

# Bayou and Marsh

No. 32

News from the Greater New Orleans Iris Society

February 2017

## MEETING FEB 18 AT LONGUE VUE

Saturday, 9 AM in the Playhouse

Our meetings that occur as bloom season approaches are always interesting. There are spring events to talk about and to plan. We try to transact as little business as possible, but there are several important items this time. Here are highlights from the agenda.

- Cindy Dufrene of Cindy's Louisiana Iris Garden in Carriere, MS will give a program on soils for Louisiana irises: "It's All About Soil for Optimum Louisiana Iris Growth." See more about Cindy on page three.
- Our annual **Iris Raffle**, including new cultivars donated by Cindy Dufrene. We'll also have some irises to give away.
- Planning for spring events, including a field trip to see wild irises. Also, for the Rainbow Festival in the Sculpture Garden and possible visits to the gardens to be on tour at the 2018 national conventions.
- Several important business items: Paul Pastorek has prepared papers for 501(c)3 status for GNOIS that require approval. We also have to adopt new bylaws and elect a complete slate of officers. Official non-profit status will open many possibilities to receive donations and grants to support our many projects. A major step forward!

## Louisiana Iris Rainbow Festival And Longue Vue Day Coming Up

It's great when events succeed to the point of becoming tradition. That is certainly the case with the Louisiana Iris Rainbow Festival and Louisiana Iris Day at Longue Vue. Both have become highlights of the iris season in the New Orleans area.

**Louisiana Iris Day at Longue Vue** is always great fun. It is held on a weekday afternoon so people can drop by after work to enjoy refreshments, music and the iris bloom in the Wild Garden. This year it will be on Thursday, April 6 from 4-6 PM.

Louisiana Iris Day is a low key event with no formal program. It consists of strolling, chatting and enjoying the irises and all the beautiful plants in Longue Vue's Wild Garden. GNOIS members and Longue Vue staff will be around to answer questions.

Longue Vue's iris planting is unique and historic. It was begun in the 1930s by the prominent conservation-

ist and naturalist Caroline Dormon. The iris collection contains many older varieties but it has been updated with recent cultivars. The planting also contains all five native Louisiana iris species thanks to a donation by Benny Trahan. Longue Vue is one of the few places in the country where all the species can be seen.

The **Sydney and Walda Besthoff Sculpture Garden** is Ground Zero for Louisiana irises in New Orleans. The lagoon is lined with them, and nearby

is the GNOIS Display Garden with around a hundred named cultivars planted by our society.

The Louisiana Iris Rainbow Festival will be held on **Sunday, April 9 from 10 AM to 5 PM** this year. In addition to all the blooming irises in the Sculpture Garden, GNOIS will have a show-like display of

selected varieties in a tent. Members will be present to answer questions, so the event is a great opportunity to not only enjoy the irises but to learn more



*'House of Blues', blooming early in the Sculpture Garden. Photo by Pamela Buckman.*

## GNOIS On The Web

[www.louisianairisgnois.com](http://www.louisianairisgnois.com)

[www.facebook.com/GreaterNewOrleansIrisSociety](https://www.facebook.com/GreaterNewOrleansIrisSociety)

[www.zydecoirises.com](http://www.zydecoirises.com)

about them.

The setting is gorgeous with Live Oaks, fascinating sculptures, and irises all along the winding lagoon. Coincidentally – for those who read the long article that begins on page 10 – that portion of the City Park lagoon system is the spot where the first Rainbow Memorial was dedicated in the 1930s.

The Festival will also feature a special program on flower arranging in the Auditorium in the Museum of Art across the street. From 1:00 to 2:00 PM, Dr. Jim DelPrince of the Mississippi State University Coastal Research and Extension Center will talk, demonstrate and entertain with his presentation “Arranging Irises Off The Cuff.”

For those with a serious iris habit, a training program for irises judges will be held prior to the actual opening of the Festival. MJ Urist of Tully, NY, the owner of Louisiana Iris Gardens ([www.louisianairisgardens.com](http://www.louisianairisgardens.com)), will teach the session. Members of the public are welcome to sit in, but pre-registration is required. Contact GNOIS President Eileen Hollander, [eehollan@bellsouth.net](mailto:eehollan@bellsouth.net).

All these iris events are free of charge, including admission to Longue Vue for the meeting. There is never a charge for admission to the Sculpture Garden.

Watch for any updated information on the GNOIS website and Facebook page, addresses on page one.

## TIME TO JOIN FOR 2017

**GNOIS membership runs on a calendar year basis, and it is time to renew for 2017. Dues are \$10 per year for an individual or a family. Send to:**

**Calvin Lopes, Treasurer**

**P. O. Box 872051**

**New Orleans, LA 70187-2051**

**A membership form is provided on the last page. Be sure to include an email address so you can be on the mailing list to receive this newsletter and other information.**

## In the upcoming Fleur de Lis



The next issue of the *Fleur de Lis*, the magazine of the Society for Louisiana Irises, will be published within a few weeks. SLI members receive the *Fleur* as one benefit of their membership.

The issue will feature a number of articles of interest to GNOIS members:

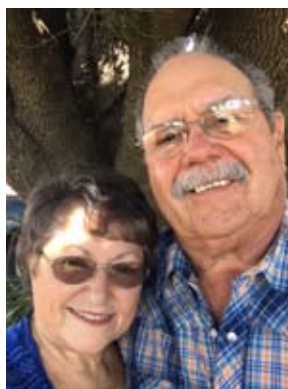
- An article from the archives by the late Joseph Mertzweiler on his approach to reworking his iris beds, “Lessons From The Great Iris Disaster of 1980”.
- “Rising From The Floods”, by Joe Musacchia with MJ Urist, on the progress of Joe’s hybridizing program. Lots of great color pictures!
- “A Few Favorites” from Ron Killingsworth. Ron focuses on three irises he likes, a tough job since he grows and really likes many. Readers are invited to submit their own favorites for what hopefully will be a regular feature in the *Fleur*.
- A summary of blog entries on Louisiana irises included over several years in the American Iris Society’s blog, “World of Irises”. They are still online and available to the public.
- A review of two books on irises by Patrick O’Connor
- Some winning pictures of Louisiana irises from the American Iris Society’s annual Photo Contest.
- The regular feature “Briarwood Reflections” from the folks at the Caroline Dormon Nature Preserve in Saline, Louisiana. Briarwood is a fabulous place, and it houses a unique Louisiana iris collection that dates back many years. A great destination for a visit!

GNOIS members are encouraged to join the Society for Louisiana Irises. A membership form can be found at the end of this issue of *Bayou and Marsh*.

# Cindy Dufrene To Talk Soil at GNOIS Meeting

GNOIS member Cindy Dufrene, proprietor of Cindy's Louisiana Iris in Carriere, Mississippi, will present a program at the meeting on Saturday, February 18. Cindy grows irises beautifully in her nursery, and it will be interesting to hear about her approach and compare it to that of others. The program is entitled, "It's All About Soil For Optimum Louisiana Iris Growth".

Cindy has begun to register her new hybrids, which will be offered for sale on her website. [www.cindyslouisianairis.com](http://www.cindyslouisianairis.com) The site can also be found by googling "Louisiana iris." A revamped website should be



*Cindy and Harry Dufrene*



*Plants in bloom at Cindy's Louisiana Iris Garden in Carriere MS.*

up by the end of the month, but the old site is available for browsing. Cindy and her husband Harry are co-owners of the mail order nursery. In the past, Cindy often sold irises on eBay.

She has generously agreed to make some of her new irises available for the Iris Raffle to be held at the meeting on the 18th. The beautiful flowers below are among the eight she has registered.

In addition to introducing her own irises into commerce, Cindy is offering several irises hybridized by GNOIS members Benny Trahan and Roland Guidry.



