

# Bayou and Marsh

Newsletter of the Greater New Orleans Iris Society



## Big News

*2014 Convention of the Society For Louisiana Irises coming to New Orleans*

For several years, the Society For Louisiana Irises has had its eye on New Orleans as the site for a national convention. As a relatively new and small organization, GNOIS has been hesitant to take on such an event. But the leap has been made, and we have agreed to host in 2014. The date has not yet

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## Spectacular Second Year Bloom In GNOIS Display Garden

Thanks to the hospitality of the Sydney and Walda Besthoff Sculpture Garden and the New Orleans Museum of Art — and with the steadfast and enthusiastic support of Garden Manager Pamela Buckman — GNOIS has created an outstanding spot for the public to see some of the latest Louisiana irises.

Between the Display Garden and the Wild Garden at Longue Vue, there is no better place than New Orleans for the public to see modern hybrid Louisiana irises that are well grown and labeled by name. Both are great places to discover favorites and add them to personal garden wish lists.

Over sixty irises were planted in the GNOIS Display Garden in late Fall 2010. Bloom in the 2011 season was good, and the following Fall another sixty-plus irises were added. In 2012, the second year plants were spectacular. There are pictures from the Display Garden on several pages of this issue of *Bayou and Marsh*.

Eileen Hollander was in charge of the Display Garden project. Irises were donated by Eileen, Benny Trahan. Joe Musacchia and Patrick O'Connor from GNOIS and by Ron Betzer from Lafayette, Ron Killingsworth and Plantation Point Nursery in Mooringsport and Jeff Weeks from Denham Springs.

## Laid Back And Beautiful

*Spring events offer music, conversation and a stroll through gorgeous irises*

Both Longue Vue and the Besthoff Sculpture Garden have begun new traditions. For the past several years, each has held an iris event that invites the public in to enjoy the Louisiana iris bloom in a relaxed atmosphere but with opportunities to learn more and chat with others interested in these beautiful native plants.

Longue Vue annually celebrates “Caroline Dormon Day” in the Wild Garden, and the Sculpture Garden holds a “Louisiana Iris Rainbow

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## **Convention, from page 1**

been set, but probably will be in early April.

The invitation to host proved impossible to refuse. New Orleans has become a premier destination to see Louisiana irises. There are many beautiful private gardens elsewhere that have made other cities the sites of memorable conventions, but the new and restored public plantings in N.O. since Katrina are unparalleled around the country. The logic of the City for an iris convention could not be ignored.

With two years of lead time, GNOIS has some organization building and planning to do. Much of the work will be done far in advance and not on a tight schedule. In the month before the event and during the convention itself, we will need the help of our hopefully expanded membership and friends. There will be quite a few small jobs for a good number of folks.

For over fifty consecutive years, SLI conventions were held in Lafayette. SLI was formed there in 1941 and the city was both the traditional "home" of the organization and the area with the strongest active membership. In the 1990s, even though it already had members from around the country and abroad, the Society set out to become a more nationally focused organization. It was increasingly recognized that Louisiana irises grow well throughout the country, so it was thought fitting that the single organization dedicated to their promotion should be nationally oriented as well.

As part of this shift, SLI opened up the possibility of moving its conventions around the country to be hosted by interested local iris societies. The first taker was the Central Arkansas Iris Society in 1999, and our convention has been hosted in Little Rock on two occasions. Since then there have been three meetings in Dallas, two in Shreveport and one in Tucson. In between, the convention has rotated back to Lafayette periodically. Dallas will host again in 2013, and then it is on to New Orleans.

The main thing is that these conventions are FUN. There is a lot to see and a lot to learn. Typically a convention will feature one or two days of garden tours by bus. Sometimes there are "open gardens" that visitors are free to drop by in their spare time. There is always an Iris Show sanctioned by the American Iris Society that anyone can enter. Awards are given for seedlings, named cultivars, and several other classes of entries. Traditionally, an educational Symposium is held. And food, always food, usually preceded and followed by auctions, including a silent auction and a live auction of irises.

You will be hearing more about the convention on a regular basis in this newsletter.

Get excited!

## **GNOIS Meeting** **7 PM, Thursday, May 31 in the** **Playhouse at Longue Vue**

GNOIS invites you to its next meeting. We have one significant item of business -- election of new officers -- plus plants to raffle off and pictures of the 2012 bloom season to show.

