

# Lilac Newsletter

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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.

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by  
Robert B. Clark  
Meredith, NH

One visitor to a notable lilac garden this spring after walking around a few floriferous plants and smelling their flowers said abruptly, "I've seen enough." That is definitely not my reaction having waited all winter long just for a whiff of the lilac's enchanting fragrance.

For me, the 1986 lilac season began, as last year, in the first week of May at Medina, Ohio, except that more than one-half of the lilacs suffered bud damage owing to frosts which followed one day in April when the temperature reached the high 80s F. And so the Falconskeape lilacs were somewhat disappointing with spotty color; nevertheless it remains the premier lilac collection of the world for the number of its novelties.

Upstate New York in contrast owing to a cool gradual spring was exhilarating, reaching peak bloom for Mothers' Day, May 12th. Collections at both Highland Park at Rochester and Grape Hill Gardens at Clyde exhibited superb bloom and excellent grooming. First my impressions of Highland Park: a goodly number of lilac plants have been removed over the past several years thus opening up vistas as well as allowing for greater space between plants the better to view each specimen while making for less crowding by milling visitors. Individual lilacs are now free-standing specimens. In certain instances when several plants remain close together beds have been outlined and covered with pine bark mulch. And, in a few instances, bugle (Ajuga) groundcover which blooms during lilactime enhances the planting.

John Dunbar first planted lilacs in Highland Park nearly one-hundred years ago by importing several cultivars (then called varieties) directly from the Lemoine Nursery at Nancy, France. In 1908 he sowed his own open-pollinated seed selecting in the next ten to fifteen years some of the very first lilacs raised in the United States. Quite naturally Dunbar's cultivars are still a feature of this renowned collection.

After World War II Alvan R. Grant, then horticulturist, did some controlled pollination which resulted in the production of the cultivar 'Rochester', a radially multipetaled white-flowered, slow growing plant noted for its excellent floral characters which it now transmits to

3 several generations of quality seedlings which I call "21st century" lilacs. Dick Fenicchia carried on the breeding project using the better French hybrids, such as 'Mme. Charles Souchet', 'Glory', and 'Edward J. Gardner'.

At the time of the founding of ILS in 1971 Dick had selected seven seedlings worthy of naming: 'Dwight D. Eisenhower', 'Dr. Edward Mott Moore', 'Bishop McQuaid', 'Frederick Douglass', 'George Ellwanger', 'John Dunbar' and 'Bernard H. Slavin'. In 1976 upon the 200th "birthday" of the United States of America he selected 'Bicentennial', and most recently another seedling honoring Rochester has been named 'Flower City'. This latter lilac occupies a prominent location near the walk leading to the erst-while Lamberton Conservatory. Across the walk, near the Austrian pine, are growing several of Kolesnikov's so-called Russian lilacs of which the better cultivars appear to be 'Krasavitsa Moskv', a double white, 'Mechta', a single violet, 'Pamyot' o S. M. Kirove', a double violet, and 'Znamya Lenina', single red.

Owing to the cool spring weather lilacs with pink or red shades have been especially vibrant. The arresting pink at Highland Park this spring is labeled "Ostrander" for Ostrander Cooley the nursery-man who introduced Hulda Klager's cultivars. Nearby were two Gardner cultivars: 'Jessie Gardner' is deeper pink and more floriferous than the better known 'Edward J. Gardner'. Also nearby is the deep pink early hybrid 'Marechal Foch' of Lemoine. I could go on, there being so many fine lilacs to see at Highland Park, but I will close with the show-stopper this year (and many another year) with Dr. F. L. Skinner's early hybrid "Pocahontas", a purple floriferous shrub which remains in flower into midseason.

On now to Grape Hill Gardens where the deep reds were gorgeous this spring. Earliest to bloom is Lemoine's 'Vauban', a single pink. It is soon followed by that gigantic or vigorous, double lilac-flowered 'Georges Claude'. Among the French hybrids which were outstanding are Lemoine's 'Monument', a single white absolutely covering a dome from top to bottom, the double white 'Taglioni', the perennial favorite 'President Poincare', a red, and the pink 'Capitaine Perrault'. James Dougall's almost century-old 'Prince of Wales', lilac-flowered was attractive. So was Dunbar's seventy-year-old 'General Sherman', a creamy white which is delicate pale pink (or blue depending upon the season) just as it unfolds. Havemeyer's 'Pink Mist' was just that, the second most spectacular lilac at Grape Hill Gardens this spring. Walter B. Clarke's double reddish 'Sweetheart' stole the show most probably because of its human-size stature, it being a newly

planted lilac to the collection.

