

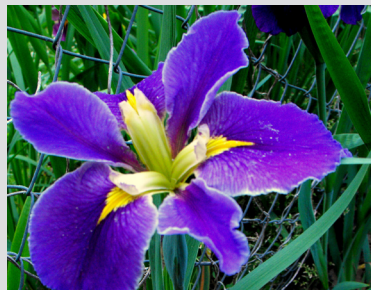
# Bayou and Marsh

No. 33

News from the Greater New Orleans Iris Society

June 2017

## Preview of the Hybridizers' Program



A few irises from the Hybridizers' Show on Saturday. From top: Cindy Dufrene's 'Nanih Waiya'; Roland Guidry's 'Celestial Rim'; Benny Trahan's 'Kathy's Clown'; Joe Musacchia's 10-04-01.

## 2018 SLI and AIS Conventions: A BIG Deal

It will be a Big Deal in April 2018 when members of the American Iris Society and the Society for Louisiana Irises from around the country begin to arrive for their annual Conventions. GNOIS is the host, and we have a major responsibility in organizing the event, assuring that it goes smoothly, and that visitors have a good experience. No pressure though; we can do this.

Look for a special issue soon devoted to the Convention.



The official Convention website is up. Just click:

<http://www.2018irisconvention.org/>

**MEETING THIS SATURDAY, JUNE 24**

**9 AM in the Playhouse  
at Longue Vue**

It has been a while since our last meeting and it is time to get back into the swing. Much of our focus at this and upcoming meetings will be the 2018 SLI and AIS Conventions to be held in New Orleans in April. A visit to South Louisiana will be a first for the American Iris Society. We hope our members will participate in this worthwhile - and fun - venture.

The meeting program will be a presentation by our GNOIS hybridizers of their

most recent registrations and introductions of Louisiana irises. Cindy Dufrene, Roland Guidry, Benny Trahan, Joe Musacchia and Patrick O'Connor will come armed with slides to show and plants to tout. It should be interesting to see what our hybridizers see as worthy additions to our existing pool of irises.

We'll also have an raffle and some door prizes. Hope to see you at the meeting!

## Bayou and Marsh

NEWSLETTER OF THE  
GREATER NEW ORLEANS IRIS SOCIETY

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## TIME TO JOIN FOR 2017

**GNOIS membership runs on a calendar year basis. 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 Summer 2017 Fleur de Lis



The next issue of the *Fleur de Lis*, the magazine of the Society for Louisiana Irises, has just been published. SLI members receive the *Fleur* as one benefit of their membership.

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

- A series of short articles on the tour gardens at the recent SLI Annual Convention in Dallas.
- An insightful and fascinating article from the American Iris Society *Bulletin* in 1932 that describes an iris collecting trip the year before by Dr. John K. Small, the Curator of the New York Botanical Garden. A botanist and taxonomist, Dr. Small's efforts from 1926 to around 1932 to catalog and identify the species and forms of irises in Louisiana were the major catalyst for the transition of these irises from virtually unknown wildflowers to prominent horticultural subjects. The author of the article, Ethel Anson S. Peckham, accompanied Small on this trip, along with several other associates, and she provides the only known firsthand description of one of Small's expeditions.
- A profile of Ethel Anson S. Peckham by Patrick O'Connor.
- A announcement of the winner of the Society's Distinguished Merit Award given to Ron Killingsworth at the Dallas convention.
- A article by GNOIS member Keith Pendergraft on his battle with garden beasts.
- Also: The winners of the Louisiana Iris Show in Dallas, the regular feature "Briarwood Reflections" from the folks at the Caroline Dormon Nature Preserve in Saline, Louisiana, and an obituary of longtime SLI member Richard Goula of Lafayette.

**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.**



## What do my irises need now?

The bloom is done and the fall dividing time is not yet at hand. What attention do Louisiana irises require in midsummer? Well, as with everything, it depends.

### Seed Pods

By right about now, any remaining stalks and seed pods from spring bloom should be removed. You might have done this a month ago or more, but, if not, it is important to do it now. Seed pods left on the plants are just about ready to reach maturity, to begin to yellow, to split open and to drop their seeds. Unless you want new hybrid irises to germinate among your existing plants, those pods should be discarded now.