There also will be a discussion of our major projects and future plans, including the 2014 Society For Louisiana Irises Convention, Display Garden expansion, the Longue Vue plantings, future Rainbow Festival and Caroline Dormon Day activities, and the Fall Iris Sale.

GNOIS aims for four meetings a year, but in practice there have been fewer in the past. We have been stronger on activities than organization, but it is important to develop a better balance.

The Playhouse at Longue Vue is part of the main house. Just drive in and look for the signs. They will direct you to toward the house and then left around to parking in back.

Please join us on the 31st if you can. There are always things to learn and opportunities to expand our gardens.



**Above:** The iris 'Rusty O' by Charles Arny, blooming at Longue Vue. This iris was named for GNOIS member Rusty McSparrin who with husband Bud operates Bois d'Arc Gardens in Shriever.



*Sarah Quintana, a jazz vocalist, guitarist and singer-songwriter at Caroline Dormon Day.*

**Beautiful events, from page 1**

Festival.” Both events are young, but each has roots harkening back to earlier times and historic contributions to New Orleans.

These roots involve long stories worthy of future articles. In brief and as mentioned elsewhere, Caroline Dormon was an important conservationist from North Louisiana, ahead of her times in many areas, who in the 1950s helped design and plant the Wild Garden. Few of her original irises remain, but her layout and the hardscaping that holds the irises remain intact. Today, thanks to the work of Head Gardener Amy Graham and Tyrone Foreman, the irises have never looked better.

The Sculpture Garden’s Rainbow Fest follows in the footsteps of a nearly forgotten New Orleans iris organization from the 1930s, the Louisiana Iris Conservation Society. In a burst of enthusiasm for newly discovered native plants, the Society created Rainbow Memorials for prominent local individuals, including one located in what is now the Sculpture Garden.

Today, the lagoon in the Sculpture Garden boast far more irises than ever, due primarily to the generosity of Bois d’Arc Gardens, Plantation Point Nursery, Jeff Weeks, and countless volunteers

## Consider GNOIS and SLI

The modern “discovery” of Louisiana irises was marked by John K. Small’s 1931 article “Vanishing Iris” in the *Journal of the New York Botanical Garden*. 1931? Vanishing?

It is ironic that Louisiana irises would burst onto the horticultural scene at a moment when changes in their environment pointed to eventual destruction.

The Society for Louisiana irises was formed in 1941 with the mission to educate, promote and preserve. Those who save or develop new irises and those who grow them in their gardens are helping preserve the genetic legacy of these plants.

Please consider joining SLI and our local GNOIS. You are welcome to participate as much or as little as you wish. Like SLI, GNOIS focuses on both preserving irises in the wild and promoting and appreciating them in all their forms.

Those who join SLI will receive its quarterly magazine *Fleur de Lis* and its latest special publication *LA Iris Hybridizers 1985 - 2010*. New members of GNOIS will receive “A Guide To Louisiana Iris Locations In And Around New Orleans,” as well as this newsletter and occasional news on our activities. Membership forms appear on the last page of this issue.



*Above Left: ‘Morgan’s Dixie’ by Richard Morgan. Right: Ron Killingsworth’s ‘Roberta Rowell’. Immediately above, a clump of ‘Barataria’ by Patrick O’Connor.*



**Above, top and middle:** Scenes in the GNOIS Display Garden showing second year bloom in 2012. **Bottom:** First year bloom of the same irises in 2011. **Above right:** Kirk Strawn's 'Bayou Tiger'. 4



who have helped plant and weed.

The past iris season was so early that both events had to be moved forward several weeks to assure blooming irises. Caroline Dormon Day was shifted to a week-day running from late afternoon til early evening. It was a fortuitous move. The crowd was good, the atmosphere relaxed, the music excellent, and the irises, although rained upon immediately before the event, were still nice.

The Rainbow Festival shifted to an earlier weekend. Unlike the previous year, it did not coincide with the Spring Garden Show in the Botanical Garden. Still, there was a steady flow through the Sculpture Garden. Joe Musaccia and Eileen Hollander gave talks on Louisiana irises under a nearby tent, and members talked with visitors and enjoyed a great day.

May there be many more like it in the Sculpture Garden and at Longue Vue.



SLI's quarterly magazine sent to members.

