

# Lilac Newsletter

Vol. VIII, No. 1, January, 1982

INTERNATIONAL LILAC SOCIETY

*INTERNATIONAL LILAC SOCIETY* is a non-profit corporation comprised of individuals who share a particular interest, appreciation and fondness for lilacs. Through exchange of knowledge, experience and facts gained by members it is helping to promote, educate and broaden public understanding and awareness.

Articles printed in this publication are the views and opinions of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent those of the editor or the *International Lilac Society*.

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#### MEMBERSHIP CLASSIFICATION

Single annual .....	\$ 7.50
Family .....	10.00
Sustaining .....	15.00
Institutional/Commercial .....	20.00
Life .....	150.00

\*Mail membership dues to I.L.S. Secretary.

LILACS AT OTTAWA

Ottawa, the capital of Canada, is the site of the 1982 I.L.S. Conference. This city, which was chosen as the capital by Queen Victoria, is unique in many ways.

It boasts of having the world's longest skating rink. Not that this will be in operation in May, but the tour will view it in its summer disguise - as a canal.

Due to urban growth the city now has a farm in its midst: the Central Experimental Farm of Agriculture Canada. Here are carried out scientific experiments, trials and test in food, forage and cereal crops. Here, also, is the Dominion Arboretum and the Ornamentals Gardens with their collections of lilacs.

It was at "The Farm" that, in the 1920's, Miss Isabella Preston carried out the lilac breeding programme that gave rise to the group of lilacs that bear her name. Many of these plants, hybrids of the American group (x hyacinthiflora) and about 150 French hybrids will be visited. A tour of the Arboretum will be given for those who are interested in other plants as well as lilacs.

Ottawa is a beautiful city, with lots of green spaces. Scenic drives, dotted with lilacs, follow the routes of the Ottawa River from the west and the Rideau Canal from the South. The conference tours will be following some of these driveways as they visit Rideau Hall, the residence of the Governor General (the Queen's representative in Canada). Here we will see greenhouses and the gardens with their plantings of lilacs.

Those attending the conference will be staying at the Chimo Inn. This is a new building with pleasant rooms and all modern facilities, including a swimming pool. The meetings will take place at this Hotel.

Just across the road (5 minutes walk, but mind the cars) is a very large shopping plaza, open Thursday and Friday night until 9 p.m. with two major stores and dozens of small stores and boutiques.

One last point. Ottawa is a safe city. You can walk or jog at night without fear. While muggings do happen, they are rare enough to cause headlines in the paper.

SEE YOU THERE?

\* \* \* \* \*

Solution to "Acrostic for Lilac Enthusiasts"

Lilac Newsletter VII (12):6-9, Dec., 1981.

Henry David Thoreau: Walden; or, Life in the Woods: "Still grows the vivacious lilac a generation after the door and lintel and the sill are gone, unfolding its sweet-scented flowers each spring, to be plucked by the musing traveller; planted and tended once by children's hands, in front-yard plots, -- now standing by wall-sides in retired pastures, and giving place to new-rising forests; -- the last of that stirp, sole survivor of that family."

LILACS IN HOUSTON, TEXAS

The following letter comes to us from a former Yankee who missed the fragrance of lilacs in her Texas garden so she tried some of the varieties of *S. vulgaris* that ILS sent out for trial. Spring 1981 brought success and blooms for Betty Tilton.

Betty will be glad to share any information she can with other warm weather friends so write her and find out how she does it.

We should all like to hear anything further you can tell us about your experiment, Betty.

Also, we would like to hear from others who are taking part in the trial plantings.

Editor

April 6, 1981

Mr. Walter W. Oakes  
P.O. Box 315  
Rumford, Maine 04276

Dear Mr. Oakes,

WE HAVE DONE IT IN TEXAS.....I do have a purple lilac bush in full bloom.....It looks like one of the old fashioned purple variety, but in any case, I couldn't be more pleased and happy that it happened this year.

I know you wanted to know if it can be done. The bush is facing east on the back side of a little metal storage shed I have. The other bushes I have are growing quite well. I have taken lots of pictures of the bush and will send

you one as soon as I get them back. I intend to call the papers this morning about it also.

If you would like more information, I will be glad to write what you would like to know. I have given bushes to my friends and all report that the bushes are growing well but no blooms. I am in hopes that I will have flowers on the others also, if not this year, maybe next.