The pods can be removed but the best course is to cut the entire stalk an inch or so from the ground. That spent stalk is doing the plant no good at this point, and it often looks untidy after bloom. The plants have better things to do than support old bloom stalks that will never produce another flower, so let them turn their attention to the growth of new offsets and foliage that will provide bloom next season and beyond.

Perhaps you would like to try your hand at growing a few new irises from seed. New seedlings will not be identical to their parents. It is always interesting to see what the kids look like. If you want to experiment, leave a few pods on until they just begin to yellow, or until around the Fourth of July, whichever comes first, and harvest them then. A pod that is firm can be opened by scoring it along or between several ridges, and prying it apart. There will be a dozen to as many as fifty or sixty seeds within

three compartments in a pod.

Plant seeds immediately (but keep them damp if you can't) in a pot of ordinary garden soil with the seeds covered by about three quarters an inch of the soil. Keep the pots damp but not soggy in a shady place, and germination will begin in November or when nights get a little cool. The new seedlings can be planted out in late February. There are variations of planting medium, timing and procedures that some advocate, but those described here are time-tested and will work well.

### Yellow Foliage

You will see that you have some yellow foliage on your irises. Everyone does. The amount depends on how vigorously the plants are growing at this point. If the irises are being well watered and have been fertilized, there might be only a little. It is normal, however, for the plants to shed a few leaves during the growing cycle. With less than optimum conditions, the irises can head toward, or into, a temporary dormant state, in which case you will find quite a lot of yellow leaves. Any yellowed or yellowing foliage should be removed. Removing yellow foliage will improve the appearance of the clump, but also will prevent the spread of a disease such as rust.

Irises grow by producing new leaves from the tip of the rhizome, so (barring some disease in the rhizome itself) the middle of the fan will be green and it will be the outer leaves that will eventually yellow. If a plant looks bad, you can always cut it back to within six or so inches of the ground at this time of the year. It is a good idea to leave untouched any vigorously growing green foliage in the middle of the fan.

The best general advice is to be

sure that the irises stay well watered. Given recent weather, that hardly seems like a great concern, but Louisiana irises do need to stay consistently moist for best growth and bloom. Dry periods do occur and then it is necessary to water. All is not lost if the irises go dormant; growth will begin anew in the fall, and large rhizomes will still produce bloom in the spring. Consistent moisture will assure the optimum rhizome growth, and, in the long run, more blooming plants.

Given the heat of midsummer it really is too early to begin dividing Louisiana irises. It won't kill them, but they will probably sulk until the irises' growing cycle begins in the fall. If it has been three or four years since the irises were planted or divided, division and soil replenishment is a good idea for September or October. Now would be a good time to begin planning for your beds and for all the new cultivars that you hopefully will add.

There is more good advice on Louisiana iris culture on the GNOIS website and on other sites for which you will find links. All the commercial gardens have good information on their sites, as well. Other members are happy to answer questions, so don't hesitate to ask.

### 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.

**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)



# Remember Spring?

*It was that pleasant but all-too-brief period of cool temperatures, low humidity and lots of irises. Let's review.*

## The Louisiana Iris Rainbow Festival in the Sculpture Garden



Top: Lorrie Brown, Sue Anthony, Cindy Dufrene, Sarah Post, Linda Trahan, Bridget Joseph, and Benny Trahan. Just below, Sarah Post and Bridget Joseph. Right: Roland Guidry and Carol Hartupee. Left: Sherry Frohlich and Eileen Hollander. Just above: Mark Schexnayder and Gary Salathe.



# Roadside Irises

They're still out there.



Richard Drouant



Richard Drouant



*There are far fewer places than in the past where you can see native Louisiana irises in masses, as Dr. John Small describes in articles elsewhere in this issue. But it is a treat to still find large stands, clumps, and individual irises that reflect the amazing range of colors of the wild irises. The reddish ones here are *I. fulva*, of course. The yellow form of *fulva* to the left is rare and a great find along a roadside. The blues are *I. giganteaerulea*, the tall ones that grow in the wettest spots. The white is the recessive albino form of *giganteaerulea*, unusual but not as rare as the yellow *fulva*.*



Richard Drouant



**In The Swamps**  
Look, but don't get  
too close.



*Richard Drouant captured some typically blue *giganticaeruleas*, below, but also some pink to rose ones in an area where, probably, there is some genetic intrusion by *I. fulva*. When you get out to see the irises, there are other sights as well, such as the Red Bellied Woodpecker, right. All pictures by Richard Drouant.*





# Getting Too Close

It has consequences.