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The Birchwood lilacs, after fifteen years and considerable opening up of the canopy owing to gypsy moth devastation of mature hemlocks two or three years ago, began this spring to make a creditable showing. Forty of sixty cultivars produced some bloom, foremost being the reliable 'Leon Gambetta', Dr. Rankin's dark red 'Edith Braun' and Dick Fenicchia's 'Dwight D. Wisenhower', a pale blue with immense clusters of radially doubled 'Rochester'-type florets. Also blooming well was S. oblata var. dilatata 'Birchwood' (Wyoming #4 raised by Dr. A. C. Hildreth when he was director of the Wyoming Agricultural Experiment Station at Cheyenne). Three little-leaved landscape lilacs also were outstanding: the so-called daphne lilac, S. microphylla 'Superba', S. Meyeri 'Palibin' and S. Julianae 'George Eastman', the latter quite reddish.

The Glen of Aherlow lilac collection at East Burke, Vermont, dedicated to the memory of Albert E. Lumley who furnished the inspiration for it was early to bloom and my visit in the fourth week of May enroute to Hamilton, caught it past prime. However, several lilacs did make a showing: Havemeyer's double white 'Professor E. H. Wilson' and Kolesnikov's intense red 'Znamya Lenina' were noteworthy. Also in evidence were several unnamed seedlings which Raymond Baker gave to Tom Chieppo a few years ago when Tom was extending his rambling lilac walk. Ray used open-pollinated Lemonine cultivars to produce several fine lilacs. These do require further testing but it remains improbable that any will eventually become available in commerce in view of the deaths of Tom and Ray.

Just below the international bridge at Lewiston, New York, and directly north of the Niagara Parks Commission's floral clock is the extensive Centennial Lilac Garden planted about the time of our third Annual Meeting at Hamilton twelve years ago. We missed peak bloom which usually comes during the last two weeks of May and timed for wedding receptions and honeymooner strolls. This season only the late hybrids were blooming, therefore we saw mostly green foliage. Lilacs are planted in large beds with usually 3-5-7 cultivars together. By summer the show is over.

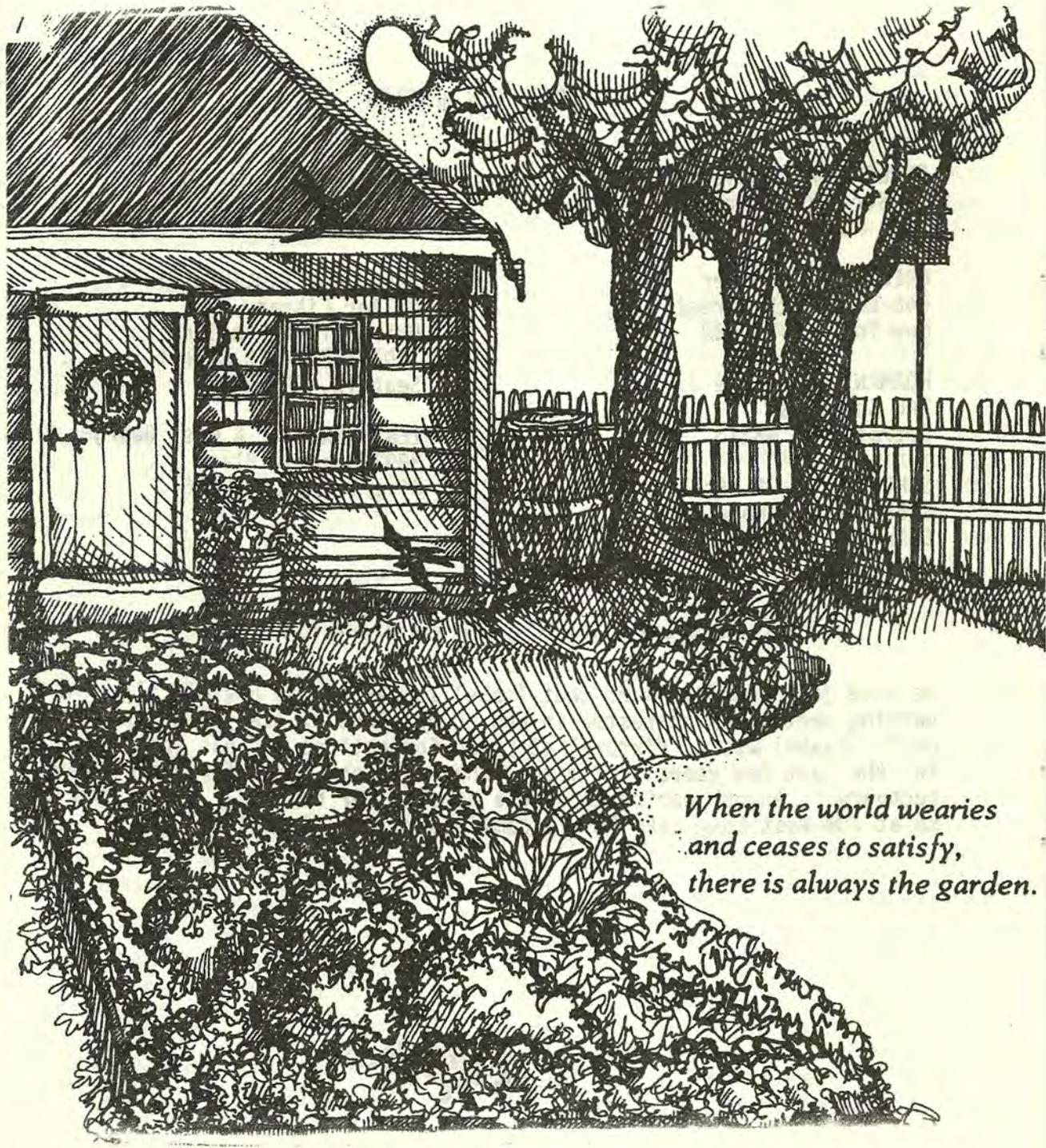
I mention the lilacs at the Katie Osborne memorial garden at Hamilton, Ontario, so that members who are not able to attend our annual meetings will get a hint of what this excellent collection offers to the public as well as to lilac students. During the time of our visit at the close of May the species and late hybrids were blooming. Many of the common lilac cultivars had passed peak bloom, however visitors could still get lasting