*'Jingleheimer'*



*'Pearl River Princess'*



*'Choctaw Sky'*

## *Bayou and Marsh*

NEWSLETTER OF THE  
GREATER NEW ORLEANS IRIS SOCIETY

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Tyrone Foreman New Orleans  
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Gary Salathe Madisonville  
Sue Anthony Jefferson

### NEWSLETTER

#### Patrick O'Connor

4628 Newlands St. Metairie, LA 70808  
504-343-1399 [pfoconnor@cox.net](mailto:pfoconnor@cox.net)

## Getting to Longue Vue

Longue Vue is easy to find. From I-10, exit at City Park/Metairie Road and take Metairie Road in the direction away from the Park. There will be a golf course on the left and Metairie Lawn Cemetery on the right. Within a half mile, as soon as it becomes residential, look for Bamboo Road on the left. It is a narrow little street that is easy to miss. If you come to the bridge over a canal, you've just missed it. Once on Bamboo Rd., Longue Vue is on the left.

When you enter Longue Vue, you will wind to a courtyard with a drive to the left leading directly to the House. Take that drive and then circle left around the House to a parking area in back. The Playhouse, where the meeting will be held, is just off the parking area.

# 2018 National Conventions: Our Focus In Year Ahead

Several years ago, GNOIS made a leap of faith. So did the American Iris Society.

AIS, which had never held a national convention outside of bearded iris country, was looking to make changes in its conventions, both to reduce their length and to visit areas where other types of irises are popular. It extended an invitation for GNOIS to host the 2018 AIS National Convention in a joint arrangement with the Society for Louisiana Irises. The two conventions were not to be simultaneous, but they would overlap and share some activities, including a dinner and the garden tours.

An AIS convention where bearded irises do not grow is something of an experiment, but GNOIS had just had a successful experience in 2014 hosting the SLI convention. We were not raw novices at hosting conventions, and we have the advantage of living in a city that is a major tourist attraction. For better or worse, we committed.

And in fact a great deal of the preparatory work is done. Convention co-chairs are in place; Joe Musacchia on behalf of GNOIS and Paul Gossett of Tulsa for AIS. Guest irises were requested several years ago, and they are already planted in tour gardens.

The Garden Tours will take us around South Louisiana, not just New Orleans. There will be Guest Iris plantings at the Sydney and Walda Besthoff Sculpture Garden, and other tour stops are set at Gary Salathe's "A Louisiana Pond" in Madisonville, at the LSU AgCenter Hammond Research Station, and the Baton Rouge Botanic Garden.

In addition, visits will be made to Longue Vue House and Gardens, Burden Museum and Gardens in Baton Rouge, and, hopefully, the GNOIS planting in City Park that is part of the Louisiana Iris Species Preservation Project. Plus, visitors will be free to go on their own to such places as the New Orleans Botanical Garden and other horticultural attractions in the City.

There will be a fair number of tasks that GNOIS will need to undertake to support convention activities. Table decorations for several dinners will need to be created and placed. Registration and information tables will need to be manned over several days. The SLI convention will have its own Silent Auction that is exceedingly important to the Society's ability to publish its magazine *Fleur de*

*Lis* on a quarterly basis, and we will need to help with that.

Many of the jobs can be handled well in advance. With good planning and steady work, we can avoid being jammed during the convention itself, and can take full advantage of the fun parts. We will be graced with nice and knowledgeable visitors from around the country, gardeners all, and we should have ample time to visit, learn, and show off our area and our irises.



*Louisiana irises at the LSU Hammond Research Station which will be one of the tour gardens at the 2018 American Iris Society and Society for Louisiana Irises conventions. The irises, including a large number of guest irises, are distributed among several beds such as this.*

## GNOIS SCHEDULE

Saturday, Mar 11 9 AM - Noon	Membership Meeting	Longue Vue in the Playhouse
Thursday, April 6 4-6 PM	Louisiana Iris Day	Wild Garden, Longue Vue
Sunday, April 9 10 AM - 5 PM	Louisiana Iris Rainbow Festival	Sydney and Walda Besthoff Sculpture Garden
April 27 -29	Society for Louisiana Irises Convention and Show	Dallas
Saturday, June 24 Noon - 4PM	Membership Meeting	Longue Vue
Saturday, August 19 9 AM - Noon	Membership Meeting	Longue Vue
Saturday, September 30 9 AM - Noon	Membership Meeting	Longue Vue
Saturday, October 21 9 AM - Noon	Annual Louisiana Iris Sale	Longue Vue



# **Louisiana Iris** **Rainbow** **Festival**

**Sydney and Walda Besthoff  
Sculpture Garden**

**City Park, New Orleans  
Sunday, April 9, 10 AM - 5 PM**

**Judges Training by MJ Urist (before  
opening)**

**“Arranging Irises Off The Cuff” by  
Dr. Jim DelPrince, MSU Coastal Re-  
search and Extension Center, NOMA  
Auditorium 1-2 PM**

**Irises in the garden and on display**

**Music, Information, Sale Irises at  
10AM until gone!**

# **LOUISIANA IRIS DAY AT LONGUE VUE**

**Wild Garden  
Longue Vue House and Gardens**

**Thursday**

**April 6, 2017**

**4-6 PM**

**Refreshments, Music, Irises  
Free!**



# GNOIS Projects Moving Forward

Sometimes no one is more surprised than we are at the number of projects that GNOIS and its members have going and the progress they are making. The various projects all relate in some way to spreading irises in the community, and they are driven both by members' enthusiasm and by requests from people who have heard about our efforts.

## Species Preservation

The most ambitious of our enterprises is the Louisiana Iris Species Preservation Project. Begun as an initiative of the Society for Louisiana Irises, GNOIS has assumed a major role in its administration. The objective is to obtain, propagate and distribute the many forms of the five native species. The environment of our native irises has been under threat from both development and natural phenomena of many kinds over an extended period. That was already the case in the 1920s when the wild Louisiana irises were recognized as an excellent horticultural subject.

The Project has developed a list of well over 100 different forms of the species, and we have begun growing them in retention ponds, or "iris paddies," on "the island" in City Park. We have around eight such paddies now, measuring four feet wide and of varying lengths. The irises are potted and sit in a few inches of water.

There are some species forms that we have yet to obtain, but the Project is well ahead of schedule due to a better than expected level of enthusiasm and donations of plants. Benny Trahan of Slidell provided many, and Buddy Manuel of Mandeville gave a huge donation of each of the four species found in Louisiana. The plants are multiplying very well, and in a year we should be able to divide and provide starts to a number of Stewards who will take responsibility for maintaining the plants going forward.

The need to preserve the wild irises has been long recognized, but the Species Preservation Project is the first

systematic effort to do so that involves a long range plan and an organizational commitment to sustain the effort.

## Reintroduction of Wild Irises

GNOIS member Gary Salathe of Madisonville has initiated any number of projects that involve reintroducing *I. giganteaerulea* into areas where it once grew or where the habitat is suitable. Gary has a large number of *giganteaerulea*s in his "A Louisiana Pond", and for seed stock he is growing more other ponds near his home.

Gary has planted irises, including some *I. virginica* and Louisiana cultivars in area detention ponds which are numerous on the Northshore. On behalf of GNOIS, he has donated irises to Common Ground Relief, a New Orleans non profit dedicated to post-Katrina rebuilding and wetland restoration. Common Ground has a nursery in the Lower Ninth Ward in which donated plants are multiplied before placement in the wild.

## Kenner Park

Richard Drouant of Kenner has initiated an effort to assess the suitability of Louisiana irises for the replanting of a wetland area in Kenner City Park at Loyola and Vintage. Working through Councilman Dominick Impastato, Richard will be meeting with city staff involved in the master plan for the Park to determine how Louisiana irises can be incorporated.

The Park is marked by a meandering pond with shallow banks that should be an excellent spot for Louisianas. Wild and overgrown areas have been cleared,

but replanting has not yet begun.

## Other Projects

GNOIS has been involved in additional projects. Some are ongoing, and the GNOIS contribution to others has been completed. They include:

- St. Paul's School in Covington (Linda Trahan)
- Levee Exhibition Garden in New Orleans (Calla Victoria)
- Guerilla Garden, Lower Ninth Ward, N. O. (Gary Salathe)
- Joe Brown Park Bio Swale, New Orleans East (Connie Uddo)
- Stennis Space Center Planters (Eileen Hollander)
- Palmer Park, N.O. (Eileen Hollander and Anne Fuselier)
- Veterans Cemetery, Slidell (Richard and Carol Drouant)
- Heritage Park, Slidell (Benny Trahan)
- N.O. Botanical Garden (Tyrone Foreman)

GNOIS values member participation in its iris projects. New initiatives are especially welcome.