*A beautiful swamp scene. A strategically placed board and cypress knee (lower left) inviting a closer view of the irises. Add intrepid photographer Linda Trahan, and you have an illustrated object lesson in proper iris behavior. Had Paul Pastorek not been able to heroically catch the camera and cell phone that Linda threw out to him, both would have been ruined and Linda would not have had the leverage to pull herself out of the muck.*





# Wild Irises In Captivity

A safer approach to appreciating nature.



*I. giganteaerulea*, *I. nelsonii* and *I. giganteaerulea* 'Barbara Elaine Taylor', seen from the boardwalk in the Black Swamp at the Burden Museum and Gardens, Baton Rouge.



*I. brevicaulis* at the Northlake Nature Center, Mandeville

## From the Species Preservation Project



Buna TX *I. brevicaulis*



*I. fulva* 'Shangri-la Pass'



Sebastapol Plantation *I. fulva*



*I. giganteaerulea* 'Ruth Holleman'



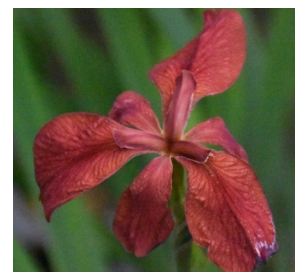
Highway 190 *I. fulva*



*I. fulva* Iberville Gold



*I. giganteaerulea* 'B. E. Taylor'



*I. fulva* - Borrow Pit Red



# SALVAGING THE NATIVE AMERICAN IRISES

By John K. Small

Iris is ancient and iris is modern. It appealed to the ancients in the abstract, interpreted by the imagination through the poetry of the early Greek theology. To the moderns its appeal became concrete through their sciences. In the varied significances of the word, iris has been an object of study, exercising the mind of man from the dim past.

The first-named iris was the daughter of Thaumasia and the ocean nymph Electra. Personified by the rainbow, whose base is on earth and apex in the skies, she thus became the messenger of the gods. After ages of mystery the physicist established the true status of the rainbow, thus connecting the fancies with the facts and still connecting the terrestrial and celestial regions.

Today iris has come down to earth and is best known as a group of plants quite universally distributed around the Northern Hemisphere. The assigning of the mythological name Iris by Linnaeus to the plants in question was far more appropriate than this botanist ever dreamed, for its flowers appear in a chromatic scale of color much

broader than he realized. At present iris has become a scientific problem for the botanist, the geneticist, and the plant geographer, and an aesthetic adjunct for the horticulturist and the plant breeder.

## The Irises of Louisiana

To The New York Botanical Garden, at least as an institution, belongs the credit of rescuing for the botanist and the horticulturist the remnants of the wreckage of the most wonderful natural iris field yet discovered.

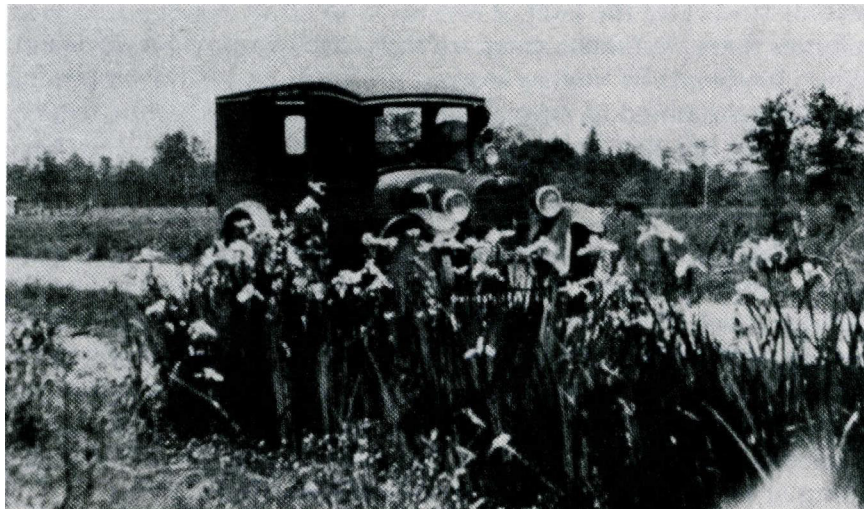


FIGURE 1. In the delta of the Pearl River, Louisiana. A small patch of *Iris giganteaerulea* in the foreground. The "weed-wagon" (the popular name for our collecting motor) in the background. The above-named species and myriad forms of *Iris virginica* constitute the iris flora of the Pearl River Delta.

