

VOLUME 48 • NUMBER 1 • WINTER 2019

Lilacs

Quarterly Journal of the International Lilac Society

Remembering
**Lilac
Land**

**Belgorod
Lilac**

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or

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Remembering

Lilac Land

Belgorod Lilac



'Rochester'
Photo by Tatiana Poliakova

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is helping to promote, educate, and broaden public understanding and awareness.

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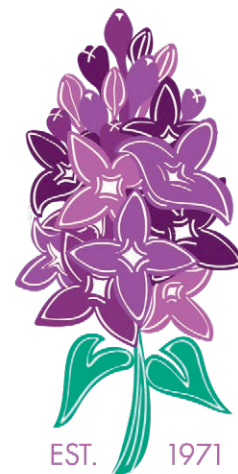
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'Dr. Masters'
Photo by Tatiana Poliakova



INTERNATIONAL LILAC SOCIETY

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Photo by Tatiana Poliakova

ON THE BACK
'Pamyat' o Kolesnikove'
Photo by Tatiana Poliakova

EDITOR'S DEADLINE
FOR SUMMER ISSUE:
MAY 20, 2019
[Please send photos + articles]

President's Message

Dear Syringa Supporters around the World,

Greetings! Its wintertime here in Northeast Ohio, USA. It has been a fairly mild, but wet winter. I was able to add many new flower bulbs to my garden this year. I am always looking for the unusual. I have my eye on a snowdrop bulb: *Galanthus* 'Primrose Warburg'. I hope to order it in February for fall planting. I am looking to add new lilacs to my collection as well.



Winter is a time of dormancy and reflection. It's the perfect time to study the structure of plants for pruning, since the foliage is missing. The garden is asleep and is in a state of recuperation from the past year of growth and blooms. For me, it is also a time to peruse through botanical catalogues and to plan for next spring. It is a time to dream about the beauty of spring: to help me get over the gray, cold bleakness of the late winter months (of course, in the Southern Hemisphere, summer has begun).

So many things have been happening behind the scenes. In November and December, the Board reviewed several proposed logo images to help in the branding of the International Lilac Society. From nine choices, we narrowed it down to three. A second vote happened, via email, amongst those three. We now have a new logo. Some changes will be made to it: black and white, adding our established date, and different sizes. Watch for its appearance on letter head, in the journal, and on the website. We are trying to accomplish more during the year, which should free up time during the Convention's Board meetings. My goal is for the Board and Executive Committee to spend time on new ideas to improve

our society. This is part of our goal to update the daily activities and move projects along much faster.

We are working on details to celebrate our 50th Anniversary in 2021. We are gathering information and lists of society presidents and past convention locations: plus, we are putting together information and pictures of our founders. We are working on Hall of Fame concepts for hybridizers and Lilacs of Merit. If you have any information on any of these ideas, please send it to Brad Bittorf or myself. We are exploring ideas of where to establish a physical location for the Hall of Fame, as well.

An amazing project has been underway by Dr. Mark DeBard. He has been working on a database of lilac cultivars. He has amassed a collection of 6300 photos of 1195 cultivars. He is currently working on identifying the photos with the best, most accurate color, based on the RGB color code for flower and bud color of each cultivar. He is anticipating on placing this database on DVD or flash drive, as well as on the members' only portion of our website. We will keep everyone posted when it is available.

In May, we will be gathering for our 48th annual convention. It will be in Des Moines, Iowa, May 2 to May 4, 2019. While the complete itinerary is still not available, there will be presenters from Iowa State University, the Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden, and others, who will share their knowledge of lilacs, gardening and other plants. Plus, our group will tour an arboretum, several gardens and the Historic Woodland Cemetery. This convention promises to be a great time with friendship renewals and meeting many new lilac enthusiasts. A vast wealth of knowledge will be shared as well. So, plan ahead and send in your convention reservation forms soon. Please consider donating a lilac or two for our lilac auction at the convention. It is our biggest revenue producer. Karen McCauley always puts on an amazing convention.

It's time once again to renew your membership to the ILS for 2019. For your convenience, we have renewal forms on the back cover

of this journal: or you may use the ILS website to download the form. Please send it to John Kirk (his address is on that form). Membership is from January 1 to December 31.

We do not send out renewal notices; so, do it today, so you may continue receiving the outstanding journal in 2019. On the renewal form is a place to donate additional funds for the growth of OUR society. Please consider donating: any size gift helps and is tax deductible!

One final note, we are in need for several people to chair committees and for Regional Vice President positions. Anyone interested in volunteering for a position, please contact me. We are a voluntary society. We need to have new people with new ideas to get involved. In this day and age, the newer generations are not as interested in joining garden societies. We need to find ways to change this or organizations like ours will fail. I invite you to get involved and let your voice be heard!

As I close on this message, I know the journal will hit your mail box in February 2019. I hope and wish everyone of you a happy and prosperous new year. Make resolutions that are attainable. Buy lilacs from our nursery and grower members. Let Josh and Tatiana know what lilacs you have in your private collections, so that the rare lilacs are not lost. Share your lilacs with other members. Consider attending our convention and a local regional meeting: we all benefit. Get involved in our society: the best is yet to come!