**The Iris Society of Dallas**  
Invite you to attend the

**Society for Louisiana Irises Convention**

**APRIL  
20<sup>th</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup>  
2017**

6 gardens on tour -  
judges training  
**Programs Featuring  
Louisiana Irises  
LOUISIANA IRIS SHOW**

[www.irises-dallas.org](http://www.irises-dallas.org)  
For information please call  
(214) 352-2191

# SCENES FROM THE SALE

October is Iris Sale Month and the best opportunity to find new varieties.

Photos by Richard Drouant



*If the fall sunflowers (*Helianthus angustifolius*) are in bloom in the Wild Garden, it is probably time for the Annual Iris Sale at Longue Vue.*



*Thanks to those who bought irises and to our members who worked to make the sale a success. Many of you are shown here, including Roland Guidry, Linda Trahan, Eileen Hollander, Sherry Frohlich, Calvin Lopes, Fred Noggerath, Gary Salathe, Pat and Allen Mocklin, Tyrone Foreman, Patrick O'Connor, Sue Anthony, Benny Trahan. Lorrie Brown, Paul Pastorek and Cindy and Harry Dufrene seem to have avoided the photographer. Possibly others as well.*



*Sherry Frohlich writing a cultivar name on a leaf blade.*



*Benny Trahan*





# Raffle!

## Don't forget!

Our annual Iris Raffle will be held at the GNOIS meeting this Saturday, February 18.

Good stuff will be offered!



# Something To See

**In Lafreniere Park in Metairie, you will see Louisiana irises displayed as you have never seen them before.**

**S**everal years ago the large, multi-function park in Jefferson Parish installed a series of floating “islands” anchored in part by Louisiana irises. They really are more like long, linear floating highways of vegetation. The purpose of the project was to help clean the water in a Park that is home to a remarkably large and diverse population of water birds.

The selection of irises for the planting does not emphasize modern cultivars, although there may be a few. There are species forms there and older looking irises that are probably not identifiable. There are issues with protection from nutria and turtles. The plantings are surrounded by fencing, but like other borders that come to mind, ways can be found to get through. It is not clear that they damage the irises, however.

GNOIS has much to learn from and about this project. Look for more attention to Lafreniere Park in the future.



Photo by Richard Drouant



# ROOTS!

Greater New Orleans Iris Society members enjoy Louisiana irises for many reasons. Some of us are just gardeners who recognize the irises as gorgeous flowers well adapted to landscapes in the New Orleans area, across the Gulf South and well beyond. We have prominently incorporated Louisiana irises into our gardens.

A few of us are iris specialists and hobbyists who assemble impressive collections of cultivars. We enjoy displaying the many modern hybrid irises not only in our gardens but in formal shows where competition for ribbons and public education both are goals. There even are several hybridizers among us who are committed to creating the new varieties by cross pollinating, germinating, planting, evaluating, selecting and naming the best irises for introduction into commerce.

Lastly, many value Louisiana irises as native plants of special significance to the State and other areas where they naturally occur. We see them as valuable parts of our natural heritage, worthy of appreciation, protection, and preservation. We often find the wild forms as beautiful as any hybrid and are happy to grow them for their graceful, natural flowers even without benefit of ruffles, flourishes or other embellishments.

Happily, most of our members fall into more than one of these categories. Louisiana irises are appreciated on all levels, and the result is an iris club that probably is more diverse in its interests than comparable organizations elsewhere. Through our programs and publications we need to nourish all these pursuits.

This issue of the *Bayou and Marsh* is weighted on the last among them, although some might

diate sensation. The over-the-top response in 1930s New Orleans demonstrates the passions that the irises engendered. For many today, it was reading about the excitement of the early period that hooked them on Louisiana irises.

The article that follows may be a lot to digest if you are new to the subject. There is a recurring cast of characters, and it is important to get a fix on their roles. Dr. John K. Small, Percy Viosca and

many other founding fathers and mothers who populate the tale were seminal figures in the recognition of Louisiana irises not just in New Orleans but for the entire country.

Since its creation in 1941, the publications of the Society for Louisiana Irises have carried the torch of Louisiana iris history. The Society has fostered an appreciation of the rather amazing story of the transition

of Louisiana irises from unknown wildflowers to widely valued subjects of horticulture. As its Species Preservation Project demonstrates, the Society retains much of the enthusiasm of an earlier day.

Through *Bayou and Marsh*, GNOIS plans to continue the story. It will be in smaller chunks than the long article in this issue. And there will be an appropriate balance with other aspects of Louisiana iris interest.



Dr. John K. Small and associates with the "Weed Wagon" used in collecting expeditions in Louisiana and Florida. Source: State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory.

say it falls into an additional category, organizational history. It does serve up a heavy dose of iris history specific to the New Orleans area, but the story in the following article, adapted and reprinted from the Society for Louisiana Irises magazine *Fleur de Lis* in Winter 2012, is directly linked to the public reaction to the "discovery" of Louisiana irises in the period beginning in the mid 1920s. These wild plants, previously unknown in horticulture, became an imme-

# THE LOUISIANA IRIS CONSERVATION SOCIETY

## A MISSING CHAPTER IN OUR HISTORY

BY PATRICK O'CONNOR

The discovery of Louisiana irises is a familiar story. At least it is an accessible one, with many individual pieces having been recounted in Society publications over the years.

It is not a dry tale either. The accounts of the early days when iris enthusiasts tromped through swamps and bogs in search of different colors, novel forms and, many thought, new species, often captured the imagination of those new to Louisiana irises. The stories of the early collectors and their finds were infectious, and for many they contributed as much to building interest in Louisianas as growing the plants themselves.

The elements of Louisiana iris history were nicely and thoroughly assembled by Richard Goula in his contribution to SLI's book on Louisiana irises, although only in the first edition was Dick credited with his work.<sup>1</sup> Tom Dillard's article in the *Fleur de Lis* also was an excellent account,<sup>2</sup> and the Society's Special Publications often have been windows into the early years. In addition, the occasional reproduction of older articles in the *Fleur de Lis* has kept our history front and center.

The cast of characters is well known – John K. Small, Mary Swords DeBaillon, W. B. MacMillan, Ira S. Nelson, Caroline Dormon, Percy Viosca, and many, many others. Over the years, SLI has assembled an impressive amount of information on our luminaries and their contributions.

There is a gap in the story, however. Few people are aware that there was an organization – the Louisiana Iris Conservation Society, first named simply the Louisiana Iris Society – that predated SLI. Keep in mind that our current Society for Louisiana Irises was founded in 1941, but the heavy lifting of modern discovery of these irises

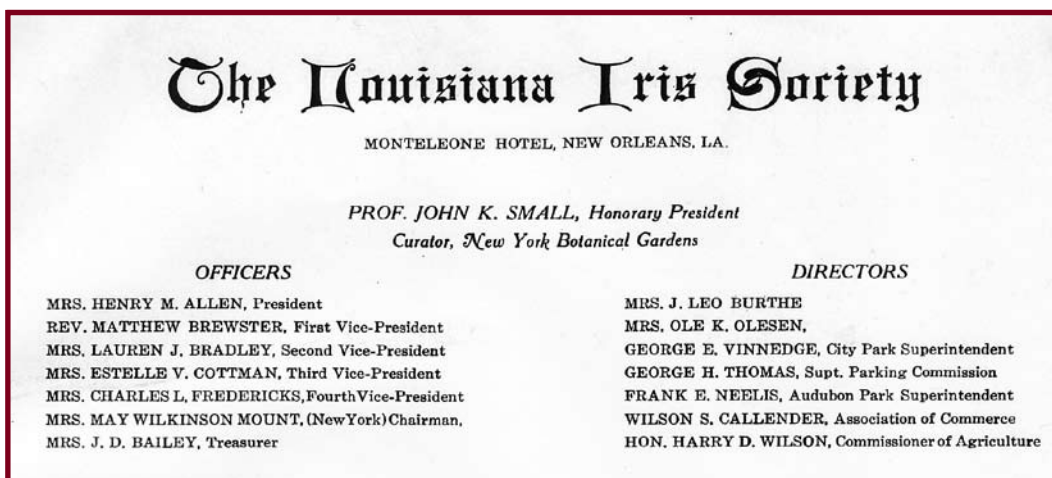
began in the mid-1920s when Dr. John K. Small, Curator of the New York Botanical Garden, reportedly traveling by train from Florida, spotted fields of irises in what is now developed, urban New Orleans.

