

# 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.

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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REQUEST FOR LILAC SLIDES

Dear I.L.S. Members:

Soon the lilacs will be blooming and those of us with cameras will have the opportunity to photograph them.

Our Society has long wanted to assemble a collection of 35MM slides for a visual program to encourage the public to be more enthusiastic about lilacs. YOUR HELP IS NEEDED!!!

Please loan the Society your slides for duplication and use in this effort. I will return your original slides shortly after receipt, and you will have the satisfaction of knowing you helped in this most worthwhile way to promote lilacs.

Also, if you have ideas regarding the format and content of the projection program, I'd like to hear from you soon.

Thanks!

Bill Horman  
P.O. Box 8784  
Detroit, Mich. 48224

## Lilac Fancier

By John C. Wister

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IT is most fitting that this beautiful tablet, bearing the name of Theodore A. Havemeyer, should be placed here at the entrance to the collection of lilacs from his garden in Brookville, Long Island.

Not often in the past has such recognition been made to persons who did outstanding work for horticulture compared with the many memorials to leaders in other activities, especially those in the arts of war rather than of peace.

Mr. Havemeyer's work is not known as much as it should be. His excessive modesty prevented his ever telling about his work himself. For many years President of the Horticultural Society of New York, he was active in many flower shows. He was interested in irises, peonies, lilies, gladiolus, and other plant specialties, as well as in lilacs. But lilacs were his first love and it was with lilacs that he made his greatest contribution to the American garden.

He became interested in them through his friendship with Prof. C. S. Sargent of the Arnold Arboretum. Mr. Havemeyer knew the Arboretum well and learned much there during the early years of this century. I do not know the exact date when he began his own collection but it must have been about 1905, because by 1910 or a little later he was visiting the great Lemoine in Nancy and bringing from there the finest Lemoine importations. M. Emile Lemoine had such admiration for him that he wished to name one of his finest lilacs T. A. Havemeyer. Mr. Havemeyer was not willing to have his own name used, but did suggest that his wife's name might be suitable. And so it came about that a wonderful lilac bears the name of Katherine

Havemeyer. Introduced by Lemoine in 1922, it has been widely accepted as one of the finest double varieties.

One of the few articles that Mr. Havemeyer ever published came as the result of his visit to Lemoine. In it he told of Lemoine's great work in lilac breeding.

By 1915, Mr. Havemeyer was making lilac crosses and growing his own seedlings. They began to flower early in the 1920's. One of his first seedlings was a single reddish purple, which today is recognized as one of the finest of its color. He named it Mrs. W. E. Marshall, for the wife of his friend, the New York lily specialist. It was not a large flower, and he often expressed to me regret that he had not waited to put this name on a plant which bore larger spikes and larger individual flowers. I always told him that I disagreed with him, that this was a fine variety which would long remain popular and one of which he should be proud, even if it was not of top size.

His later varieties, however, were much larger in flower. The largest of all was Glory. I can remember that about 1922, when he first showed it to me, he took from his pocketbook what he called a luck piece — a twenty dollar gold piece (the like of which I had never seen before or since!) and it just covered one single flower of the larger spike. Now after thirty years, Glory is still the largest-flowered lilac I know, in fact, it is often so big that the weight of the flower bends the stem over. For this reason, I personally prefer the smaller, but still very large variety, Priscilla, which he named for one of his nieces.

One of the deepest single purples he named Sarah Sands, for Mrs. Havemeyer's sister. A very late blooming

purple which has won great acclaim, is Night.

At Ewing Park, Des Moines, the variety which has attracted the most attention is Mr. Havemeyer's variety, Charm. Indeed, it might be said that this great lilac collection owes its beginning to him, because it was a collection of his seedlings sent to Miss Vivian Evans of Van Meter, Iowa, which so aroused her enthusiasm that she showed them to members of the Des Moines Garden Club. They in turn were so enthusiastic that they persuaded the Park authorities to devote a special garden to them.

I first met Mr. Havemeyer, not because of his lilacs, but because of his interest in iris. It was just before the organization meeting of the American Iris Society at The New York Botanical Garden in January 1920. The small committee, which was arranging for the meeting, felt that Mr. Havemeyer would make the best possible president and I was sent to his office in downtown New York to ask him to accept this position. He did a great deal to help the new society, but quite firmly declined to accept any official position.