Strange as it may seem, what was the maximum development in this iris field of the lower Mississippi River delta, even in recent modern times, will never be known.

The one who has seen the southern Louisiana irises in flower in the Garden's plantations or who has seen only the paintings of the flowers, the words wreckage and remnants may

not adequately convey the true state of affairs to his imagination. Only by a thorough study in the field can one either picture to himself the present conditions or imagine those of the recent past.

Whatever devastation nature may have been responsible for in recent geologic time we have no means of knowing, except as indicated on a following page; but the discouraging things that have happened in the past and are happening in the present are well known from direct and indirect evidence.

After a thorough survey of the iris lands in the New Orleans region, we confidently calculate that through rural improvements and urban growth about eighty per cent of the iris fields of a half century ago have been ravaged or destroyed!

Consider the bottom-lands and the adjacent marshes in the New Orleans region south of Lake Pontchartrain.

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*This article by Dr. John K. Small and the excerpt from another that follows are reproduced in Bayou and Marsh because in Louisiana especially, our appreciation of Louisiana irises is enhanced by knowledge of their origins in our wetlands. The natural history of the irises is ancient, but the awareness of them to a large extent can be traced to Dr. Small's efforts in the 1920s and 1930s. Dr. Small sounded an early warning that changes to the environment was destroying the wild irises in Louisiana. This article first appeared in 1931 in the Journal of the New York Botanical Garden, 32:175-184; it has been reprinted by the Society for Louisiana Irises several times. Many of the species names referred to in Small's articles have been abandoned. For more on Dr. Small, see page 16. Surviving names for Louisiana irises include hexagona, fulva, brevicaulis (formerly foliosa), giganteaerulea and nelsonii. Several non-Louisiana names are also still valid, including virginica, verna, and versicolor.*



The bottom-lands are the more elevated and are cut by bayous (creeks) of various sizes and depths. The edges and vicinity of the bayous are the favorite haunts of the native irises. The plants have also invaded the marshlands, which are the lower areas lying between the bottom-lands and the Gulf of Mexico, and often develop into vast colonies there, but these areas are subject to overflow by salt water blown landward by violent storms, so that their iris development has not maintained as sure a hold as it has on the bottom-lands, comprising the two geologic formations south of Lake Pontchartrain, once held this iris development complete.

In the case of the marshlands, nature may destroy and may rebuild the iris fields. On the other hand, on the bottom-lands against man's destructive methods, nature has little chance to restore any vegetation that has been eliminated. In the urban or metropolitan regions the iris growth that once inhabited marshes, swamps, and bayous has as a rule been utterly wiped out, except in suburban sections where much may remain in spite of drainage, filling of low places, and the erection of buildings.

In the rural parts of the region under consideration, the same agencies of destruction operate in a minor way. Where the large agencies of devastation are (I) lumbering, (II) agriculture, and (III) the dredging of bayous so as to make them into water highways, these agencies are thoroughly destructive. The first two speak for themselves. In the case of the third it may be explained that the bayous, whose sloping banks were once vast iris gardens continuous for many miles, are made into canals by dredging and piling the excavated materials on the banks, even to the extent of making levees. The iris growth is thus exterminated, except for an occasional iris plant which may have escaped by being thrown on top of the excavated materials and which, surviving, starts a small colony of that species. This colony may continue for a time, but when the materials of the banks are removed for one purpose or another, even this remnant of the once vast iris garden succumbs. Furthermore, a highway is usually made just back of the bayou-banks,

and homes and settlements spring up along the highway. Vegetable gardens, sugar-cane plantations, and general agriculture drive out the remnants of the native irises. In order to show how thorough these destructive agencies may become, take Bayou Lafourche for example. This stream is now a federal water-highway and its banks on both sides of the stream are lined with houses and settlements for a hundred miles.

### American Iris in Botany and Horticulture

Within the past two years many kinds of native iris have come to our attention. They have been brought into the fold of botany and are being introduced into horticulture.