impressions of their colors and merits. But two lilacs, both white, drew my attention: S. Tigerstedtii from China is a member of the Pubescentes with loose habit, moderate-sized leaves for a lilac and with feathery loose-flowered clusters producing an airy effect. It is a large shrub worthy of a prominent location in a spacious landscape. The other lilac is 'Hunting Tower', Skinner's cross between S. villosa and Sweginzowwi. This too is a large shrub with dense flower clusters making a striking note in the landscape.

Other features of the Royal Botanical Gardens syringetum were the close-clipped hedges at the entrance to the lilacs. Two or three lilacs were included among the hedges. Especially lovely was S. Meyeri 'Palibin' with its spicy scented lavender flowers and slender hairy twigs bearing small leaves.

The University of Guelph arboretum featured an extensive collection of late hybrids first produced by Canada's Isabel Preston at Ottawa using species of Villosae (S. villosa and reflexa). The cultivar 'Royalty', deep purplish, was noteworthy; however most interesting to me were two species of Villosae (S. villosa and reflexa). The cultivar 'Royalty', deep purplish, was noteworthy; however most interesting to me were two species from China, S. Wolfii and reflexa itself, seldom seen even in comprehensive collections having been displaced by their hybrids..

In the first week of June exactly one month after setting out in search of lilacs my pilgrimage ended in the garden and enjoying the hospitality of Bernard McLaughlin at South Paris, Maine. Here lilacs in quantity and variety are grown to perfection as background to herbaceous perennials. The garden is situated on a level plot of an acre or two, planted about fifty years ago. Saplings have grown into trees, some already removed. The entrance is an open gate on Main Street and leads onto a spacious turn panel upon which on either side colorful herbaceous plants (peony, iris, doronicum, gas plant) form a border above which rows of moderate-sized lilacs, three to five feet apart, are growing. Bernard and his cousin Cyril themselves tend the garden. Bernard is a discriminating gardener who does not depend upon lilacs alone to provide interest, but uses herbaceous perennials in variety to prolong bloom over the several weeks of springtime. Although it was somewhat late for French hybrids I found such Lemoine cultivars as 'Miss Ellen Willmott', 'Vestale', 'DeMiribel', 'Marechal Lannes', 'Decaisne', 'Leon Gambetta', 'Montaigne', and 'Paul Thirion' still colorful; but the late-flowered pink 'James Macfarlane' was the glory to close out my month-long quest.



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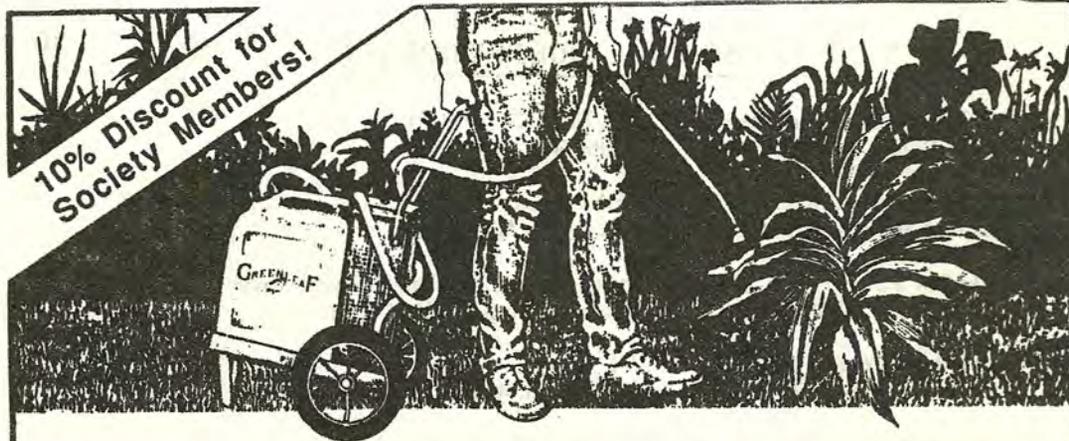
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