Sincerely yours,

Dr. Robert A. Zavodny

ILS President
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New ILS Logo

The logo above is the new branding approved by the Board of Directors in December of 2018. Tom Gober, our editor, proposed at our Riverside, CA board meeting that the ILS should update the logo to a more current look. Tom pointed out to the group that the ILS logo was rarely used and for the ILS to become more widely known that we needed to do a better job of branding. A graphic artist that works for Tom created several different logos for the board to consider (at no cost to the ILS). The board voted on the logos and the initial group was narrowed down to three and a second vote took place to pick the new logo. You will begin to see this logo more and more as the executive committee and board of directors works to improve the brand awareness of the International Lilac Society.

If anyone needs the logo, please contact Tom Gober at lilaceditor@gmail.com. He will be able to email you several different formats based on your requirements.

2019 ILS Convention and Annual Meeting

Save the Date: May 2 – 4, 2019 Des Moines, Iowa

Lilac enthusiasts are encouraged to join the International Lilac Society for the annual convention in Des Moines, Iowa, May 2 - 4, 2019.

There will be speakers from Iowa State University, the Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden and others, sharing their information on lilacs, gardening and other plants.

The group will also be touring the 30-acre Ewing Lilac Arboretum, which was designed by John Wister. Reiman Gardens at Iowa State University. There will be a tour of the Better Homes and Gardens test gardens, Pappajohn Sculpture Park and the historic Woodland Cemetery. There are so many places to go and plants to see! Des Moines is very excited to have the group visit their capital city.



Greater Des Moines
Botanical Garden
Photo by Julie Hempel

Tentative Agenda

Wednesday, May 1st

6:00-8:00 pm > Hampton Inn, Early Registration check in table.

Thursday, May 2nd

9:00-12:30 > Board of Directors Meeting

10:00-12:00 > Registration check in table

1:30 > Meet and greet in lobby

1:45 > Board bus to Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden

2:00-4:30 > Speakers:

2:00: **Ben Page**, Director DM Parks and Recreation, Welcome

2:10: Mark DeBard, ILS Member, Variegated Lilacs

3:00: Kelly Norris, Director of Horticulture, Greater DM Botanical Garden, Iris Breeder

3:45: Aaron Harpod, Assistant Director of Horticulture, Tour Greater DM Botanical Garden

4:30-5:30 > General Meeting

5:30 > Board bus to hotel, Dinner on your own

7:00-10:00 > Meet and Greet Hospitality Suite at the hotel

Friday, May 3rd

8:00 > Meet in hotel lobby, board bus to Reiman Gardens, Ames, Iowa.

9:00-10:30 > Reiman Gardens guided tour Sarah Rummery

10:30-11:15 > Jeff Iles, Professor and Chair Horticulture Department

11:15-12:00 > Edward Lyon, Director, Reiman Gardens

12:00-1:30 > Lunch at Reiman

1:30 > Board bus for return trip

2:30-4:30 > Tour of Pappajohn Sculpture Park and Better Home & Gardens Test Garden, Meredith Corporation Social

4:30 > Bus returns to hotel.

6:00 > President's Dinner, Americana

Saturday, May 4th

7:45-8:45 > Board meeting (hotel)

8:45 > Board bus to Ewing Park.

9:00 > Joel VanRoekel, Environmental Education.

10:00 > Tour Ewing Park Lilac Arboretum and Children's Forest.

12:00 > Board bus to hotel

12:15-1:00 > Lunch 'In the Bag'

1:30-4:00 > Auction

6:00 > Awards Banquet, Centro, Flashbacks from the Russian Conference and a Preview of 2020 Convention.

A Letter From The Preservation Committee

As some of you may or may not know, the International Lilac Society has established a Preservation Committee. The intent of the Preservation Committee is twofold: to identify and record the locations of all known lilac cultivars throughout the world in order to identify those lilacs of merit that are in danger of becoming extinct; and to take steps to preserve them for future generations to enjoy.

In reviewing the history of ILS from its inception, one trend is reoccurring alarmingly more often than one would hope. Upon the passing of their owners, private collections housing some of the more rare lilacs are disappearing or falling into disarray to the point that records of the lilacs residing in these locations no longer exist. The impact is that in some cases, the only known specimen of certain cultivars have been lost forever. Such great collections including Margaretten Park, Grape Hill Garden and Vale of Aherlow seem to have been affected.

Why is this happening? The reality is most people do not have the same intensity of passion for lilacs as the owner had in the past. This passion gave him/her the drive to maintain such a collection, which arguably takes a lot of time and effort. Those remaining can't be blamed for the collection not being maintained if they don't have the same passion, though it may be difficult for you and I to fathom that lilacs are not a priority in everyone's life.

At this point, I hope that you are asking yourself how you, as a member of the International Lilac Society, can help to prevent this from continuing. While the Preservation Committee has made great strides in collecting data regarding the lilacs located in public gardens and arboretums, data regarding private collections is severely lacking and private collections are where some of the more rare lilacs are likely still in existence. As cochairmen, Tatiana Polyakova and I are asking that those that have private collections



Endangered Lilac
'Christophe Colomb'
Photo by Joshua Miller



Endangered Lilac
'Humphrey'
Photo by Joshua Miller

or connections to them work with us in helping to identify and record the locations of all lilac cultivars.