FIGURE 2. Collecting iris in swamp at Arabi, Louisiana. Colonies large and small of many kinds of iris occur here. This swamp and those of Gentilly are the richest in various kinds of iris.

Up to the beginning of this century our native irises received relatively little attention from either botanists or horticulturists. The active and well-known American Iris Society devoted its attention and resources almost exclusively to the natural irises of the Old World or to their numerous hybrids.

References to American iris first appeared in European plant literature late in the seventeenth century. A period covering two centuries, less about a score of years, comprises the technical botanical history of American iris. A period longer by about half a century covers the horticultural history.

The history of the irises under consideration falls naturally into three epochs. The first begins with the botanical introduction of the three species, *Iris versicolor*, *Iris virginica*, and *Iris verna* by Linnaeus. This first epoch covers a period of nearly 150 years. In this period, in addition to the three Linnaean species, eight others were published by six authors, both in America and Europe. Curiously enough, up to this time, the beginning of the present century, there were generally recognized ten or eleven species of iris in eastern North America. The same group of iris is not represented in both regions. None of the plants of western North America reaches the large stature of those of the eastern.

The beginning of the second epoch may be dated 1902, when *Iris foliosa* was published by Mackenzie and Bush. Twenty-six years was the time extent of





FIGURE 3. Our shortest-stemmed iris — *Iris flexicaulis*. In the typical form of this iris the flower-stalk is about six inches long. It is zigzag and frequently lies on the ground. This iris is related to *Iris foliosa*, in which both leaves and flower-stalks lie on the ground.

this second epoch, during which six species, additional to *Iris foliosa*, brought to light by exploration in the Gulf States were published by the writer.

Observation during explorations in the lower Mississippi River delta indicated a third and very spectacular epoch, ushered in by the publication by the writer of seven species, one from peninsular Florida and six from southern Louisiana.

Up to 1929 our explorations and studies of these lower Mississippi delta irises was of necessity somewhat desultory. After that date the unusual displays of native irises in southern Louisiana led us to concentrate on the region and make the best of the opportunities at our disposal.

### The Range of Color of the Iris

Mr. Alexander, co-student with the writer, of these Louisiana irises, records that it is interesting that the great range of color mentioned is more apparent than real. Among the many shades represented, none goes into true red and none into true blue. The nearest approaches to red in the numerous *Iris fulva* variations always have a cast of orange; the nearest approaches to blue always have a cast of violet or purple; and the “red” and the “pinks” in the group *Roseanthae* are really not red or pink at all, but various shades of lilac, red-lilac, red-purple, red-violet,

pink-lilacs, and rosy-lilac. All of these, with one or two exceptions, are represented within a certain few pages of the color dictionary when laid out for actual color-matching.

A possible clue to the origin of some of the species in the lower Mississippi delta region lies in the fact that when *Iris fulva* is growing somewhere nearby, irises other than “blues” are likely to be found. This seemingly indicates that this peculiar “red” iris may have had a large part in the production of such a really startling scale of colors as our recent explorations have brought to light. It also indicates that many of the now fixed and geographically well-established species other than the *Iris giganticaerulea* types were possibly of hybrid origin.

The two possible parental species, so to speak, *Iris fulva*, “red,” and *Iris giganticaerulea*, “blue,” have proved themselves to be champions of variation in color-tones. Up to two years ago these two plants were considered quite simple in coloration. Our recent explorations have shown them to hold color-values almost beyond belief.

(I) The primitive guardian of the “red” possibilities (*Iris fulva*) exhibits in its flower range of colors from clear yellow (albino) through various shades of orange and red-orange to lavender-pinks, and from orange-crimson to mauve and dull-violet; in addition one form, a rich, clear, dark violet may possibly be a form of *Iris fulva* also. Thus the entire scale of known colors for iris, with the exception of the “blue” shades, would be embraced in the iris formerly considered rather drab!

***“After a thorough survey of the iris lands in the New Orleans region, we confidently calculate that through rural improvements and urban growth about eighty percent of the iris fields of half century ago have been ravaged or destroyed!”***

(II) The primitive guardian of the “blue” possibilities (*Iris giganticaerulea*) is sometimes colorless, or white (albino), and exhibits all the shades of blue and violet to purple and lilac. Both species occur in purple, lilac, lavender, and mauve. It is thus possible that these two species, as ancestral forms running the complete color-gamut, are the parent forms and all the other species in the geographic range occupied by the two were produced by their natural hybridization. This theory would account for the absence of the spectacular Delta irises from the regions between where they now grow and where they or their ancestors must have come from.