They are planted in clay soil, but I have added sand and lots of lime to it. I also have put mulch on it in the form of bark type and that seems to help hold the moisture.

I am just so happy about it and I have gone out every day to enjoy the smell that I haven't had in 15 years of being a transplanted Yankee. I will let you know about anything else if it is published, but lilacs can be grown and will bloom in the City of Houston.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Betty Tilton  
13719 Homette  
Houston, Texas 77044

BITS OF WIT

A good laugh is worth a thousand groans in any market.

He who thinks by inch and talks by yard should be moved by foot.

It is probably safe to assume that most lilac fans are avid gardeners. Such real gardeners and farmers, as Eleanor Perenyi calls them in her new book GREEN THOUGHTS, are familiar with phenology. Whether or not the gardener is familiar with the term, phenology, he more than likely has noted which of his trees or shrubs can be called 'indicators', that is, those plants which are sensitive weather instruments.

Following is a reprint of a chapter from GREEN THOUGHTS in which the author discusses weather instruments and uses the common lilac as a reliable 'indicator'.

We invite members and readers who have made observations concerning plants, especially lilacs, as weather predictors to share that information with us. Editor

### PARTLY CLOUDY

by Eleanor Perenyi

\*Reprint

The drought is serious, the corn crop is threatened, lawns are burning up and water restrictions forbid us to water them. Turn to the evening weather forecast and there is a grinning young man surrounded with weather maps and radarscopes to assure us we haven't a worry in the world: "The threat of shower activity has passed and it looks like a gorgeous weekend". Or it is winter and a snowfall is in prospect. Panic: "It could be as much as four inches and travelers' warnings are out for the metropolitan area and eastern Long Island." Nightly, some variation on these themes is enacted in the grotesque ritual called a weather forecast but more

\* Eleanor Perenyi is the author of GREEN THOUGHTS: A WRITER IN THE GARDEN, published by Random House in October, and is herein reprinted by permission of the Atlantic Monthly Company, Boston, Mass. 02116; Copyright C 1981.

accurately described as pandering to infantilism. It is a frightening revelation of how insulated we have become from the natural world.

I assume that in those parts of the country where sufficient rain is still a life-and-death matter the forecasters show a little more sensitivity, though I wouldn't bet on it; and surely the states whose economies depend on snow to activate the ski resorts don't allow an imminent storm to be forecast as though it were a plague of locusts. Elsewhere, the weather is treated as something between a threat and a joke. The "meteorologist", having read out the figures we can see for ourselves on the screen and relayed predictions that come to him from computers at the National Weather Service as though they were his own, then engages in heavy banter with the fellow who broadcasts the news: "Don't give us any more of the white stuff, Bill." "I'll do my best, Jim." Thus is the power once attributed to Jove and his thunderbolts transferred to a man in a sports jacket - a quaint conceit indeed in a scientific age, and one with disturbing implications that the viewer is a child on perpetual holiday, his only interest in going out to play.

But, of course, the chief sin of the forecasters is unreliability. Many years ago, my father believed there would be a revolution in forecasting as soon as Arctic weather stations and an efficient system of radio communication were established at various points across the globe. A Navy man, he had a particular interest in the subject, especially as it applied to military operations like the Normandy landings - which, it will be recalled, nearly foundered on account of an unforeseen storm. He died before the invention of weather satellites and all the recent advances in computer technology, which would have given him



even higher hopes. What would have been his feelings to learn, thirty years later, that during the attempt to rescue our hostages our military weathermen in the Arabian Sea were unaware of a vast sandstorm hovering over the Iranian plateau - a locality where such storms are common at that time of year?

Is it reasonable to expect the little chap on the TV screen, who gets his information from a less vitally concerned source, to do better? I would rather trust the farmer who holds his finger to the wind - anyone, indeed, who lives outside the technological cocoon. I can remember that when my father was in charge of a naval station on a West Indian island in the 1920's, he had received no official word of an approaching hurricane. It was the inhabitants who gave him warning of the need to take precautions. Reading the motion of the sea, the clouds, feeling in the barometer of their bones a sudden drop a thousand miles away, they muttered for days, "Hurricane coming, hurricane coming." They were right. A couple of hours after the official warning arrived, the storm struck the island like a sandblasting machine and nearly blew us off the map.