We understand the concern that certain collectors have of maintaining privacy regarding this information and completely respect that. Our response to this concern is that we commit that this data will not be shared with anyone else or used for any other purpose than for the committee to identify and propose a plan to preserve certain cultivars, if and when they are identified as extremely rare. Any such plan will be designed to limit the effort of the owner so that the act of preservation is as little of a

In 2019, the Preservation Committee will be reaching out to those of you with known collections to inquire as to your willingness to aid us in our preservation goals. While a monumental effort was conducted in amassing data regarding the lilacs existing in public gardens, now there is much to be done in regards to preservation of these beautiful specimens, all of which will be communicated to you as it happens. If you feel so inclined, we welcome you reaching out to us even before you are contacted by us (JoshuaandPaula@MSN.com). We welcome this proactivity even more so because we might not necessarily even be aware that you own a private collection. Please feel free to ask any questions, propose ideas,



Endangered Lilac
'Spectabilis'
Photo by Joshua Miller

burden to him or her as possible. Coupled with this request is that we ask that you consider being open to aiding the Preservation Committee in our request to preserve some of the finest and most rare lilacs. We are sure that some of the lilacs in private collections were undoubtedly provided with pride and perhaps with the ultimate intent to ensure their preservation. We of the Preservation Committee ask - what better way to show your appreciation for being able to obtain these lilacs and your true love of them then by paying it forward and being a proponent of the preservation of these rare varieties?



Endangered Lilac
'Richard A Fenicchia'
Photo by Joshua Miller

etc. Preservation of rare lilacs of merit is paramount and is going to require a team effort. Even though you might not be on the Preservation Committee, your participation and cooperation will be invaluable in order for us to be successful. We are looking forward to working with the other members of the International Lilac Society to make preservation happen!

Joshua Miller & Tatiana Polyakova
Chairmen of Western & Eastern Hemispheres, respectively.

Belgorod Lilac

by Oleg Polukhin & Valerity Tokhtar

The Botanical Garden of the Belgorod State National Research University (NRU "BelsU") was founded in 1999 on the initiative of the Governor of the Belgorod Region Yevgeny S. Savchenko.

The Botanical Garden of the National Research University "BelsU" is located in the South-West district of Belgorod on an area of 71 hectares. Today it is the leading research institution of the Central Black Earth region and has the richest collection of living plants in the region: more than 2500 species and varieties, including endemic, relict, rare and endangered plant species of the Red and Green Books of Russia and the Belgorod Region. The dendrological collection of the Botanical Garden, located on an area of 18 hectares, includes more than 700 species and varieties collected from various parts of the world.

The introduction of lilacs in the botanical garden began in 2001, when the first plants were obtained from the Forest-Steppe Experimental Selection Station and the Main Botanical Garden named after N.V. Tsitsin Russian Academy of Sciences. The goal was set at the initial stage i.e. to show the most common species of the Genus *Syringa* in the arboretum collection. In 2015, the lilac was represented by 12 species:

➤ *S. vulgaris* L.; *S. × hyacinthiflora* Rheder (*S. vulgaris* × *S. oblata*); *S. × chinensis* Willd. (*S. persica* × *S. vulgaris*); *S. pubescens* subsp. *patula*; *S. villosa* Vahl; *S. emodi* Wallex Royle; *S. wolfii* Schneid; *S. josikaea* J. Jacq. ex Rchb.; *S. komarowii* C.K. Schneid; *S. sweginzowii* Koehne & Lingelsh; *S. × prestoniae* McKelvey (*S. komarowii* subsp. *reflexa* × *S. villosa*); *S. × josiflexa* I. Prestone × J. S. Pringle (*S. josikaea* × *S. komarowii* subsp. *reflexa*). As well as 7 cultivars: 4 cultivars of common lilac, 2 - *hyacinthiflora* and 1 - *josiflexa*.

In 2018, at the initiative of the Governor, Yevgeny S. Savchenko, the Belgorod Lilac project was developed and started to be

implemented in order to turn the region into the leading Russian centre for the selection and production of lilacs. The project is implemented on the basis of the Botanical Garden of the National Research University "BelsU". The Rector of the university, Professor Oleg N. Polukhin, outlined the main tasks assigned to the botanical garden at the first stage of the project, for 3 years:

- Creation in the territory of the Botanical Garden of the National Research University "BelsU" the largest lilac collection in Russia.
- Creating a laboratory of genetics and selection of ornamental crops.
- Creation of a nursery for the production of high quality planting material of different lilac varieties..

The first year of the implementation of the Belgorod Lilac program has become truly prolific. The territory of the botanical garden, allocated for syringaria, was prepared for planting: a drip irrigation system and a network of walking paths were laid; a fountain was built in the centre, representing a lilac flower. With



Anastasia Aladina & Governor Yevgeny S. Savchenko at the ceremonial planting of the first lilac bushes in the collection.
Photo by Anna Gamurak

the participation of the creative group "Russian Lilac" is actively replenishing the collection fund with new cultivars and types of lilacs. Currently, 169 lilac cultivars in the amount of 463 seedlings have already been planted on the territory of the syringaria. In the laboratory-greenhouse complex, 72 more cultivars are being prepared for planting in syringaria.

