

Lilac Newsletter

Vol. X, No. 6, June, 1984

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 | \$ 10.00 (as of January, 1984) |
| Family | 12.50 |
| Sustaining | 20.00 |
| Institutional/Commercial | 25.00 |
| Life | 150.00 |

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

A MEMBER WRITES

Dear Mr. Oakes:

Thank you for your considerable contributions to the lilac publications and to the Society. I enjoy reading your comments as well as the observations of others.

I have been familiar with lilacs since my childhood when I transplanted an offshoot from a giant white common lilac.

In later years I was able to observe lilacs at Morton Arboretum, Lisle, ILL., Lilacea Park in Lombard, ILL., as well as the plants I could spot in yards while driving. Also have grown a few varieties I considered to be superior.

Among my favorites are 'VESTALE', 'AMI SCHOTT', 'CAPITAINE BALTET', 'DESCAINE', 'MRS. W. E. MARSHALL', 'DIDEROT', 'LAVENDAR LADY' and 'FRANK PATTERSON'.

Some observations:

'SENSATION' - Really! I could hardly believe what I was seeing the first time I approached this plant unawares. Spindly growth, but the picotee blooms are sensational.

'VESTALE' - Just beautiful, outstanding white.

'CAPITAINE BALTET' - Good color, larges trusses, much bloom. Impressive year after year on well cultured plants.

'MRS. W. E. MARSHALL' - Rich deep color - impressive. Frost tender in my collection. A plant with poor culture and not established had muddy colored small weak bloom. Perhaps this was misidentified.

'AMI SCHOTT' - Broad robust bush with lots of outstanding different double blooms.

'DIDEROT' - Deep color with good bloom.

'FRANK PATTERSON' - Much bloom, bright red, showy, leggy plants.

'LAVENDAR LADY' - (at Morton Arboretum) Good plant, heavy bloom, good color. Most impressive landscape effect in a bad year. In other words, on my last visit when other lilacs were not looking good generally, 'LAVENDAR LADY' was the outstanding plant and doing well.

This is just my reminiscing as thoughts come to mind, and includes only a few of the many lovely lilacs some of which I cannot presently name - many of Lemoine's doubles in various color shades and combinations. It seems incredible that the introductions of the Lemoine family of 75 to around 100 years ago still comprise the bulk of the outstanding cultivars of the present.

I have not had the opportunity to see the Russian introductions or the 'ROCHESTER' series so I am looking forward to seeing them sometime.

I do not mean to belittle the fine efforts of Clarke, Havemeyer and others who have contributed much, but have confined my remarks to the group known as French Hybrids as they are what most of us think of when we refer to lilacs.

I think a weakness of the "Society for Lilacs" in the sense of achieving popularity in a broad sense in this era of diminishing yard size is that lilacs grow too large for maximum enjoyment, as they take up too much room - or worse, that the blooms are way up there, on a mature plant and they are leggy in general.

Slow maturity, a boon to longevity, but a bane to the breeder with long intervals between succeeding generations and what appears to be a slow response to change dampens the excitement of a constant succession of progressions to new and different cultivars as is the case with daylilies, irises, roses etc.

I'm looking forward to the coming season and thanks to the Society's earlier publications, I may get

to visit the Longnecker Horticultural Gardens at the University of Wisconsin at lilac time this year.

Best wishes and thanks,

Woodrow W. Kuecker

A NOTE TO MEMBERS:

Please drop a line to the editor when you return from the 1984 meeting. We'd like to devote much of a newsletter to your experiences and observations, as well as visits with other Society members. Make it your newsletter.

M. C. S.

PLEASE TAKE A LOOK!

If address (sticker) label on the envelope reads December 83, it means that as of April 24, 1984, you have failed to renew your 1984 I.L.S. Membership.

See inside front cover for membership classification. Please make cheques payable to 'INTERNATIONAL LILAC SOCIETY' and mail them to: Walter W. Oakes, Box.315, Rumford, MA 04276. Or, if you are a Canadian member send payment to I.L.S. c/o Royal Botanical Gardens, Box 399, Hamilton, Ontario L8N 3H8

Charles D. Holetich
ILS Membership Chairman

LILACS BLOOM AT BROOKLYN BOTANIC GARDEN

Thomas Delendick & Daniel Ryniec

The Brooklyn Botanic Garden Lilac Collection was started in the days prior to World War I. The date of the first plantings is unknown, but Dr. C. Stuart Gager, B.B.G.'s first Director, reported in the Annual Report for 1917 that the war was 'disrupting the Garden's acquisition of choice varieties.' In fact, in 1916, the Garden's sixth year, the collection already included 130 varieties of Syringa vulgaris, and the war-time interruption was happily only temporary.