FIGURE 4. Our tallest-stemmed iris — *Iris giganticaerulea*, growing in a swamp near Cut-Off Louisiana. In this swamp violet-flowered irises prevailed. The plants were mostly three to five feet tall. The plants in the colony shown above were fully seven feet tall. If some of the drooping leaves were straightened up they would overtop one's head.

The trail of *Iris fulva* still leads back to higher elevations. *Iris giganticaerulea*, however, does not give as complete a history of its ancient migration.

A native yellow iris was unknown in America up to a few years ago (1929). A native yellow iris is still rare and much sought for in the vicinity where it has been found. At present, four different yellow irises have been found in southern Louisiana: (I) a canary-yellow form of *Iris fulva* collected independently by George Thomas and the writer; (II) a light creamy-yellow, an albino or *Iris vinicolor* found by Ethel Anson S. Peckham; (III) a light, dull, creamy-yellow of uncertain relationship found by Edward J. Alexander; (IV) a pale creamy-yellow of uncertain relationship found by the writer.

Color is not the only variety shown by Louisiana irises. There is much variation in the size of plants. Mentioning the extremes, the flower-stalk of *Iris flexicaulis* may be six inches high; while that of *I. giganticaerulea* may be

seven feet high. (Figures 3 and 4).

### Collecting Iris in the South

The weather in southern Louisiana last winter was spring-like up to March. Then it turned cold for a month. This drop in temperature retarded the growth of the iris plants to such an extent that they did not flower until two or three weeks later than usual. As soon as the normal spring weather prevailed, the iris fields burst into color. From this time to the end of the flowering season we devoted every day — and long days — to field work, collecting plants to ship to the Garden and recording the colors of the various parts of the flowers of all kinds not studied the previous year. The field-work of last spring was participated in by Ethel Anson S. Peckham, Rachel L. Lowe, Edward J. Alexander and the undersigned. A large share of our success was due to the keen eye and the skill of John B. De Winkeler, as mechanic and driver. Our mileage from start to finish amounted to about 6,500. The citizens of New Orleans interested in iris facilitated our work in many ways.

In collecting from large colonies we naturally leave plenty of plants for future growth, and in the case of small colonies we take such material as we need for study and leave enough to continue the natural growth and ultimate increase. Dr. D.T. Macdougall, of the Scientific Directors of the Garden, en route from Tucson to New York, spent a day in the field with us. Especial thanks are due Mr. George Thomas, Superintendent of the Parkway Commission of New Orleans, for furnishing facilities for assembling and packing.

Although we could not cover all the ground mapped out in our original plans, by using all the time and facilities at our disposal we were able to send to the Garden for growing about 6,000 iris plants from more than 450 colonies. Our activities were confined to parts of the broad delta peninsula south of the latitude of Lake Pontchartrain lying between the longitude of the Pearl River delta on the east and the Cote Blanche region on the west.

In this way, in spite of the probability of continued devastation in the course of urban progress, at least some of the irises of this region have been insured of preservation. However, every effort will be made to continue the exploration and preservation of this as yet unexhausted store of the 'American Iris.



An excerpt from  
“VANISHING IRIS”

By John K. Small

In an article under the caption “Salvaging the Native American Irises,” in which our positive activities in the iris fields during the spring of 1931 are recorded, reference was made to the various causes leading to the destruction of large and small colonies, and perhaps species and varieties of native irises. In these notes an estimate was given to the effect that at that time about eighty per cent of the iris fields of the lower Mississippi delta had been wiped out during the past half century!

A letter recently from R.A. Bazet, Clerk of Court, Parish of Terrebonne, a naturalist and associate in our iris studies, contains the following important and interesting paragraphs. These points were referred to in a general way in the article entitled “Salvaging the Native American Irises.”

That innumerable iris fields have been destroyed by the entrance of salt water by means of the opening of artificial waterways to obtain more direct water routes to the Gulf is evident. I know this to be a fact in several instances, two of which may be mentioned. One conspicuous case resulted from the opening of the Pointe au Barre canal in the southern part of Terrebonne Parish, where formerly great iris fields (consisting almost exclusively of *Iris gigantea*) existed. These have been wiped out by the almost constant presence of salt water. Later on, the excavation of the Minor Canal from Bayou Black to Lake Ducad in Terrebonne Parish had the same effect on the iris growth in certain parts of the low marshland through which this canal was cut.