My first visit to the Havemeyer garden was late in May, 1920. On the day he chose there was a heavy down-pour of rain just as I arrived at his home. I can remember Mrs. Havemeyer's gales of laughter, when Mr. Havemeyer and I proceeded to go out in the rain to look at flowers. She was sure we were both crazy and said so quite loudly. She never forgot the incident and laughed about it almost every time I saw her afterwards.

For many years I went to Brookville nearly every year at lilac time. It was there that I first saw the newest varieties and listened to his remarks

about them. In his extreme modesty, Mr. Havemeyer hesitated to make his own final judgment, but he would quote what Prof. Sargent or E. H. Wilson had said about them, always ending with the caution not to make any final decision about one variety until it had been grown and judged for ten years. He was willing to name only a very few of his many seedlings. I have mentioned a few of those that have made lilac history in this country. Many others, some thirty in all, were named after his death and have not yet been widely distributed.

Mr. Havemeyer's last years were tragic. He suffered a paralytic stroke and for a long time was helpless. He never recovered the power of speech, but after two years was able to walk enough to go into the lilac fields to point out seedlings he thought had special merit. Mrs. Havemeyer and Alexander Michie, his superintendent, would suggest names and he would nod approval or violently shake his head in disapproval. Courageous and cheerful throughout his illness, he maintained his interest in lilacs to the last and enjoyed having visitors who talked to him about his flowers.

In his modesty, Mr. Havemeyer would not have wanted any monument or tablet or even a mention of his name. I know, however, that he would have been greatly pleased that plants from his collection should have a permanent home at The New York Botanical Garden, where they can be seen by tens of thousands of people, in contrast to the mere hundreds who used to visit his garden on Long Island.

The above address was given at the unveiling of a tablet at the Havemeyer Lilac Garden in The New York Botanical Garden.

#### EDITOR'S NOTE:

ILS members who attended the annual meeting at Burlington, Vermont had a further opportunity to see many of the Havenmeyer cultivars at the Sherburne Museum.

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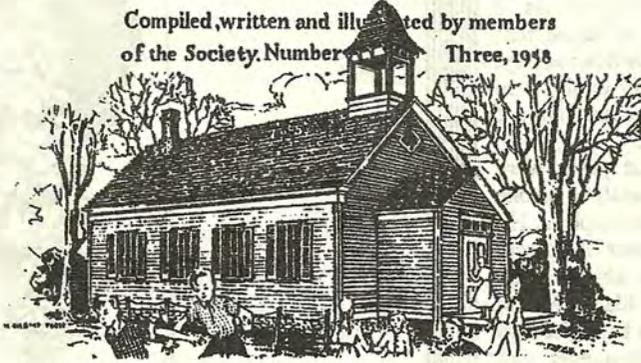
*The row of young lilacs against the back fence bloomed for the first time this spring. Their delicate fragrance drifted into the house and brought with it a vivid image of the blossom-laden lilac bush in front of my parents' farmhouse. The flower heads nodded in the warm breeze, inviting my teenage sisters and me to drape our dresses over them to lightly perfume the fabric before dressing for a special date.*

*Arletha Albright  
Columbia, Missouri*

APRIL 1987

THE  
DU PAGE COUNTY  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
PORTFOLIO

Compiled, written and illustrated by members  
of the Society. Number Three, 1948



Lombard, known to all Chicagoland as Lilac Town, dates back to 1833 when the Babcocks settled in the grove which later bore their name. Near the center of this suburb stands the spacious 89 year old Plum home of frame construction, white painted with a huge veranda across the front. A towering silver aspen tree shades the home. The interior was furnished in the style of the 1860's with solid walnut furniture, carved chairs and marble topped tables, giving the home an air of Victorian elegance. Large portraits of Col. and Mrs. Plum hang on the walls. The second floor remains intact and contains furniture from the Plum household.

