in the hands of today's "Heavy Hitters" or "Super Growers" raises the bar year after year.

Nowadays the right seed means a lot, but in addition to the pure simple and basic growing techniques outlined by Mr. William Warnoch in 1904, other methods are used to compete on a higher level, than say even 10 years ago. Some of the top growers are using custom built micro-nutrient "designer fertilizer" programs to properly feed the plants and their mammoth pumpkins throughout the growing season. So around the world and primarily along the 43<sup>rd</sup> parallel in North America raising pumpkins isn't just a sleepy backyard pursuit. Its an extreme sport. And nowhere are the stakes higher and the intrigues thicker than at the annual weigh-off in October, during the time of the Harvest moon.