By the laboratory of biotechnology of the botanical garden, more than 200 micro plants of the first 6 varieties obtained by micropropagation were transferred to the greenhouse for growing.

In the spring of 2018, the Botanical Garden organized expeditions to the territories of historic estates of the Belgorod Region to identify and study lilac species and cultivars preserved there. As a result, the most interesting specimens were selected and placed in the botanical garden, for their further study and use in breeding.

Creating a collection of lilacs, we pay attention not only to well-known, classical cultivars of domestic and foreign selection, but also to the newest cultivars of Russian selection, which are just starting their way through the gardens and collections of the world.



Left to Right: Rector of the University, Professor Oleg N. Polukhin, Head of the Nursery Marina Evtukhova, Head of the "Russian Lilac" Breeding Group Sergei Aladin, & Governor Yevgeny S. Savchenko
Photo by Anna Gamurak

The Botanical Garden of the Belgorod State National Research University
Photo by Anna Gamurak

A mother plantation of cultivar lilac was laid, and 574 saplings of 116 cultivars were planted. More than one hundred plants of another 20 cultivars grow up in a laboratory-greenhouse complex for spring planting.

A breeding nursery has been created, where more than 800 common lilac hybrid seedlings (*S. vulgaris* L.) are already growing. In addition, another 2,875 hybrid seedlings of *S. vulgaris* and *S. × prestoniae* are grown in containers in protected ground.

One of the most important tasks we consider is the preservation of rare endangered cultivars. To save endangered cultivars and propagate them is our mission. In this regard, we appeal to colleagues from botanical gardens and arboreta, as well as to private collectors from different parts of the world with a request to join our program and help in this difficult, but very noble cause. We hope for prolific cooperation and mutual assistance in the exchange of rare cultivars and types of lilacs.

Remembering Lilac Land

by Lorraine Eaton | Originally printed June 8, 2008 in The Virginian-Pilot. Reprinted with permission from The Virginian-Pilot and Lorraine Eaton.

As her father faded, Lorraine Eaton knew tracing her family history was something she had to do. What she didn't know was how deeply it would lead her into the world of one special family of flowers.

My "Katherine Havemeyer" lilac was inexplicably bigger and more beautiful this spring than I had ever seen her. She came into her glory while my father, whose love of plants began in the Long Island nursery where she has roots, withered away.

As clusters of tight buds emerged in March (98 of them – I couldn't help but count), my father lost his ability to walk. In early April, when a pink profusion of petals proffered a heady scent to the world, my father lost his ability to converse.

In early May, I knew that the blooms and my father would soon be gone.

Lilacs are a sentimental plant. At once resilient and delicate, they can sometimes seem like kin, perhaps a beloved aunt, plumpish and punctual in colorful clothing and a trail of perfume. Europeans immigrating to America in the 17th century couldn't leave their lilacs behind; they packed them with their other possessions. Some of those original settlers, now more than 250 years old, still grow in gardens in northern Michigan.

My childhood memories are entwined with lilacs, acres and acres of French hybrids on what was once my grandparents' Long Island nursery, Lilac Land. My grandfather, uncles and father and mother worked that land for years. It was my first home. My grandfather named and introduced 11 new cultivars – or varieties – of French



Mark Eaton
Photo provided by
Lorraine Eaton

hybrid lilacs. Sightseers came by the score.

Shortly before my father died, he tried to describe Lilac Land in springtime. “I’ve never seen anything that was as spectacular as that all in one place,” he said, choking back the only tears I’d ever seen him shed.

Decades ago, Lilac Land was sold, divided and developed. With my father’s passing this spring, I had to know whether anything survived on that piece of storied earth.

It was time to find my roots.

It was time to find my roots.

Carved from a province of privilege and wealth, Lilac Land was on the north shore of Long Island where, in the early 1900s, Gilded Age barons built country estates – 120-room mansions with children’s wings, stables, tennis courts, swimming pools, formal gardens and greenhouses. Teddy Roosevelt lived there, and so did Walter Chrysler.

Upper Brookville, where Lilac Land was, rests in a valley. But a wealthy widow who in the 1930s worked to incorporate the village, sniffed at the suggestion that it be called Lower Brookville. “I refuse to live in lower anything,” she said.

The barons built the Brookville School for the children of the help. Butlers had a country club of their own organized by J.P. Morgan’s man.

Theodore and Katherine Havemeyer were of this aristocracy, he a member of the industrialist family that founded what eventually became Domino sugar, she the daughter of a wealthy New York banker. They owned a 37-acre estate, Cedar Hill, and a short walk from the main house Theodore Havemeyer indulged his interest in horticulture – dahlias, iris, crab apple trees and especially French

hybrid lilacs. Havemeyer’s love for lilacs grew during visits to Victor Lemoine’s famous lilac nursery in France. He brought Lemoine’s finest back to Cedar Hill and crossed them with the best available stock, intent on improving the color and size of the blooms. Havemeyer became one of the most respected names in the lilac world.