From the beginning, B.B.G.'s lilacs were planted in two separate areas. In the Systematic Collection (in general, the south half of the Garden), species of lilacs are represented in the area devoted to the Olive Family, Oleaceae. This area, however, accommodates but a token representation of Syringa (in 1983, three species). A much better representation of the genus was planned for the Horticultural Section near the north end of the Garden.

This Horticultural Collection was laid out somewhere in the area between the present Esplanade and the Local Flora Section (see map 1). The exact limits of the original plantings are not known with certainty, but in 1929 the 'Lilac Triangle' "was extended south to the west entrance of the Rose Garden (established in 1927)...(and) the peninsula north of the triangle... was planted with thirty-nine purchases (lilacs)."

The Lilac Collection was remapped in 1933-34, at which time it was noted that the privet understock of many of the grafted specimens was too vigorous and that a thorough taxonomic evaluation was required. The Annual Report for 1934 notes 16 species and 216 varieties in the Horticultural Collection and records the beginning of several years of intensive work on that collection by Harold A. Caparn, B.B.G.'s consulting Landscape

Architect from 1910 till 1943, and Dr. Alfred Gundersen, one of the Garden's outstanding taxonomists.

In 1935 Caparn produced a new design for the Lilac Collection. The species lilacs were grouped at the south end of the plantings, while the cultivars (the bulk of the collections) radiated northward. The "count" for that year included 15 species, 86 single- and 73 double-flowered cultivars of S. vulgaris, and 8 cultivars of non-vulgaris origin. Clearly a great deal of culling of misnamed and inferior clones had occurred within the space of a year.

Dr. Gundersen initiated his study of the lilacs in 1936 during the three-week bloom period. In that year he took samples for comparison to the Cedar Hill Nursery of the late Mr. Theodore A Havemeyer at Brookville, New York. During the next three years Dr. Gundersen spent considerable time at The New York Botanical Garden (courtesy of Dr. W. J. Robbins and Thomas H. Everett); and with John C. Wister of Swarthmore College. His traveling and comparing specimens may account for an apparent anomaly in our records: some of the cultivars in the present collection are not to be found in the accessions records, probably because of an unrecorded change in the name during this period.

In the midst of all this activity, in 1937 Dr. Gundersen proposed a classification for S. vulgaris cultivars, based on flower color, flower and inflorescence size, and denseness or openness of the clusters. It is rather unwieldy, and we should perhaps be grateful it never caught on.

Developments in the collection are somewhat vague from the early 1940's through the 1960's. It is known from maps of the area (variously dated from the 1930's to the early 1950's) that the collections extended solidly, like a thicket, from the Rose Garden to the surrounding roads. Sometime in the 1950's the cultivars were "re-grouped" into a single major bed with the species strung out individually to the south. Regrettably, development in that area was limited to addition of new varieties without regard to planting distance

of nomenclatural accuracy. The attempt to show "more" in less space was, in retrospect, not very successful.

By the mid-1970's, the problems of too-closely spaced plantings and the emergence of understock from grafted specimens almost overwhelmed the collection. In the late 1970's Edmond Moulin, Director of Horticulture, and Dr. Stephen Tim, Taxonomist, undertook to verify the identity of the many cultivars. Later, Dr. Thomas Delendick, Assistant Taxonomist, and Daniel Ryniec, who was named Gardener-in-Charge in 1980, became involved.

They realized that a major overhaul of the Collection was required. First, the over-large bed adjacent to the Rose Garden was divided by paths to make the many cultivars accessible to visitors and to give the Collection a less formidable, more inviting, aspect. Many full-sized specimens were relocated; others were propagated by Thomas Hofmann, B.B.G's Plant Propagator, to replace original plantings now in poor shape or for "insurance" for transplanted specimens. The old planting scheme in which the cultivars were arranged by color groups was not esthetically effective and was discarded unmourned. By wonderful chance, the old 1935 lilac maps were rediscovered in 1980, with the result that all the lilacs on the west slope of the Overlook could be verified using the descriptions and color charts in McElvey's "The Lilac". These specimens had been unlabeled for upwards of forty years and had till this time been regarded as pretty but unnamable.

Much of the recent activity in the collection reflects the restructuring of plantings dating back to the 1930's. The principles guiding us now -- and with which we look to the future -- are threefold.