Such skills have largely been lost. Hence, in part, the inordinate fear of weather and the dependence on the idiot box to feed the dream of eternal sunshine or the nightmare of a couple of inches of snow. In our civilization, if that is what it is, only farmers and gardeners are free of these fantasies. We don't care if your weekend is ruined by the rain we need. We curse the wind the Sunday sailor wants for his outing (it dries up our peas, just coming to perfection) and bless the snow that blocks your roads but keeps our plants

and the winter wheat safe. We must collaborate with nature whether we like it or not, and perhaps need a special weather service of our own.

Something of the sort exists, and I don't mean the old black magic - not that I don't rely on it on occasion, and in the short run. Rain really is imminent when the leaves turn their backs to the wind, smoke goes to ground, and the earthworms rise to the surface. It may not be true that if St. Martin's Day is fair and cold the winter will be short, but I would give it a try. A Mexican-Indian gardener once told me at the beginning of the dry season in October that it would rain heavily for three days in February - I forgot which saint's fiesta was involved and anyway the saint was undoubtedly a thinly disguised Aztec god - and not thereafter for three months. The prediction was correct, which amazed me at the time. It doesn't amaze me now. It never pays to underestimate folk wisdom, but neither does it pay to overestimate it. What I seek is a scientific approach that takes into account information gathered down the ages by observant human beings and goes on from there.

Such a minor discipline is at hand, in a development called phenology: the study of the growth stages of plants, which can be used to predict the approach of spring and all that implies about planting dates, the emergence of insects, and other data vital to farmers and gardeners. The name is modern, the practice as old as the hills. The Chinese and the ancient Romans were using phenological calendars a couple of thousand years ago, and real farmers, as opposed to those engaged in mass agriculture, have always been aware of the principle - which simply consists in

noting the dates when one or more plants known as "indicators" burst into leaf or bloom. Given this information, one can then predict other events, such as the warming of the soil, the likelihood of one area remaining persistently colder than another, and so on. It has long been understood that plants are sensitive weather instruments, registering temperature and humidity. Indicator plants are simply more reliable than others. The common lilac, for instance, won't open its buds until it is safe to do so (which is why the flowering can vary by as much as three weeks from one season to another), and the farmer or gardener who takes phenology for his guide will watch for this flowering rather than go by the books and perform certain tasks at a fixed date.

In Montana, the blooming of the lilacs tells farmers they have ten days to cut the alfalfa and eliminate the first brood of alfalfa weevils. Truck farmers on Long Island count on the flowering forsythia to signal the arrival of the cabbage-root maggot. In New England, we used to plant our corn when the elm leaves were the size of a squirrel's ear, knowing the ground would then be warm enough for the seed to germinate. The elms are nearly gone, but oak or maple will do as well. Using the lilac, or the dogwood - another indicator plant - it should also be possible to locate the best place on a property to plant a tender fruit tree such as an apricot. Where either of these flowered consistently earlier than others of their kind would be a warm spot, which could save the fruit buds from late freezes.

A number of countries in Europe maintain networks to gather phenological information as part of their national weather services. We don't. Such a network was established here in

1904 by the Weather Bureau but abandoned for lack of funds. Now, however, there seems to be a revival of interest. A few states are developing programs, and the Department of Agriculture is collaborating with some of them. Phenological maps have been compiled. But it will be a long time before the nightly forecast includes the latest word on lilac time. Meanwhile, there is nothing to stop the amateur from making his own observations. I scored a minor success though not with phenology, in long-range forecasting in the fall of 1979, when we had an exceptionally early snowfall, one that took place while the roses were still in bloom and the leaves green on the trees. That, I announced grandly, meant we would have no more snow until February and an exceptionally dry winter. This forecast was based on nothing more than notes in my garden log, which recorded two similarly premature snowfalls in the early 1970s, both followed by dry winters.

It may well have been coincidence, but I turned out to be right. On the number of times I have been wrong, misled by the behavior of squirrels with nuts and the amount of moss on the north sides of trees, time-honored omens, I naturally don't enlarge. But then I notice that those who predict weather on television rarely mention, or apologize for, their failures either.

INTERNATIONAL LILAC SOCIETY

Eleventh Annual Meeting

May 27, 28, 29 - 1982

CHIMO INN - OTTAWA, CANADA

Thursday, May 27th - REGISTRATION. Board of Directors Meetings.  
Hospitality Suite open, or across the  
road to shop.