When monsieur tried to honor their bond by naming a new variety of lilac for his friend, Theodore Havemeyer suggested it instead be named “Katherine Havemeyer.”

Back at Cedar Hill, in 1924, Havemeyer debuted “Mrs. W.E. Marshall,” among the deepest purple lilacs. Later, he named “Zulu” and “Glory,” still popular today. Other new cultivars followed – 45 in all – named for society friends and family. “Carley,” with her single pristine blooms, considered one of the finest white lilacs ever, was named for a favorite niece.

Then in 1936, Theodore Havemeyer died.

Sometime in the 1940s, Katherine Havemeyer and my grandmother, Alice Eaton, started talking real estate.

During World War II, Alice built a booming real estate business on Long Island. My grandfather, Mark, who had been a cellist, a newspaper publisher, a Montgomery Ward catalog copywriter, a ladies’ belt manufacturer and Spanish editor for the Sears catalog, was nearing retirement. He also was a self-taught gardener who tended a nine-acre victory garden during the war.

“Enough for two families,” my father once told me. “Enough for two wars.”

In 1949, my grandparents bought the seven acres of Cedar Hill where the lilacs grew, renamed it Lilac Land and wasted no time in going public. My Uncle Gene, the oldest of their four boys, cleared out cedar trees and brush at the top of the hill to make way for the parking circle. My dad, Tom, the youngest, helped. They heaped

Your visit to **LILAC-LAND**

Cedar Hill Nursery was established in 1910 by the late T. A. Havemeyer, perhaps America's best-known Lilac specialist, and the Havemeyer Lilac collection now includes more than five thousand exhibition-size Lilac shrubs. Lilac-Land park was planned and built to provide a fitting home for this famous Lilac collection. It was completed in 1941 and first opened to the public in 1950. During the blossoming season a visit to this land of color and perfume is an experience to remember for a lifetime.

*Lilac flower arrangements
are under the direction of
Mrs. Charles Scholz.*

The logo for Lilac-Land, featuring the words "Lilac-Land" in a white, cursive script font. The text is set against a dark, irregular, cloud-like background.

(CEDAR HILL NURSERY)

REMSSEN LANE, UPPER BROOKVILLE, L. I.

POST OFFICE ADDRESS: GLEN HEAD, N. Y.

PHONE: BROOKVILLE 5-0331

piles of brush all morning and then ate roasted hot dogs and drank scotch for lunch.

Meanwhile, my grandfather managed the media.

On May 21, 1950, The New York Times announced that "One of the most magnificent displays of lilacs in this country is now coming into full flower, and may be seen by the public for the first time at Lilac Land."

The writer continued: "At Lilac Land, no gardener can believe, at first, what he is seeing. Lilac-hung paths lead through the six-acre park where more than 7,000 bushes, each one more beautiful than the last, flourish. ... Each new kind quickly erases the memory of the one just seen."

The collection included the French hybrid lilacs, as well as Chinese lilacs. Admission was \$1.10.

The New York Times announced the opening of the season at Lilac Land in 1951 and 1952. In 1953, my grandfather, obviously enchanted, began writing gardening columns himself.

"We should get to know them," he said of lilacs in his May 3, 1953, column. "Not just one, but three visits to a good lilac collection are recommended, when the early hybrids are in bloom, when the mid-season lilacs are at their best, and when the late lilacs are on display. That is the only way to get acquainted. ..."

This was during the "golden age of automobiles," and Lilac Land quickly became something of a tourist attraction and was listed as a "place of interest" for happy motorists using Esso road maps.

To further publicize the nursery, my grandfather would have his boys load the back of the battered blue pickup with dreamy boughs of blooms wrapped in newspapers and tied with twine. Then he'd send them to New York City to try to get mention of Lilac Land on the radio shows.

Always they arrived unannounced. Sometimes they were successful. Once, my Uncle Gene recalled, Arthur Godfrey spoke of lilacs for 45 minutes after the Eaton boys arrived in the studio with their bounty. That's today's equivalent of getting on Jay Leno.

Soon after the opening season, my grandparents built an office, a six-bay garage and their house, cementing a 1924 silver dollar in the center of the brick sunroom floor in honor of the year of their wedding.



'Carley'
Photo by Bruce Peart
& Margaret Walton

Directly outside their living room window grew a gigantic crab apple tree, a blush of fuchsia in the spring that paled to a tender pink. In front of the crab apple were planted rows and rows of young lilacs for eventual sale.

In the rear of the property were two "selection beds" of unnamed lilacs, hybrids that Havemeyer had deemed worth watching. But he died before naming and putting many promising lilacs into production.

New varieties of lilacs, like most plants, can take a decade to bring to market. First, the crosses must be made, either by hand pollinating or planting open pollinated seed. Then the hybridized plant must grow for a few years to determine the true quality. Then cuttings must be nurtured to a salable size.

A new color is hardly enough to win a lilac official "cultivar" status. A plant must be a "notable improvement" over existing cultivars. An application detailing flower color and size, fragrance, growth



'Serene'
Photo by
Zelimir Borzan

habit, hardiness and other factors is required. The International Code of Nomenclature of Cultivated Plants lays out the rules for acceptance or rejection. And the name must be evaluated by the International Lilac Registrar at the Royal Botanical Gardens in Canada.