# The Shreveport SLI Convention

## *Briarwood Tour A Reminder Of Link With Longue Vue*

Several members of GNOIS were among those attending the Society for Louisiana Irises Convention in Shreveport in late April. Rusty and Bud McSparin, Eileen Hollander, Joe Musacchia, Charles and Kathline Periloux, Betty Rena, Keith and Iris Pendergraft, and Patrick and Julie O'Connor all made the drive to North Louisiana.

The early bloom season meant that there were fewer irises to see in the gardens and entered in the show. Still, there was plenty to enjoy, and the tour gardens themselves were thoroughly gorgeous, each in a very different way.

Most of the irises in the show were brought from farther north. Robert Treadway from Carlisle, Arkansas, whose garden has been on tour for the Little Rock conventions, was largely responsible for filling the tables. Robert won almost all the awards, including



**Above:** Caroline Dormon, 1888 - 1971. **Right:** The Bay Garden at Briarwood, a natural bog where pitcher plants, Louisiana irises and many native plants thrive.

the seedling awards and Queen of Show with Patrick O'Connor's 'Deja Voodoo', which was well past bloom in its South Louisiana home.

### **Briarwood**

The bus tour to Briarwood, the Caroline Dormon Nature Preserve in Saline, Louisiana was a special treat for those of us who know the role that Caroline Dormon played in bringing Louisiana irises to

line Dormon brought many plants native to the South to grow, or not, in a natural setting.

Caroline Dormon, who died in 1971, was a naturalist, horticulturist, conservationist, ornithologist, and preservationist, among other avocations. She was the first woman professionally employed in forestry and is credited with persuading the U.S. Forest Service



Longue Vue. She designed the Wild Garden and provided the original irises planted along the winding path that we still walk each spring to enjoy the irises. There are a few Dormon-era irises still there, but most have been added in recent years as the Wild Garden has been reinvigorated. The look of the place is as Caroline Dormon intended, however.

The Wild Garden at Longue Vue displays a wide range of native plants, but Briarwood is really wild. It is a somewhat rugged, wooded preserve into which Caro-

line Dormon brought many plants native to the South to grow, or not, in a natural setting.

### **Plantation Point**

Other tour stops were Plantation Point in Mooringsport and the Debbie and Colton Sanders garden in Ringgold, Louisiana. Plantation Point is owned by new SLI President Bobbie Ann Hutchins and her husband Dr. Stanley Schikowitz.

Plantation Point is the site of Plantation Point Nursery, begun in 2002, which features Louisiana irises by the acre, and also daylilies, a large vegetable garden, fruit

trees and many other plants. It sits on Caddo Lake and offers a beautiful cypress-filled view from the house and many of the iris beds.

Stanley also operates a gourmet coffee business at Plantation Point. The roasting facility was part of the tour.

The Sanders garden in Ringgold is a meticulously landscaped private garden developed over many years and sitting on a lake also created by the owners. The visit was a bit rainy and the irises had mostly bloomed out. It was a treat nonetheless to enjoy the vistas provided by a unique and imaginative garden design and the hospitality of the Sanders.

In the lead-up to SLI conventions there is always worry that the timing of bloom will be too early

or too late. Sometimes it happens, but hardly ever is the bloom diminished as badly as feared. And there are always other compensations.

The mass of iris bloom that is typical of a convention was reduced in Shreveport, but the event was every bit as enjoyable as expected.

Another fun convention. There's never been a bad one.



**Left, from top:** Frank Chowning's 'Pomp And Glory' and 'Sheer Delight', two old varieties from the 1950s preserved at Briarwood; pitcher plants in the Bay Garden. **Above:** two views in the Sanders Garden in Ringgold. **Upper right:** Harry Wolford's 'Shaye Evyn Wolford', growing at Plantation Point.

## GREATER NEW ORLEANS IRIS SOCIETY

2012 Annual Dues **\$5** - It's time to renew for the year. Please make checks payable to Greater New Orleans Iris Society, or GNOIS.

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(This newsletter is distributed primarily by email, so please give an email address if possible)

Mail to: Fred Noggerath, GNOIS Treasurer, 4537 Ithaca St., Metairie, LA 70006.

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## SOCIETY FOR LOUISIANA IRISES

Annual Dues **\$13** - Staggered beginning with the quarter in which dues are paid. Make checks payable to the Society for Louisiana Irises, or SLI.

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