Friday, May 28th - REGISTRATION OPEN UNTIL 10:30 A.M.  
Lilac talks followed by tour of City  
visiting lilac plantings. Lunch at City  
Hall, visit to Rideau Hall, tour grounds  
and greenhouses.  
Presidents Buffet and Annual Meeting.

Saturday, May 29th - Talks on Lilac Hybridizers and The Lilacs  
at Ottawa, then move to the Central  
Experimental Farm for LUNCH, and tour of  
the extensive lilac collections.  
Awards Banquet, presentation of Awards,  
annual lilac auction.

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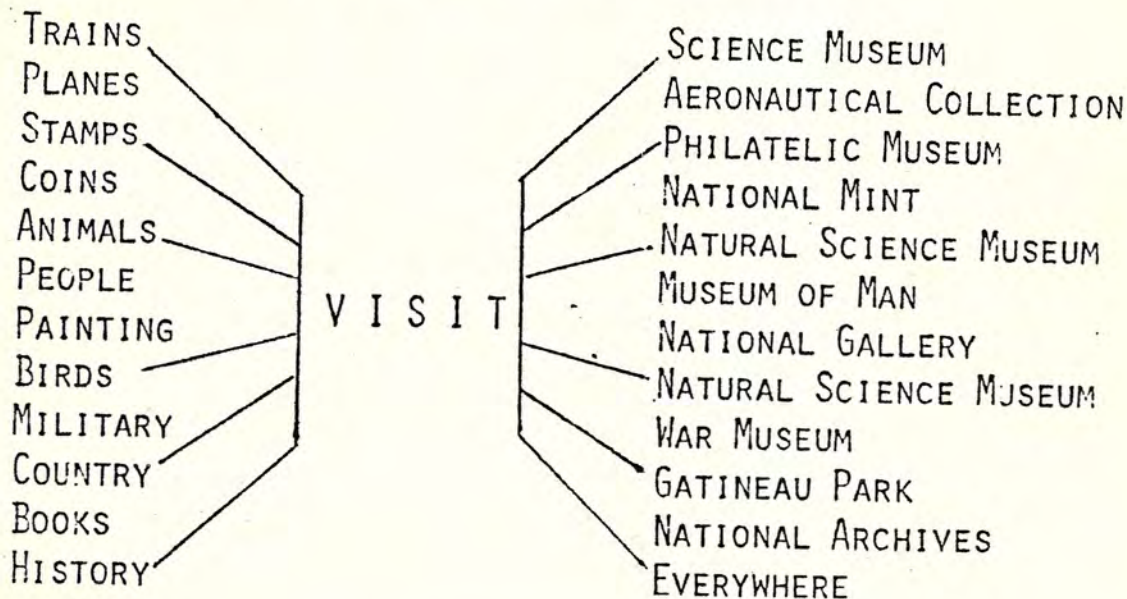
Sunday, May 30th, VISIT SOME OF OTTAWAS MANY ATTRACTIONS.

Bring slides of places, people, plants  
for a "DO YOU REMEMBER..." at the  
Hospitality Suite.

HEADQUARTERS: - CHIMO INN, 1199 Joseph Cyr Street, Ottawa.  
Special Conference Rates \$42 per night, single or double. Please register direct with the hotel, using the enclosed card. Full directions will be supplied.

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BESIDES LILACS - ARE YOU INTERESTED IN



AND TAKE HOME A LASTING MEMORY OF OTTAWA AND ITS SURROUNDINGS,

-(cut here) ----- REGISTRATION FORM -----

I.L.S. ELEVENTH ANNUAL MEETING

MAY 27, 28, 29 - 1982 OTTAWA, CANADA

YES, I plan to attend the meetings. Please send travel directions.

NAME (Dr./Mr./Mrs./Miss) \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

I will be arriving by Car ( ), air ( ), train ( ), bus ( ).

REGISTRATION FEE - \$65 (Canadian) per person.

I enclose \_\_\_\_\_ I will pay on arrival \_\_\_\_\_

Registration includes all lunches, dinners, tours and transportation.

PLEASE MAIL REGISTRATIONS TO: Mrs. Brenda Cole  
2700 Priscilla Street  
Ottawa, Ontario K2B 7E2  
CANADA