My grandfather introduced seven "Havemeyer-Eaton" lilacs in 1954, including "Mr. Big," with its double-flowering magenta blooms, and "Serene," a pinkish-purple still considered by some to

be the most fragrant of the *Syringa vulgaris*, or common lilacs.

Dad dug and propagated plants at Lilac Land throughout high school. He made a little money on the side in the greenhouses at the nearby 409-acre Coe estate. After the Army, Dad went straight back to gardening. He graduated in ornamental horticulture from the State University of New York at Farmingdale, where he met my mother, Sandra, an art student.

Mom and Dad married in 1958 and moved into the wood-paneled Lilac Land office. Three babies came in quick succession – 1958, 1960 and I in 1961. One of my mother's most treasured memories is of bathing her babies under clouds of perfumed lilacs.

In my memory, it is always spring in Lilac Land.

In my memory, it is always spring at Lilac Land.

A winding road through a tunnel of trees, and a purple, wavy-edged "Lilac Land" sign, led to our gravel drive. I can still hear the crunching of gravel as cars carrying nurserymen and sightseers and plant collectors approached the expansive parking circle at the top of the

hill, at its center a weeping lilac, a fountain of blooms each spring.

An arc of buildings at the outer edge of the circle encompassed almost my entire world. My grandparents' one-story house stood to the left, and next door to it the six-car garage, dark and foreboding to a child. Adjacent to the garage stood the "office," where my family lived. Our kitchen could hold only a speck of a table, but the door behind it opened to a 25-foot-long greenhouse, filled with sunshine and seedlings and the scent of earth.

A gap between my grandparents' house and the garage led to the

lilacs. The 24 beds and the maze of grassy pathways between were our playground. Tommy and Crystal, my brother and older sister, and I each had a favorite tree, mine a soaring cedar. We knew where a patch of lily-of-the-valley grew. My grandfather sometimes gave us nickels to feed the fat, red Coca-Cola machine behind the garage. Sometimes we'd venture to the chain-link fence that separated Lilac Land from the Brookville School and wish hard that we were old enough to go there.

Meanwhile, legions of lilac lovers kept driving up the hill. My mother remembers one sunny day when a long, lean limousine crunched up the drive. The chauffeur emerged, snapped open a parasol and opened the door for an Asian woman ... Madame Chiang Kai-shek, wife of the Chinese leader. A black woman came to buy lilacs for a park in Harlem; Uncle Gene went back with her to plant them. And for many years, the head of a Virginia school for girls – my mother cannot recall which one – would drive up the hill with his wife and buy as many 3-inch cuttings as they could fit into the car.

Nursery work was physical. Dad and my grandfather and my mother kept busy pruning older lilacs, making cuttings and coaxing them to life in the greenhouse, digging full-grown lilacs, balling the roots in burlap, heaving them into the pickup and delivering them all over the island and as far as New Jersey. Lilacs were tagged with heavy metal nameplates, twisted to the trunks with heavy-gauge wire. Just keeping the paths mowed and the weeds at bay was enough work for a crop of gardeners.

I don't remember spending a lot of time with my father back then, but sometimes Mom and Dad would pile four children and the dog onto their 14-foot sloop and spend the day on Oyster Bay. My whole life, Dad kidded me for falling off the boat so often that they tethered me to the mast.

In 1963, my grandfather registered two more Havemeyer-Eaton lilacs, "Mauve Mist" and "Romance," a bush with single pink



'Mauve Mist'

Photo by Bruce Peart
& Margaret Walton

blooms. Mark named it "Ethan Allen."

But as the age of the automobile waned, the crowds at Lilac Land thinned. Another baby arrived in 1965. Dad took a job as a horticulturist at the New York Botanical Garden in the Bronx and propagated lilacs on the side. A couple of years after that, he became Portsmouth's first director of parks, a job he would hold for 35 years.

I was 5 years old when the moving van was packed with toys and furniture and my dad's books, which had titles like "Pest Management" and "Proper Propagation." When my parents began to stuff the hull of our sloop with balled and burlaped lilacs, it was perhaps the first time I rolled my eyes at them, wondering why they were putting all that dirt in our sailboat.

I later learned that since ancient times, lilacs had migrated across the land with the people who loved them. We arrived at our new home in Virginia laden with lilacs and greeted by a little media fanfare.

On Feb. 12, 1967, the Page 1 headline in The Virginian-Pilot and The Portsmouth Star read, "Eaton to Start Beautification Work on Monday."

By then, Lilac Land was in deep decline. It was too much for my grandfather to care for. In 1970, when he was 70 years old, he made his last introduction, "Tit Tat Toe," a single pinkish-purple bloomer. Two years later, my grandparents moved to Florida. Later that year, he was awarded the International Lilac Society's Award of Merit.