In fact, individuals in Louisiana had already discovered the irises when Small's train rolled through. The renowned naturalist, conservationist and artist Caroline Dormon reported that she first came to appreciate the plants in 1920 on a visit to a friend in Morgan City where the tall blues abound.<sup>3</sup>

In 1921, Percy Viosca, a "pre-eminent herpetologist" began a career with the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries in which he "documented the coastal landscape" as he traveled doing

work that "included mosquito control, riparian and marshland studies, flood control, taxonomic work with native Louisiana irises, newts and snakes, culture of crawfish, and environmental impact of oil refinery practices."<sup>4</sup> A *Times-Picayune* article in 1933 cites the J. H. Montreuil Garden on Tonti Street, noting that the garden "has grown irises for 60 years...."<sup>5</sup> There are other examples of early local familiarity with Louisiana's native irises, but Dr. Small is properly credited as the catalyst and driver of their national recognition.

In a nutshell, beginning in 1926 Dr. Small returned to Louisiana each year until around 1932 to study the irises. He collected specimens, named an astounding number of "species," and publicized the irises with beautiful color plates by artist Mary Eaton in *Addisonia*, the publication of the N.Y. Botanical Garden. Small continued to champion and promote irises well into the 1930s in journal articles and public lectures, and part of this effort was in association with the Louisiana Iris Conservation Society which had formed in New Orleans. It is highly probable,



in fact, that Small engineered its creation.

SLI accounts of the early “collecting days” of the 1920s and 1930s prior to its own birth in 1941 emphasize the contribution of Small and others. That era was not only important, it was still a fresh memory when SLI was born. But I have never seen mention in SLI publications of the Louisiana Iris Conservation Society.<sup>6</sup> It is an odd omission since there was at least some overlap in early membership.<sup>7</sup> Even more, the Conservation Society was active throughout much of the 1930s in promoting Louisiana irises to a degree that I doubt has been surpassed in intensity by any organization.

I first learned about the Louisiana Iris Conservation Society through Mark Schexnayder of New Orleans. Mark shared a number documents he found in the Tulane Library Special Collection. They consisted of several articles from the *Times-Picayune*, New Orleans then-daily morning newspaper, and a program and a special bulletin of the Conservation Society associated with a 1939 memorial service for Dr. Small held at Tulane University after his death in 1938.

These documents put the Conservation Society on my radar as something to research, but I never took the next step. Then last year I learned that the *Times-Picayune* archives had been digitized and made available for online searches by topic back into the 1800s. For forty bucks, one could locate and print 200 pages. I was off.

Amazingly, I found so many “hits” on “irises”, on Dr. Small, and on the Conservation Society, its leaders and activities that I had to spend another forty dollars. I wound up with a thick binder of pages arranged by date. On most of the pages the relevant article was just a couple of paragraphs in length, often a notice of meetings and programs, but many were more substantial. In aggregate, I had in my hands a virtual chronology of the organization, if not an actual history, at varying levels, sometimes very high but occasionally revealing considerable detail about the activities and personalities involved.

Many of the articles were among general news, but quite a few were contained in the *Times-Picayune*’s weekly gardening column penned by the anonymous “Lady Banksia.” Lady Banksia’s columns were most interesting and remain so today, ranging broadly over

many horticultural topics. They often included tidbits on Louisiana irises and activities but occasionally longer, substantive iris topics as well.

There were gaps, of course, and things I still wonder about, particularly the Conservation Society’s eventual demise. Above all, I was astonished that a newspaper would provide so much coverage of an iris organization. What other iris society has generated over 200 articles in a major newspaper over an eight year period? What was going on here?

### **The Louisiana Iris Conservation Society**

The first reference in the *Times-Picayune* to an iris organization was carried on December 1, 1931. It was in a simple one paragraph meeting notice headed, “Speeches To Be Made At Iris Society Meet.”<sup>8</sup> This appears to have been the organizational meeting of the Society.

It was evident, however, that Dr. Small had previously been at work in the area promoting his two principal themes: that Louisiana offered the widest assortment of irises in the world **and** that they were endangered by development. In an April 1929 editorial in the *Times-Picayune*, entitled “Our Louisiana Irises,” the writer notes that

Small had found “our neighborhood of New Orleans the finest region in all the United States for the collection of the wild iris.” And the paper supported his fear that the irises were endangered, noting: “It was only a few years before the World war that the tract of ground now built upon by Newcomb College was abandoned pasture land upon which the wild iris flourished with especial luxuriance.” The editorial also expressed hope that the many plants that Small transported back to New York to grow in his Botanical Garden would not “lose any of their native charm in new and maybe unsympathetic surroundings.”<sup>9</sup>

### **May Wilkinson Mount, “Founder, Executive Secretary and Board Chair”**

May Wilkinson Mount likely will be a new name to those with an active interest in the history of Louisiana irises. Because few surviving documents from the Louisiana Iris Conservation Society have been found, this account is based in large part upon inference from the press coverage and a few letters in the



*May Wilkinson Mount*

Archive at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette.

There is no doubt, however, that May Wilkinson Mount was the driving local force behind the organization, at least until 1937. A letter from Mrs. Mount to Mrs. B. S. Nelson of New Orleans after Mrs. Nelson was unable to attend the organizational meeting contains a liberal dose of insight into the Society.<sup>10</sup> In the letter, Mrs. Mount appealed to Mary Nelson to attend the next meeting, to become a member of the Board of Directors, and to accept the position of Recording Secretary. Based on the suggestion of the president Mrs. Henry M. Allen, Mrs. Mount told Mrs. Nelson, “you were one of the first two persons (and your sister was the other) to whom I wrote when I planned the organization.”

Mrs. Mount continues: “We have seventy members in the club and more are promised. But I have not tried to create a membership of numbers, only of people who actually grow irises or those whose influence and cooperation will be of advantage to our cause.” “It does seem so very important for you to be a leader in this club when you are so widely known as a great authority on the subject of iris, and Mrs. Burthe<sup>11</sup> tells me that you have worked among your friends for ten years to get them interested in making this ‘the Iris City.’” And: “The first meeting was intended to awaken interest through good public speakers, and to arouse the interest of the press ....”, but the next, which Mrs. Mount appealed to Mrs. Nelson to attend, will “turn to a discussion of how best to further the plans of iris lovers of New Orleans; how to cooperate with the City Beautification committee”; and how to handle a January meeting with “scientific horticulturists from the North – when Professor Small writes he probably will be joining us....”

Mrs. Mount (who was Executive Secretary and Board Chair but not President) appeared to run an organization under a model in which presidents, if not ceremonial, were individuals prominent in the community in some capacity but who were supported by a prestigious board, generous patrons and dedicated individuals doing the work of the Society. If one reads in the newspaper coverage of who attended meetings, who was elected as officers, and who headed up committees, it is clear that the Society had reached out and brought in many individuals active in other capacities, in key organizations, in local offices, in state agencies. John K. Small even held a position of sorts, “Honorary President-General.”

Finally, ending any reasonable doubt about who was in charge, the official headquarters of the Society and the site of all the meetings and activities was the Monteleone Hotel, where Mrs. Mount lived.

Two articles in the *Times-Picayune* in particular elevated

an understanding of club dynamics. The first was a report in October 1934 of the presentation of a loving cup by the New Orleans Horticultural Society to Lady Banksia in appreciation for her service in writing garden articles in the *Times-Picayune*. Here it was revealed that Lady Banksia was May Wilkinson Mount. The founder of the Society was also the garden editor of the newspaper.<sup>12</sup>

The second article that brought the Conservation Society into sharper focus was Mrs. Mount’s obituary in 1943. It speaks for itself:

“Member of a prominent Louisiana family, Mrs. Mount early in life moved to New York City from her plantation home in Plaquemines parish with her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Biddle Wilkinson, and became engaged in newspaper work there.