Col. William R. Plum, pioneer resident of the village, soldier, lawyer, writer and horticulturist, graduated from Yale Law School in 1867, and married Helen Maria Williams. He built his home in 1869. Co. Plum served for several terms as village President and was a highly esteemed resident of the town. He practiced law in Chicago for many years. After Col. Plum retired from his profession, he traveled extensively, and in 1911 he and his wife toured Europe. While in France they visited the famous lilac gardens of Pierre Lemoine and immediately began collecting lilacs by purchasing two choice varieties...a white Mme. Casimir and a purple Michael Buchner. Each year thereafter, they kept adding to their collection until their garden became a showplace in spring time. Here on the Plum estate all types of lilacs were pleasantly arranged on the two and one half acre plot which Col. Plum called "Lilacia."



THE PLUM HOME ... 1869 ... LOMBARD

Mrs. Plum died in 1924 and Col. Plum in 1927 at the age of 82, and, having no children to carry on the estate, they left wills designed to contribute to the happiness of the village. The estate was willed to Lombard as a park. The Park Board took over the grounds in 1929 and added more land. They obtained the services of the nationally famous landscapist, Jens Jensen, who replanned the estate. This park became the shrine of lilac enthusiasts in the midwest and the park is regarded by botanists as the finest lilac garden in the western hemisphere. The estate now contains over 1500 lilac bushes of 400 varieties as well as over one hundred thousand tulip bulbs. For a few years there were lilac pageants, but these were discontinued on account of the great crowds and unpredictable weather. Thousands of visitors from the Chicago area go to the park every May to view the blooms and to see the ceremonies attending the crowning of a village Queen for the coming year.

This is the setting of Lombard's Helen M. Plum Memorial Library...formerly a meeting place for village and church affairs. It now houses approximately 12,000 volumes. The Library is supported by taxation and is aided by the Friends of the Library, plus an endowment fund left by Col. Plum.

Over the graves of the Colonel and his wife near Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio, grow two lilac bushes, off-shoots of the two original French lilacs which were the beginning of the famous collection.

By Dr. F. G. Brethour, Toronto, Ontario  
Written March 1937

There never was a time when lilacs and peonies were not associated in my mind, for one of the vivid remembrances of my boyhood days was the old log house and the picket fence around the small garden in which was found, by the house, some clumps of lilacs and the odd red peony but they were called "laylocks" and "pineys" then. To this day, in the back counties, there are many old log houses, some merely a heap of decayed wood with but a log or two still intact, and some with the walls still standing but the roof broken down and window frames empty.

"Ghosts of dead homes looking out through empty window frames on forgotten gardens."

Almost without exception, one will see a clump of lilacs, gnarled with age, still growing by the gateway or doorstep, bravely waving each spring, their perfumed sprays to cheer the passers-by. I know of a certain clump, standing in the middle of a field that has been plowed around and harrowed for years and years, but these lilacs are sacred. A mother planted them there near the old house before the children were born, but now the old house is gone and she is gone and the lilacs are left standing in loving memory of the long ago.

Some years ago I had a trout stream leased in a back country, where scores of these forsaken and dilapidated houses are to be seen, and on my return from a certain fishing trip, I happened to have as a patient a young lady schoolteacher, who was born in that locality and I spoke to her about this and that. I thought there was so much sentiment in it, that I wished I could compose a poem to express my feelings, and next day she brought the following four verses scribbled on a piece of paper:

In an old-fashioned garden where children once played,  
There's a plot by the gate, where the lilacs have stayed.  
They glisten and rustle, in springtime - all green -  
They surely are tended by fingers unseen.

When the lights of the village are twinkling, gold,  
And the peace of the twilight seems earth to enfold,  
They tap on the roof of the tumble-down shack,  
Just wondering - When will the children come back?

At dawning, when colors peep over the hill,  
They stand there, like sentinels, silent and still;  
They've faithfully whispered - through night watches deep -  
Love's lullaby low, to the children asleep.

In spring, when the world is all flooded with light,  
They stand there in clusters of purple and white,  
They stoop, fragrant branches, down low to the pane,  
In hopes that the children have come back again.