In America's nurseryman's "lilac bible," a book titled "Lilacs: The Genus Syringa," author Father John L. Fiala explained:

"Rarely does a team such as Havemeyer-Eaton come forth for the good of all. Most of the Havemeyer lilacs were relatively unknown until they were offered to the public through the efforts and nursery

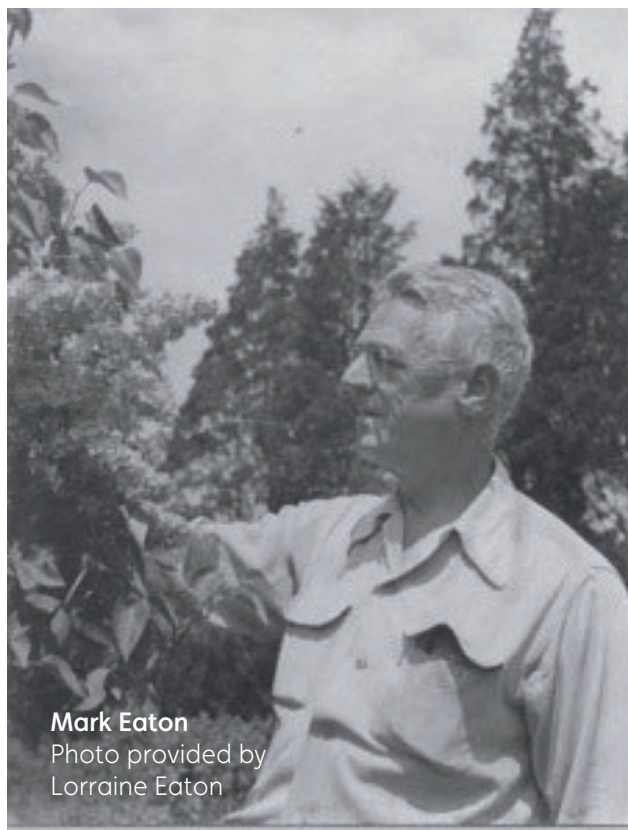
of Mark Eaton. Often hybridizers' most mature and best work is done towards the end of their life, and most frequently the best fruit of their work is lost upon their death. The best seedlings are often not evaluated by trustees of estates and discarded."

That last sentence has always made me wonder what happened to the lilacs at Lilac Land. Many of the plants that traveled south inside our sailboat were already gone, the entire row ripped out by the new owners of the Portsmouth home where we were raised. When my parents divorced, my mother moved a "Glory" and a "Hallelujah" to her new home but later found the rest dead in the creek.

In the pre-dawn hours of May 4, my father died of pancreatic cancer. At sunrise, I walked into my garden to check on "Katherine Havemeyer." Her blooms were shriveled and brown, the last speck of pink from two days before had vanished.

Ten days later, Mom, my sister Crystal, my daughter, Peyton, and I set out for Lilac Land.

I already knew that a few of my grandfather's lilacs had vanished, including "Dazzle," "Mr. Big," "Ethan Allen," "Eaton Red" and "Tit Tat Toe."



Mark Eaton
Photo provided by
Lorraine Eaton



**Lorraine & her
sister Crystal, 1970**
Photo provided by
Lorraine Eaton

It was a long shot, we knew, but what if some of the Havemeyer-Eaton lilacs were still living on that hill that was once Lilac Land? The heavy metal tags might still be on them. Or maybe Mom could recognize "Mr. Big" if she saw him.

Halfway there, we checked into a hotel. We spent the evening remembering the quirky side of Dad – how he always said he was

16, and the amazing apricot birthday cakes he would make for us. All the while we sifted through a box of papers and pictures that my stepmother had given to Crystal.

We found yellowed football programs from high school days when Dad was No. 62, a starting right guard for the Glen Cove Big Red, and high school and college report cards. A crumpled copy of his college paper revealed that his fellow classmates predicted that he would be "a playboy."

Gosh. Who knew?

Crystal and I never imagined that Dad was a playboy, much less sentimental enough to save this stuff for more than 50 years. But pictures or pieces of Lilac Land remained elusive. The only trace in this cache was two small photographs, dated 1970, of Crystal and me walking down a path carrying bouquets of lilacs in our arms.

That was 38 years ago, likely our last time at Lilac Land.

Our day on Long Island dawned cloudless, despite a gloomy forecast.

Since we didn't want to start knocking on doors too early, first stop was the Planting Fields Arboretum State Historic Park, the former Coe estate where Dad worked as a teenager. Even Peyton, who came on this trip only for the hotel swimming pools, was enchanted. There are soaring greenhouses with Greek columns at the entrances and exits, formal gardens and a corridor of fragrant lilacs in full bloom, some flower masses the size of footballs.

The corridor was like a little bit of Lilac Land.

"I get it," Crystal said, standing beneath the boughs. "Now I get it."

All the books on botany and borers, Dad's unwavering interest in horticulture, his will to make Portsmouth a pretty place. He witnessed the splendor of nature early in life. "How could he have done anything else?" Crystal said.

With an epiphany in our pocket, we pressed on.

We had three phone numbers we hoped would gain us access to what once was Lilac Land: one for the people who live in my grandparents' house on the hill, another for a woman who lives on part of the old Havemeyer estate but not on Lilac Land proper and another for Carley Wagner, the exact Carley the lilac was named for.