“Assuming a post with the *New York World*, she remained with the newspaper about 15 years, in the interval becoming one of the first women syndicate writers in the nation. There she married P. W. Mount, New York newspaperman who later was connected with *The New Orleans States*.

“While with the *World*, Mrs. Mount gained distinction as an interviewer, forming many close friendships with celebrities of the day that persisted into later life....

“Returning to New Orleans at the death of her husband over 10 years ago, Mrs. Mount became active as a garden writer here. She evinced particular interest in the Louisiana iris, and gained wide recognition in her efforts to popularize the flower throughout the country.”<sup>13</sup>

At this point, I did not have to be slapped hard to dredge up an hypothesis: May Wilkinson Mount knew Dr. John K. Small, Curator of the New York Botanical Garden, while living in New York, and after her move back to Louisiana, the two worked together to create and direct the Louisiana Iris Conservation Society.

I actually already had in my hands confirmation that Wilkinson and Small were acquainted in New York. One of the documents given me by Mark Schexnayder – but not fully digested or appreciated until well after reading the Mount obituary – was a special Society bulletin at the time of the memorial service for Dr. Small in 1939. In reviewing the purpose of the Society, the document says: “...Dr. Small, who knew Mrs. Mount, writer and lecturer in New York, told her that the most beautiful species of iris in Louisiana were being destroyed by natural city ex-

pansion around New Orleans. He interested her in saving what were left, placing them in a safe place and preserving them for the benefit of future generations.”<sup>14</sup>

If one wanted bring to bear the optimal resources to build an iris organization at the time, it would be hard to top Dr. John K. Small and a friend and accomplished journalist placed as garden editor of New Orleans’ major daily newspaper, who, by the way, had a knack for befriending celebrities. So, what did the Small-Mount combination wrought?

### **Projects of the Louisiana Iris Conservation Society**

The Louisiana Iris Conservation Society could not be accused of failure due to aiming too low. Undoubtedly, many of their activities were of a kind with those of any iris organization. Annual sales, for example. Seminars

on culture and garden design. Garden tours. Iris plantings as part of beautification projects. But the tone, tenor and scale of the Society’s projects were often unique, and there were a few activities that would seem alien to today’s iris societies, although understandable in the Great Depression; specifically, the sponsorship of a “sorority dance” to raise funds to aid unemployed individuals who had applied to the American Legion for assistance. Or securing unused City Park property on which the unemployed could plant and grow out irises they had collected in order to sell them for some income later.<sup>15</sup>

**The Rainbow Memorials.** Beautification projects were one of two major thrusts of the Society, and they took two forms. The first was a series of “Rainbow Memorials” to commemorate famous Louisiana poets, musicians and

## **The Dedication of the Pearl Rivers Rainbow Memorial**

The dedication of the Pearl Rivers Rainbow Memorial was no happenstance event. New Orleans Mayor T. Semmes Walmsley had declared the date (April 20) as “Louisiana Iris Day” in perpetuity. A platform was constructed in City Park to accommodate speakers and honored guests.

Poems by the honoree Eliza Poitevent Nicholson, who wrote under the name Pearl Rivers, were read. Mrs. Nicholson had served as publisher of *The Picayune*, a predecessor of the *Times Picayune* and was described as a “pioneer in the field of woman journalism.” She “took a bankrupt daily and so built it up that at the time of her death it was the most influential paper in the South.” A “great mind of the Old South”, one speaker said.

Percy Viosca served as Master of Ceremonies and the benediction was given by the Rev. Matthew Brewster, Rector of St. Andrews Episcopal Church and First Vice President of the Iris Society. Music was furnished by the Alcee Fortier Boys High School band, by Milwaukee tenor K. F. Johnson who sang Joyce Kilmer’s “The Tree”, and by the Choral Union of the Women’s Auxiliary, American Legion Post 114.

According to the *Times Picayune*, “The scene of the dedication ceremonies Wednesday was one of picturesque beauty. Sunshine slanted through branches of giant oak trees upon the heads of the honor guests who were seated on a platform, and on the hundreds of persons who sat out under the trees.”

In a special section, roped off by lavender ribbon, sat a “Guard of Honor,” sixteen “young girls” of New Orleans with the first name “Iris.” They were: Iris Jordan, Iris Hoffman, Iris O’Dowd, Iris Luteman, Iris Ball, Iris Boutillier, Iris Rebenne, Iris Daussue, Iris Frisch, Iris Savarese, Iris Rose, Iris Heffner, Iris Stokees, Iris Riggs, Iris Garr, and Iris Lourdes.

At the end of the ceremonies, “the crowd dispersed in groups to visit the park lagoon which the irises border.” The Rainbow Memorial itself was the gift of irises which the Iris Society had placed around the lagoon



*Master of Ceremonies Percy Viosca, Jr. presenting a vase of irises to Mrs. Elizabeth M. Gilmer, a friend of Pearl Rivers and a writer for The Picayune who became nationally famous under her pen name of Dorothy Dix.*

artists. At least three of four planned Rainbow Memorials were created. Each consisted of a large-to-massive number of irises planted in public gardens or other public locations, designed both to beautify and to conserve the irises by removing them from the path of development. Lady Banksia reported in February 1932 that the “Louisiana Iris Society has held innumerable small iris hunts which brought in thousands of iris” in preparation for the initial Rainbow Memorial.<sup>16</sup>

The first, most elaborate and well-publicized Rainbow Memorial was for Eliza Poitevent Nicholson, a poet who wrote under the name Pearl Rivers (see sidebar). Mrs. Nicholson also had been a prominent newspaper woman in New Orleans. Based upon the comments of her many admirers, the choice of Pearl Rivers undoubtedly was highly deserved, and it was also a master stroke of public relations, linking the Iris Society further with the city’s morning newspaper. And, the dedication, it seems, was a grand event.

The second Rainbow Memorial was in Audubon Park and dedicated to another Louisiana poet, Mary Ashley Townsend “author of ‘Down The Bayou’ and other poems of Louisiana.”<sup>17</sup> Townsend, who wrote under the name “Xariffa” had been suggested for a Rainbow Memorial by the Association of Commerce. The Townsend Memorial featured blue and white irises.

Tulane University was asked to nominate additional individuals as recipients of Rainbow Memorials, and it chose Dr. Giuseppe Ferrata, former professor piano and composition at Newcomb College. At the time of the announcement by Dr. William Penfound, Chairman of the Tulane Botany Department, plantings for his Memorial had already begun along Bayou St. John near the Dumaine Street bridge.<sup>18</sup>

**The John K. Small State Iris Study Field.** The other major public beautification project, a particularly ambitious one in Audubon Park, was the John K. Small State Iris Study Field. The concept was to grow native irises from each of Louisiana’s 64 parishes in proximity for study and comparison. Lady Banksia reported that, “The Louisiana Iris Conservation Society has sent out an appeal to all

the parishes to represent their types of irises” in the Study Field. The project had the support of Frank Neelis, Superintendent of Audubon Park and who also was a director of the Iris Society. The Iris Field added to the many plants in the Park “around the Mary Ashley Townsend Memorial . . . where Dr. Small set out the first plants.”<sup>19</sup> Considerable progress was made on the Study Field with contributions from local people in at least 19 parishes.

#### **The School Plantings and Iris Garden Contests.**

Soon after it was organized, the Conservation Society began donating irises to “schools at which officials expressed a willingness to care for them.” In one week in April 1932 the Society’s “school planting committees” placed irises at 21 public schools.<sup>20</sup> At some point, Frank M. Carroll gave the Conservation Society 3,000 plants to distribute to the schools.<sup>21</sup>

The Society solicited donations of cups to be given as awards and arranged for the judging of school iris gardens. Society awards were given in 1932 and 1933. Beginning in 1934, the awards and judging by the Society continued but were reported as part of a larger school garden judging of which iris gardens were a category. New Orleans seems to have had a robust public school gardening program at the time directed for over twenty years by James M. McArthur, Director of School Gardens and Nature Study. In any case, school iris awards survived as a Society activity into at least the mid-1940s, long after any other signs of other Society activity ceased.