(1) Brooklyn Botanic Garden aims to have a public display of lilacs which are correctly labeled, accuracy in labeling being basic to instruction and the fuller enjoyment of an interested public. (2) Individual specimens will be given maximum space for healthy and attractive growth, with a minimum planting distance of fifteen feet. This horticulturally sound decision will

also allow visitors better access to the plants for pleasure and study. (3) The collection is intended to be representative of both species lilacs and the range of horticultural variation. With this in mind the plantings are arranged (as nearly as it is possible to "arrange" living and often long-established plantings) by originator (e.g., Lemoine, Havemeyer, Rochester, etc.) or hybrid group (e.g., Preston and villosa hybrids) for historical perspective and instructional facility.

As progress is made in the context of these guidelines, we hope to reinstate the "Spring Walk Through the Lilacs" for members and the public. We would like to think that, in time, people will associate Brooklyn Botanic Garden with lilacs the way they do now with cherries, roses and Japanese Gardens.

The major features of the redesigned collection now includes:

- Species lilacs. There are 18 species, mostly at the south end of the plantings, including S. pinnatifolia and S. laciniata. Non-vulgaris hybrids (S. X persica, S. X chinensis, S. X henryi) and cultivars are also here.

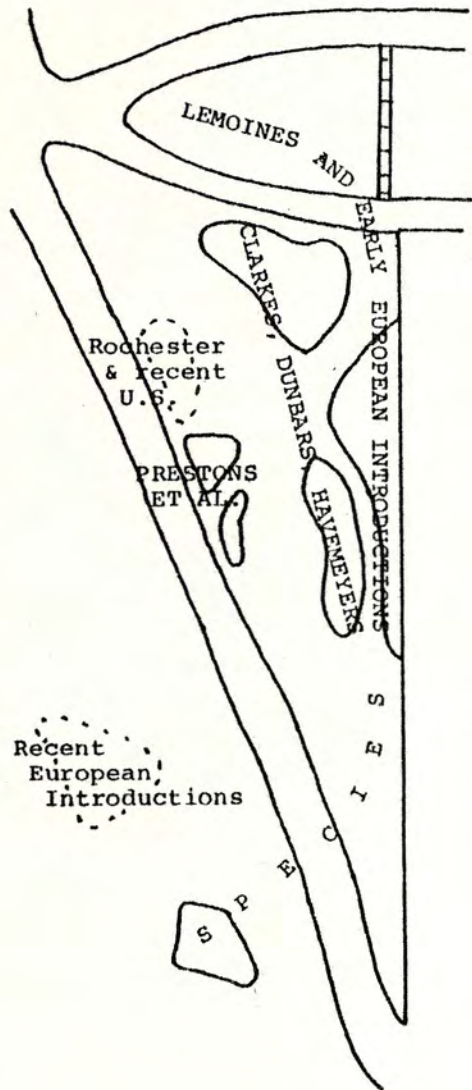
- Syringa vulgaris and S. hyacinthiflora cultivars. These are the bulk of the plantings, north of the species types. The hillside plantings and east bed (Map 2) include the older European introductions, with Lemoines predominating. In the north and centre beds are displayed the earlier American introductions, particularly Havemeyer, Clarke and Dunbar clones.

- Preston hybrids and other hybrids in the Villosa Group. These are now grouped along the road on the western perimeter of the collection where they are readily noticed and appreciated by visitors. The Prestons, et al., bloom for us about two weeks after the vulgaris types; but since they were originally interplanted among the vulgaris hybrids, they had been overlooked for the most part. Not any more!

In terms of the long-range plans for the Lilac Collection, Dan Ryniec is working closely with the Horticulturist and the Taxonomist on:

BROOKLYN BOTANIC GARDEN

LILACS: HORTICULTURAL COLLECTION



MAP 2

- a bed for the Rochester clones and more recent American introductions, to be located just north of the Prestons.

- expansion of the collection of Havemeyer hybrids, emphasizing the best of these introductions. This group is of a special significance to us, as Mr. Havemeyer did his work and established his nursery on Long Island -- virtually in our "backyard".

- a bed for some of the newer European introductions, tentatively located in the lawn area just west of the main collection.

As a result of the renewed Staff interest in the Lilac Collection, Dan Ryniec and Tom Delendick joined the International Lilac Society. Dan has since traveled extensively, visiting sister botanic gardens and arboreta, and bringing back choice varieties -- e.g., Rochester clones, courtesy of our friends at Highland Park, and much-desired plants from the collection of Walter Oakes. Dan has also been to Bayard-Cutting Arboretum on Long Island to see the Havemeyer plants, and has plans to look over the Havemeyer archives at The New York Botanical Garden.

The enthusiasm of the Staff involved and their love for the Garden have carried us a long way. The lilacs have been a major cooperative effort at Brooklyn Botanic Garden for more than six years now. Like any living collection, it will never be finished, but we are increasingly proud of it.