Fifty-eight years ago, Carley moved into what was once a gardener's cottage on her great Uncle Theodore's estate.

Carley was a most gracious hostess. She brought cookies and iced tea – apologizing that it wasn't Southern sweet – and a stack of lilac memorabilia.

We realized that for a few short years, we were neighbors. She rarely

went up the hill to Lilac Land, she said.

Carley has three lilacs in her garden, including "Katherine Havemeyer," but no Havemeyer-Eaton lilacs, nor her namesake "Carley." Her garden slopes upward from her terrace. She walked us to the ridge where a whisper of the Havemeyer estate remains, a straight line of yews that once led to Lilac Land.

If not for a fence, we could have walked there.

Our next stop was Polly Sealy's house. On the phone, Polly said she wouldn't be home but welcomed us to roam her expansive property and check out the two acres of lilacs that front the road. We could hardly wait. Even though it wasn't on the site of Lilac Land, maybe, just maybe, we'd find something familial.

We exited the car and spotted them immediately, across a grassy expanse that seemed as wide as a football field. But when we reached the hedge, we saw the ragged-edged leaves. These were another variety of lilac, not French hybrids. Along the edges of the property, we found a young single lavender bloomer, and another white. Both looked like French hybrids, but when I checked my notes, I saw that none of the missing lilacs fit those descriptions.

We still had not been able to talk with the present owners of the Lilac Land proper, but it was now or never.

I strained the car straight up the hill, but there was no crunching. I continued up the asphalt drive and bore sharply to the right once more.

The bones
of what was
once my
whole world
were still
there...



'Romance'

Photo by Charles Holetich

The bones of what was once my whole world were still there, an arc of low buildings fronted by a circular bed, although the circle was edged with concrete blocks and the weeping lilac had vanished, replaced by a soaring spruce and a meticulously clipped hedge. The greenhouse and the gap that once led to the lilacs were missing.

I knocked on what was my grandparents' front door. A woman answered. She seemed busy. I explained my ties to her land as quickly as I could.

She nodded while I was talking. She'd heard about my quest; I felt like a nuisance.

"There's nothing to see," she said through the glass, in her strong New York accent.

"Gone. Bulldozed."

I never dreamed it would end this quickly.

"Could we just take a look around?" I asked.

"There's nothing to see," she repeated. "Nothing."

I wasn't going away.

I told her that my mother, who worked this land with her hands, was in the car. Could we just have a moment of your time? She softened slightly and moved to the porch. When my mother walked toward us, I saw her eyes flicker to the right, where our greenhouse once stood. I saw it, too, clusters of faint purple buds, not yet burst into bloom.

On the porch, the owner told us that when her family moved here 12 years ago, they tore down the greenhouse, paved the driveway and converted the garage and the gap to living space. They puzzled over the wavy-edged "Lilac Land" sign they found in the garage and

sent it to the landfill.

We were 12 years too late.

She sensed our sorrow and apologized. The lilacs on the property were so old, she explained, and they had not been cared for. She feared that her grandchildren might venture into the tangle.

“And the smell,” she said, waving her hand in front of her face. “When those white ones turned brown, you couldn’t stand it.”

The owner offered to show us the backyard, now an in-ground pool surrounded by terra-cotta pavers and manicured lawn.

We hoped
that this little
piece of
Lilac Land
would survive.

leaned toward land. I couldn’t find a tag; Mom didn’t think it was a French hybrid anyway.

But this lilac had been growing there forever. Tears welled up in my mother’s eyes as she did what she used to do hundreds of times, right here on this land.

Our timing was bad; this was not the season for cuttings. But as we rolled down the drive with our clutch of green leaves, we hoped that this little piece of Lilac Land would survive.

As she said, gone. All gone.

She welcomed us to take cuttings of the one lilac left and lent us her scissors.

The lilac was growing on a spot that once was the far end of the greenhouse. Its roots clenched a sloping hillside; the gnarled trunk

EPILOGUE

No nursery I can find has “Tit Tat Toe” or “Blue Angel” or “Dazzle” or “Mr. Big,” but I have learned that other Havemeyer-Eaton cultivars flourish across America, in Canada and even in England.

On the way back to Virginia, we stopped at the New York Botanical Garden in the Bronx. There, in the T.A. Havemeyer Lilac Collection, we found “Mauve Mist.”

“Pink Mist,” “Romance” and “Serene” live on at the Royal Botanical Gardens in Ontario.

Colin Chapman, former International Lilac Society president and its current executive vice president for Europe, has a whole bed of Havemeyer-Eaton lilacs at his home in Suffolk, England.

Chapman, who met my father and grandfather at a lilac society convention in 1991, said it “was a very proud moment in my life, and I have never forgotten it.”

Brad Bittorf, executive vice president of the International Lilac Society, sent me a note saying that “your family name is recognized among the top dozen or so within the lilac world.”

I had no idea how respected they were. There is peace and solace in knowing that while Lilac Land may be gone, the legacy of my father and grandfather lives on.

Lorraine Eaton

Lorraine Eaton retired after 30 years of writing for The Virginian-Pilot.

2019 Membership Roster

If you see any errors in your address, please email our membership secretary at membership@internationallilacsociety.org.

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