**Order of the Fleur-de-Lis.** According to its 1939 memorial bulletin, “The Order of the Fleur-de-Lis was conferred by the Society on anyone who has performed a signal services

for its help and from wholly disinterested motives.” It is not known what reward, ceremony or regalia, if any, were associated with the conferring of membership in the Order, but the practice, while hardly a major activity of the Society, was one that enlarges an understanding of the mindset and scope of the organization’s rather grandiose vision. The Small memorial bulletin names past recipients, most all prominent figures in the community, but one was the

**Iris Society Plans to Comb City for Specimens Today**

**Plants Will Be Used to Carry Out Scheme of Park Beautification**

The Louisiana Iris Society will conduct its first hunt for plants to be used in city beautification when members equipped with boots, spades and trucks assemble at the Monteleone hotel at 12:45 o'clock this afternoon to be conducted by Dr. John K. Small, curator of the New York Botanical Gardens and honorary president of the society, and Percy Viosca, Jr., director of the society. to spots were they expect to find irises.

Red and pink iris will be obtained from one section of the city, after which the party will visit the Gentilly district for the purple and rainbow-hued bloom-bearing plants. Some of the species to be sought are those believed doomed to destruction by city improvements unless replanted in other sections. All of the plants obtained will be used in park beautification. One of the parks, it is announced, has asked for a supply for one of its pools. The question of distribution, however, will be decided after the party returns.

*-Times Picayune, January 6, 1932*

General Passenger Agent of the Southern Pacific Railroad who had been especially helpful in arranging a train trip for members through iris territory to the famous Jungle Gardens at Avery Island near New Iberia.<sup>22</sup>

**Prospects, Kudos and Disappearance.** From all appearances, the Louisiana Iris Conservation Society was a strong member of the community and a going concern with excellent prospects for the future. At a December 1931 meeting just after its organization, the topic of the program was “Enlarging the Iris Industry.” William Callender of the Association of Commerce (and future Society president) declared that “New Orleans is the center for the native iris and that the flower provides a community asset which can be made an attraction of national interest.” There was the hint of an outlook that the discovery of irises was akin to the discovery of gold, or that the economic slogan of the area might someday be “Oil, Gas, and Irises.” Insofar as sales go, I can report that oil and gas are still in the lead.

The actual good work of the Louisiana Iris Conservation Society did not go unnoticed, however. In 1935, the State Department of Conservation held a reception at the Monteleone Hotel to honor “Patrons and members .... who have ‘rendered signal and unselfish service’ to the organization.” The spokesperson for the Department cited especially the Society’s work “in the planting of irises from many parishes in Audubon Park and educational garden work in public schools.”<sup>23</sup> Back to earth and solid accomplishments, well worthy of notice in a history of Louisiana irises.

Judging from press coverage, however, the organization fell off the map in the latter part of 1936. Or, more to the point, it fell out of the newspaper. In all of 1937, the Conservation Society was mentioned in only three issues of the *Times-Picayune*, and in 1938 not at all. What had happened in large part is speculation. In 1939, the Society did come to life again in arranging the memorial service for Dr. Small. The Treasurer’s Report in the special bulletin at the time offered a strong hint of what had happened, if not why. In listing the club’s receipts, the report offered this preface and qualification: “Omitting the years 1937 – 1938, when Mrs. Mount was absent from the club ....” For whatever reason, the driving force had been absent from the driver’s seat, and activity languished. Some of

Mrs. Mount’s earlier correspondence pointed to a possible health issue. Perhaps it recurred. Or perhaps there was the kind of “falling out” that occurs in organizations. Dr. Small was terminally ill in 1937 and died in 1938. Possibly that had a bearing.



*Dr. John Kunkel Small*  
1869 - 1938

But in 1939, for the Small Memorial, Mrs. Mount was back, and as “President and Founder.” The Small Memorial appears to have been the organization’s last hurrah, but it was an elaborate one befitting Mrs. Mount’s organizational skills and the exceedingly high regard in which John K. Small was held. Dr. Small’s contributions were widely appreciated and, judging from his correspondence, he was a kind and generous individual both with his plants and the time he took to interact with those interested in irises. The participation in his memorial service is thus not surprising.

**Lessons.** Was the Louisiana Iris Conservation Society a failure? If survival is the criterion, yes. Did its beautification work endure? Not in its original form.

I don’t think one would find any signs today of the major Rainbow Memorials or the John K. Small Iris Study Field as such.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps some of the irises still circulate as pas-salong plants. Does the New York Botanical Garden still maintain the reported 10,000 irises transplanted there from Louisiana by Small and his associates? Not a chance.<sup>25</sup>

I do believe that the educational impact of the amazing burst of iris activity in the 1930s had a lasting effect. Learning about our irises is a diffuse and non-linear process, and the exposure to the plants and publicity that were a direct result of the Society’s work without a doubt flowed into the public consciousness about Louisiana irises that we know has increased so remarkably over the years.

The Louisiana Iris Conservation Society faced several problems. First, the scale of public plantings undertaken undoubtedly outstripped the resources available to maintain them. Second, the Society to a large extent was more of a civic organization and less of a plant society than would have been good for its long term health. Times and interests change – we get into distracting World Wars for example – and in New Orleans the civic layer driven by local iris pride and aggressive leadership peeled away. The dirt-under-the-nails gardeners retained their interest, even if not the ability to sustain the organization. Quite a few of them made it into SLI, which, we can hope, is designed to persist for the ages.

# The Louisiana Iris Conservation Society

P. O. BOX 1037, NEW ORLEANS, LA.

## Memorial Meeting to Honor Dr. John Kunkel Small

GIBSON HALL, TULANE UNIVERSITY, SEPTEMBER 29th, 1939, 3:30 P. M.

### THE JOHN KUNKEL SMALL MEMORIAL COMMITTEE

Wm. M. Garic, past president the La. Iris Conservation Society; Marshall C. Callender, past president; Brigadier General E. A. McIlhenny, Avery Island; Marshall Ballard, Editor the Item-Tribune; Nicholas Bauer, Superintendent of Education; Harry D. Wilson, Commissioner of Agriculture; Andre Lafargue, attorney, decorated by France; General Allison Owen, president the Parkway Commission; State Forester V. H. Sonderegger; Frank E. Neelis, superintendent Audubon Park; Col. R. E. E. DeMontluzin, Mrs. Donald Rafferty, president of the Federation of Garden Clubs, of Mississippi, who are patrons of the iris society; H. Van R. Chase, Association of Commerce, James P. Guillot, secretary of State Conservation; Harry L. Daunoy, soil conservationist; Attorney Richard B. Otero, Attorney Gaspar R. Bossetta; Prof. James M. McArthur, Director of School Gardens and Nature Study in public schools; Richard Koch, architect; Mrs. Ole K. Olsen, landscape architect; Louis Reuter, P. D. Nielsen, Jeff J. Steckler, seedmen; Mrs. Olive A. Stallings, Felix Seeger, superintendent the Parkway Commission; E. A. Farley, Peter A. Chopin, C. W. Eichling, Sr., Frank Reyes, president the Horticultural Society; Max Scheinuk, Paul Abele, Charles Eble, Dan Newsham, Mrs. Jules F. Peytral, Jr., Harry Papworth, Leo Van Os, florists; Dr. C. V. Kraft, owner the Algiers Herald; Prof. Wm. T. Penfound, Dept. of Botany Tulane University; M. E. Polson, president the Floral Trail Association; Mrs. J. J. McLoughlin, chairman the John K. Small Louisiana Iris Study Field, Paul Ebeyer, rosarian; Robert Usher, librarian Howard Library; Mrs. May Wilkenson Mount, founder and president the iris society; Mrs. Jos. Burrell Simmons, Mrs. Estelle Verjie Cottman, Mrs. Bertram R. Baker, vice presidents and Miss Mae W. Barthel treasurer.

Mr. M. E. Polson, Master of ceremonies.

Mr. Frank E. Neelis, chairman of reception committee. □

General E. A. McIlhenny, Chairman of Arrangements.

Mrs. May Wilkenson Mount, program chairman.

Mrs. J. J. McLoughlin, chairman the John K. Small La. Iris Study Field.

### SPEAKERS

Organization of the Louisiana Iris Conservation Society.

Peter A. Chopin, florist, real estate developer, Always found in chairmanships of city beautification enterprises.

What the Iris Society Has Done In Teaching School Children To Conserve Wild Iris.