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We, who were living in those places, back from the frontier, thought these old-fashioned flowers, including Sweet Mary, Old Man, and a few others, were about everything one could wish for in a garden, and I was well along in my twenties before I knew any different. I shall never forget the first flower show I went to in the big city, and saw some of these modern French lilacs. They didn't seem real to me - there was a large table of them - white ones, red ones and some double ones, all kinds, and such big trusses! All I wanted to know was where I could buy some plants. Fortunately, I was advised by a lady to get them on their own roots and I kept adding to my collection about as fast as Lemoine brought them out. I have had a lot of pleasure with my lilacs and once I got growing them from seeds, my enjoyment was much greater. Why do more people not grow these from seeds? There is always a good percentage of worth-while seedlings if you can get good seed. There is need for a good yellow lilac and also a real pink variety, and they will soon be here.

I cannot imagine a garden without both lilacs and peonies, and in our variable climate, with periods of severe cold and extreme heat, the former is possibly our most suitable shrub, and the latter one of our most reliable perennials. I was never so proud of them as I was last year, one of the most trying summers that is recorded, to see them perk right up after the autumn rains and look as if nothing unusual had happened. They certainly looked sick after the weeks of heat and drought, but I do not think I ever saw a more promising prospect for good blooms next summer, in both of them.

A large group of lilacs in bloom is a very busy spot, for their leafy shade coaxes the birds to build their nests in them and the singing of the robins, song-sparrows and catbirds makes pleasant music all day long. The perfume fills the air and is especially delightful in the early morning. When the sun is high, the buzzing of the bees is heard everywhere while gathering the honey.

The sun shone warm, and the lilac said,  
"I must hurry and get my table spread,  
For if I am slow, and the dinner late,  
My friends, the bees, will have to wait."

For those who plant for effect, I do not know of anything better for a background for peonies, than lilacs, and I used them for that purpose when I grew peonies in my city garden and there is no doubt at all that they looked better than they do now grown in long rows. The early peonies come about the same time as the lilacs and by proper arrangement, good color combinations can be secured. Wouldn't a nice clump of Legionaire look pretty fine with the creamy white Edith Cavell at the back or a few clumps of Mlokosewitschi on the south side of the deep red Etnas? I hope that those who are not growing lilacs, will get themselves a few, at least, of the beautiful new varieties that are now so easily obtained.

## In the Garden: The Subject Is Lilacs

By ROSALIE H. DAVIS

There's no good reason I should want to keep the lilac that came with my lawn, the stolid, 8-foot-high urn of green from whose top branches droop old-fashioned, altogether blowsy trusses of violet flowers in spring. It is choked with suckers and stubs of dead and broken branches. By June the blossoms fall and powdery mildew, under cover of dampness, disfigures the leaves.

I should remove this shrub and replace it with a woody specimen that is more useful, as we say in gardening circles. I know better than to keep this lilac. I know there are plenty of shrubs and small trees that, theoretically anyway, are more worthy of my reception and affection. Well-meaning friends tell me about small trees whose bark is mottled as richly as an appaloosa's behind; shrubs with berries as ornate as pearls and sapphires; woody plants whose ramifications bespeak the formality of Classic architecture or the grace of a calligraphic flourish. At least, they tell me, I should want the delicate cut-leaf lilac, *Syringa lacianata*, with its fernlike foliage and subtle fragrance.

But, terrier-fashion, I want to keep this shrub. If that reveals a weakness of character, so be it. I notice that neither my neighbor on my left nor the one on my right is any stronger. They pester me to give them branches, cheekily suggesting that I cut for them those most burdened with bloom. And every one who pauses beneath the lilac or accepts a cut branch or two is ready to tell me just what memory it is that the smell of lilacs in spring unlocks:

Having grown up in New Hampshire, where the state university is always improving lilacs, where a new crop of fourth-

graders learns every year that this is the state flower, and where lilacs don't bloom until the end of May, when I smell lilacs, I smell Memorial Day, when the new grass is rich with dew in the early morning and you have to keep a sweater on until noon.