Prof. James M. McArthur, Director of School Gardens and Nature Study, New Orleans Public Schools.

The Floral Trail and Iris Gardens On The Trail.

M. E. Polson, president the Floral Trail Association of the Y. M. B. C.

What Dr. Small Has Done for the Botany of Louisiana

—DR. W. T. Penfound, Dept. of Botany, Tulane University.

What the Iris Society, Inspired By Dr. Small, has done to Conserve Native Wild Flowers.

Gaspar R. Bossetta, prominent attorney, who has taken an active part in civic functions, particularly those pertaining to the conservation of natural resources.

How the Work of Dr. Small and the Iris Society Have Attracted Strangers To New Orleans.

Wilson S. Callender, Secretary of Committee of 101 Membership Dept. the Association of Commerce.

How the Eminent Botanist Illustrated Devotion To Duty. Benediction.

Rev. Father O'Brien, S. J., Loyola University.

Taps—The Boy Scouts of America

### RECEPTION COMMITTEE

Hon. Frank E. Neelis, chairman.

Representatives from each large florist on the Memorial Committee or the florist, himself. Officers of the Iris Society and Mrs. Helen Grace Stanton, Mr. Albert Huber, Mrs. Jules F. Peytral, Jr., Mrs. J. H. Forcelles, Jr., and Mrs. Henry Mische.

Ushers: Boy Scouts of America.

The Louisiana Iris Conservation Society is indebted to Brigadier General E. A. McIlhenny for the generous financial assistance which made this memorial possible, and to those seedmen and florists of New Orleans whose liberality published the Society's bulletin for this occasion.

## Small, Viosca and Species Inflation

The number of actual “species” of Louisiana irises has long been an interesting and open question. Some might say controversy.

It is common in SLI for people to say that there are five recognized species today, but there are some, including scientist-types, who assert that *I. giganticaerulea* is actually *I. hexagona*, so there are only four. There are others who insist that in Florida, “*I. savannarum*”, one of Small’s designations, in fact should be regarded as a



distinct species, so we are back to five, or six depending on how you count.

In the 1920s and 1930s, when Dr. John K. Small was studying native irises in Louisiana and Florida, he was naming species right and left. How many is unclear. Richard Goula reported in our first iris book that the number was 77.<sup>1</sup> A 1931 New York Times article on Dr. Small puts the number at 96 in the New Orleans region.

In the period 1930 – 1932, Small was giving talks around New Orleans and citing upwards of 100 species. In a 1932 talk to the Louisiana Iris Conservation Society, he put the number at “more than 100 species of iris represented by 300 color varieties ... in and near New Orleans.”

In April 1934, May Wilkinson Mount, undoubtedly in a burst of massive embellishment, was quoted in the *Times-Picayune*: “According to botanical reports... there are more than 700 shades of irises and more than 200 species around New Orleans.”

In 1935, Percy Viosca, Jr., long a student of the flora of South Louisiana, published his paper “The Irises of Southeastern Louisiana: A Taxonomic and Ecological Interpretation.” Based on detailed analysis and in-depth knowledge of South Louisiana, Viosca concluded that there were only three distinct iris species of the Louisiana iris group in the area. Viosca’s view, which prevails today, was that, “The large majority of the forms de-



scribed from the same region by Small and Alexander ... and innumerable others yet undescribed, [should be interpreted] in part as variants and in part as natural hybrids.”<sup>2</sup>

It appears that Viosca was right in today’s terms, but Small apparently was operating under different standards. In an interesting letter to Mrs. B. S. Nelson of New Orleans, who apparently had written raising questions about the irises, Small wrote back, “Hybrid origin is the way to state the reason for some of the Louisiana irises; but many are not hybrids now, they have become fixed species through their long development. Of course, we find new hybrids among our discoveries, but

*Continued, next page*

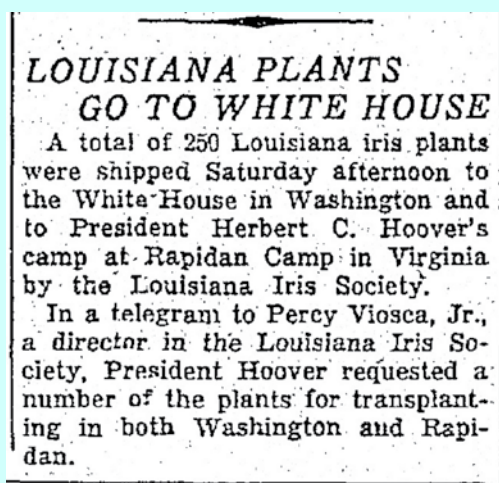
*Left: Dr. John Kunkel Small. Above: Percy Viosca, Jr.*

we do not consider these fixed. We have some of these growing here, but have not had a chance to observe their behavior.”<sup>3</sup>

In January 1932, the Iris Society executed plans to “comb the city for specimens” to be used in park beautification.<sup>4</sup> Jointly leading the hunt were Dr. John K. Small and Percy Viosca. Oh, to have been able to overhear the conversation.

In a broad sense, the species count does not matter much. No one disputed the natural variations among wild irises that have contributed to the modern hybrids. Three hundred colors? Seven hundred hues? Innumerable forms? That will do, regardless of the species buckets into which they are crammed.

Small’s “species inflation”, however, was a useful idiom through which to bring these important irises to the public’s attention. Did it work? We all know today that it did. One small item in the *Times-Picayune* in February 1932 testifies to its success back in the day:<sup>5</sup>



-Times Picayune, February 21, 1932

## Notes

- 1 Richard A. Goula, “History of Louisiana Irises” in Marie Caillet and Joseph K. Mertzweiller (eds.), *The Louisiana Iris: The History and Culture of Five Native American Species and their Hybrids*, Waco: Texas Gardener Press, 1988 p.
- 2 *AIS Bulletin*, No. 57 (April 1935), p. 5.
- 3 Letter from John K. Small to Mrs. B. S. Nelson, October 3, 1931. Collection 29, Ira Schreiber Nelson Collection, Box 10, University Archives and Acadiana Manuscripts Collection, University of Louisiana at Lafayette.
- 4 *Times-Picayune*, January 1932, p.18.
- 5 *Times-Picayune*, February 21, 1932, p. 10.

## Notes On Main Article.

- 1 Richard A. Goula, “History of Louisiana Irises, Chapter 1 in “Marie Caillet and Joseph K. Mertzweiller (eds.), *The Louisiana Iris: The History and Culture of Five Native American Species and their Hybrids*, Waco: Texas Gardener Press, 1988.
- 2 The Dillard article can be viewed online on the SLI website at: <http://www.louisianas.org/aboutsl/history.html>
- 3 Caroline Dormon, “History of the Louisiana Iris,” in Society for Louisiana Irises, 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Publication, 1966, p. 5.
- 4 [http://www.louisianadigitallibrary.org/cdm4/index\\_LSU\\_PVC.php?CISOROOT=/LSU\\_PVC](http://www.louisianadigitallibrary.org/cdm4/index_LSU_PVC.php?CISOROOT=/LSU_PVC)
- 5 *Times-Picayune*, October 15, 1933, p. 6. “One of the rare irises in it, and is native, is white with splashes of purple....”
- 6 There are several documents relating to the Conservation Society in the papers of Ira S. Nelson in the archives at the University of Louisiana in Lafayette. One was a blank piece of stationery of the Louisiana Iris Society showing its officers and directors, with the note penciled in: “This Society only lasted one or two years – 29-30 and 30-31.” Another document in the collection was a copy of a 1932 article from the *Times-Picayune* about a Conservation Society plant sale, with the penciled notation: “This was the 1<sup>st</sup> Louisiana Iris Society we formed. It planted iris in New Orleans Public School Grounds and also in Audubon and City Parks. It only lasted a few years.” Ira Nelson did not come to Louisiana until the early 1940s. Collection 29, Ira Schreiber Nelson Collection, Box 13, University Archives and Acadiana Manuscripts Collection, University of Louisiana at Lafayette.
- 7 Mrs. B. S. Nelson of New Orleans, active in the Louisiana Iris Conservation Society, was a charter member of SLI.
- 8 *Times-Picayune*, December 1, 1931, p. 16.
- 9 *Times-Picayune*, April 14, 1929, p. 32.
- 10 Letter from May Wilkinson Mount to Mrs. Mary H. Nelson, December 7, 1931. Collection 29, Ira Schreiber Nelson Collection, Box 10, University Archives and Acadiana Manuscripts Collection, University of Louisiana at Lafayette. The “Correspondence of Mary H. Nelson” is included as part of the Ira Nelson Collection, although they were not related.
- 11 Mrs. J. Leo Burthe, a Director of the Society.
- 12 *Times-Picayune*, October 3, 1934, Part 2, p. 13.
- 13 *Times-Picayune*, March 12, 1942, p. 2.
- 14 Undated, “Memorial Edition” bulletin of the Louisiana Iris Conservation Society (1939), 8 pages, unnumbered.
- 15 April 17, 1932, in column by Lady Banksia, p. 18.
- 16 *Times-Picayune*, February 21, 1932, p. 18.
- 17 *Times-Picayune*, January 27, 1932, p. 27.
- 18 *Times-Picayune*, March 29, 1932, p. 19. A fourth Rainbow Memorial to composer Louis Gottschalk was planned, but it can’t be determined from the news coverage if the project was completed. A separate committee was established for each of the Rainbow Memorials and worked independently under the umbrella of the Conservation Society.
- 19 *Times-Picayune*, May 6, 1934, p. B-5.
- 20 *Times-Picayune*, April 15, 1932, p. 21.
- 21 Frank M. Carroll was a major figure in the Society and a grower on an extensive scale. He also gave 300 plants to the John K. Small State Iris Field and plants to Milne Home and Tuberculosis Hospital. According to the 1939 memorial publication, Carroll “has given plants, seed, and personal assistance, liberally, to the club for their work in City Park.” Carroll “had an iris experiment station at Carroll’s Iris Study.”

22 Recipients included Mrs. Olive A. Stallings; Mrs. Ole K. Olsen; Mrs. Donald G. Rafferty, president of the Mississippi Federation of Garden Clubs; Mr. Richard Koch, architect and planner of a botanical garden for City Park; Hon. Yuki Sato, General Consul of Japan; Dr. Walter Schmid, Consul of Switzerland; General Allison Owen; Dr. John K. Small; Col. V. H. Sondregger; Hon. Frank E. Neelis, Superintendent of Audubon Park; John D. Bailey; and W.C. McCormick, the General Passenger Agent of the Southern Pacific R.R.

23 Times-Picayune, April 5, 1935, p. 6.

24 By coincidence, the Pearl Rivers Rainbow Memorial in City Park was located on the same site as today's Sydney and Walda Besthoff Sculpture Garden. Since Hurricane Katrina, and through the co-operation of the Besthoffs, the New Orleans Museum of Art, Sculpture

Garden Manager Pamela Buckman, and the Greater New Orleans Iris Society, Louisiana irises have today been reestablished. They line the banks of the lagoon, much as they must have in 1932 when the Rainbow Memorial was dedicated.

25 Letter to Mary Nelson on November 1939, E. J. Alexander, an associate of Dr. Small's at the N.Y. Botanical Garden said: "I am glad to you know some of you ladies are still growing these irises down there, as the whole collection that we brought back up here has been lost through neglect." Dr. Small had fallen ill in 1937 and died in 1938. Ira Schreiber Nelson Collection, Box 10, University Archives and Acadiana Manuscripts Collection, University of Louisiana at Lafayette.



# GNOIS

## JOIN OR RENEW

2017 Dues \$10 per person or household for one year, or \$25 for three years. Please make checks payable to Greater New Orleans Iris Society, or GNOIS. Please provide the names of those in the household who will participate and, if desired, email addresses for each.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

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(Please provide and email address to receive this newsletter and other information.)

**Mail to: Calvin Lopes, GNOIS Treasurer, P. O. Box 872051, New Orleans, LA 70187-22051**



# SOCIETY FOR LOUISIANA IRISES



SLI is an international organization established in 1941 to promote Louisiana irises. Members receive its quarterly magazine **Fleur de Lis** and occasional special publications. Membership is \$17 annually for an individual or \$45 triennial. Family is \$22 and \$60 respectively. **Mail to: SLI, 10325 Caddo Lake Road, Mooringsport, LA 71060**

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

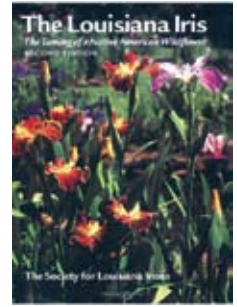
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# Society for Louisiana Irises Storefront

## ***THE LOUISIANA IRIS: THE TAMING OF AN AMERICAN WILDFLOWER***

Contributing Editors: Marie Caillet, J. Farron Campbell, Kevin C. Vaughn, and Dennis Vercher  
Details: 254 pp, 111 color photos, 5 watercolors, 21 b/w photos, 14 line drawings, 11 tables, hardcover.

This authoritative treatment by The Society for Louisiana Irises is based on the first edition published by the Society in 1988, but it is considerably expanded. It covers every aspect of the history, botany, and development of these distinctive irises, with particular emphasis on the newest hybrids, hybridizing techniques, and cultural practices, and also includes suggestions for their use in the landscape and in floral arrangements. It should serve to introduce a wider gardening public to these colorful and versatile flowers. - \$30.00



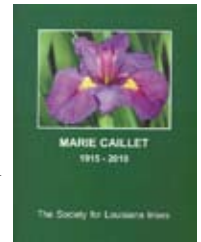
## ***Special Publication of the Society for Louisiana Irises - The History of Hybridizing (2007)***

This Special Publication of the Society for Louisiana Irises is a 100-page summary of how the "ditch irises" of Louisiana have been tamed and introduced into American gardens. Contents include informative articles on such early pioneers as Mary Swords DeBallion, Caroline Dorman, and Percy Viosca; the Shreveport and Lake Charles groups, the California hybridizers, and a wide variety of other contributors to the development of the Louisiana iris. Includes 30 color photographs of outstanding cultivars. Paperbound. - \$5.00 plus \$2.00 shipping within U.S.



## ***Special Publication of the Society for Louisiana Irises honoring Marie Caillet (1915-2010)***

This is a very high quality publication that pays tribute to Marie Caillet, a charter member of SLI, longtime editor of the SLI newsletter, and the "grandmother" of SLI for many of us. This is a 52 page 8.5 x 10 publication in full color with many pictures of Marie, species Louisiana irises, Marie Caillet Cup Winners with pictures, a listing of SLI Distinguished Merit Award winners from 1989 to 2010, and memories of Marie written by several members of SLI. - \$10 plus \$3 shipping within US



## ***Louisiana Iris Hybridizers 1985-2010***

This is a paper bound booklet consisting of 99 pages of color pictures, the Marie Caillet Cup Winners from 2001 to 2010 with color pictures, the Mary Swords DeBaillon Medal winners from 1986 to 2010 with color pictures and many articles written by the hybridizers during the period 1985 to 2010. This is a companion book for the Special Publication of 2007, which contains information on the hybridizers from the beginning to 1984. - \$5 plus \$2 shipping within US



## ***Special Publication of the Society for Louisiana Irises 1995***

This paper bound special publication, edited by Marie Caillet and Joseph Mertzweiller, consist of 86 pages and contains "a half-century of progress", information on hybridizers, the development of the tetraploid LA irises, information on LA irises in Australia, culture of LA irises and many beautiful pictures of LA irises. There is a limited supply of of this publication remaining so get them while they last. - \$5 plus \$2 shipping within US

## ***The SLI Louisiana Iris Checklist CD!***

The CD checklist is illustrated with photos of many of the cultivars and it can be displayed in three formats. It has a powerful search feature that allows you to search the checklist by cultivar attributes such as name, date of introduction, hybridizer, parentage and much more. The checklist lists names, descriptions, breeder/introducer and parentage of iris cultivars from the 1920's through the present. The iris are grouped by year of registration and/or introduction. The CD will cost \$10 for delivery to the United States,



***Any of these products & other Iris materials can be ordered from the SLI Treasurer Ron Killingsworth.  
For shipment outside US please contact Ron Killingsworth directly for pricing***

10329 Caddo Lake Road, Mooringsport, LA 71060 318-996-9969 retmiagt@gmail.com