It was an annual ritual at our house to walk to the top of our hill and fill a galvanized bucket with lilacs. These we picked from an old shrub, heavy with lichen and growing beside the cellar hole where a barn had stood not too long before my parents bought the place where I grew up in the early '50s. The cellar hole is filled in now, the lilac has been swallowed up by white pine, but every time I smell lilacs, I think of those Memorial Days, taking the lilacs downhill with my Dad. He would wear his service uniform, because he always marched, and my mother arranged some of the flowers. Dad took the rest to put on his parents' grave. Not that they had anything to do with any war that he knew of; it was just that when he smelled lilacs, the fragrance invariably provoked the habit of remembering them.

Perhaps it is bad luck that this lilac ought to be pruned immediately after it blooms. This is when I should take out greedy suckers; branches that produce a pittance of leaf and flower at the end of a most generous neck; misshapen or dead side branches; the sad, rusty tufts of faded blooms. Maybe last fall, when I inherited this garden, when I had forgotten how much a lilac could make me recall, maybe then I could have cut it down and carted its dark, forked branches to the curb to be picked up with the other refuse.

Then, I might have been equal to the

task of pouring stump-remover into its ruined crown, hacking out its roots with hatchet or mace or mattock or whatever sort of tool it took. If this sounds criminal, it's probably because it would have been. But in the end, my friends scold, I might have had a glossy thicket of mountain laurel to give me green leaves throughout the year and, in spring, pink blooms as dainty as after-dinner mints. Most any plant, after all, comes to have pleasant associations for its grower.

Perhaps next June, when the weather warms up, and rain and the street-sweeper mercifully wash away spring's debris—petals, maple seeds, those paper poppies people sell—one nostalgia will be supplanted by another. Powdery mildew will indeed claim my lilac's leaves, and the carpet of lilies of the valley will be a finer sight below than the shrub in whose shadow they prosper. But with my head so full of the perfume of lilac, I must prune this shrub.

Under the influence of sentiment, I see myself buying, finally, those fancy bypass shears I've circled in red pen in the nursery supply catalogs for several years now. The manure spread last fall, I confess, was really for the lilies of the valley. But what the lilac may require, I will certainly see it gets from now on. I may even spray for powdery mildew, an activity I recently denounced as being more foolish than sorting socks. It's almost silly. But I'm not maintaining a shrub here; I'm keeping a souvenir.

*Ms. Davis writes frequently about gardening.*

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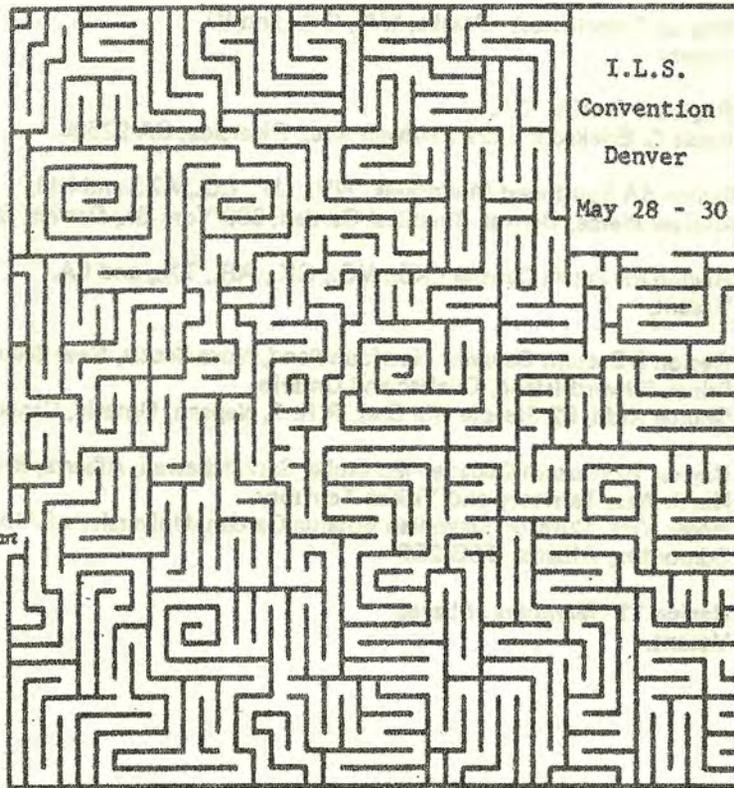
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