"I The drainage of swamps and prairies results in a twofold program of destruction of iris growth. First, the drainage itself creates a condition which, in periods of drought particularly, would not be considered ideal for a moisture-loving plant; and secondly, the areas have been rendered susceptible to repeated brush and forest fires which have taken a heavy toll. I have seen many cases where the humus had burned to a depth of two or three feet, destroying not only the smaller vegetation, but forest trees as well. It is not uncommon to see large trees with roots exposed to the extent of several feet as a result of the burning of the humus deposit upon which they stand. No iris could exist under such conditions.

"II With reference to the destruction of

iris by the dredging of bayous, I might add that by the older method of performing this work the dipper dredge was used, the dredged material being merely thrown upon the bank of the stream, forming a levee, beneath which was buried not only the plant forms which existed along the water's edge, but also such as may have existed in the stream itself. The modern method, in my opinion, is even more destructive in that not only is the growth in the stream destroyed, but large areas in the swamps, beyond the natural levee of the bayou, are covered to a uniform depth of several feet of soil in some cases. I have seen the discharge pipe of a suction dredge extend over a mile in order to reach some low spot in the swamp which the owner had designated as a dumping ground in his permit to the federal government for the privilege of filling on his property. This dredging is constantly going on in one place or another because all of our navigable streams (bayous) have to be dredged at least once every ten years in order to maintain the required depth."

A recent letter of George Thomas, of the New Orleans Parkway Commission, whose observations on the irises about that city extend over nearly half a century, says:

“During the past twenty-five years, I have witnessed the most frightful destruction amongst the irises within the city limits of New Orleans and adjoining parishes, even worse than that of the Frenchmen Street Location. At the junction of Washington and Carrollton Avenues, there was a patch of several acres, which when in bloom appeared to be a solid mass of iris; today not one remains. At the site of Newcomb College there was a fine stand of *Iris fulva*. This has disappeared entirely. Suburban Acres on the way to Kenner at one time was a fine hunting ground for the *vinicolor* types, but very few can be found there now, and the natural growth of the city, with its paved streets and subsurfaced drainage replacing mud streets with open ditches, of necessity destroys many fine colonies of various colors.”

During further studies in the Louisiana iris fields,



carried on in the first two weeks of August, 1931, with less than three months intervening between the observations recorded in the article referred to above, the progress of further destruction was quite evident.

The field-work referred to in this note was carried out mainly for the collection of miscellaneous iris seeds and the rootstocks of several species of *Iris* for study and distribution.

Conditions found in the iris fields were quite different from those that obtained there at the same time last year, and the harvest of iris seeds was not as extensive, both as regards quantity and kinds. These discrepancies were due apparently both to lack of pollination in some cases and local adverse weather conditions that prevailed in the spring and summer.

The relation between meteorologic conditions and locality resulted in a more uneven maturity of capsules than obtained there during the corresponding season last year.

This quest for seeds led us to nearly all the localities in the lower Mississippi delta, south of Lake Pontchartrain and adjacent territory covered during our activities in the preceding spring. However, we were able to compare the changes that had taken place during the short periods that had elapsed between our periods of field-work. Two conspicuous examples may be recorded:

One of the two remaining exceptionally fertile and spectacular iris fields in and near New Orleans lies in the Gentilly section of the city. This area is the remaining damp spot of the one time Bayou Sauvage. Here is where our attention was first attracted to these delta iris fields (in 1925) and where year after year new species, new forms, and new hybrids have yielded recruits to our collections through our field-work. On the other hand, during the past half-decade alone, fully seventy-five percent of the iris growth that existed there in 1925 has been completely destroyed, chiefly through draining, filling in of low places, and building operations! Aside from minor areas, one locality alone, of about ten acres, where many choice kinds of iris grew in abundance up to last spring, has been filled with soil, leveled off, and the iris growth wiped out!

The other field was described in the notes referred to above. These were in reference to the Bayou LaFourche. Here, for miles between Golden Meadows and Cut-off all the irises on the bayou banks and in the ditches between the roadway and the farms had been destroyed through the building of a new road within the past two months (June and July, 1931). Referring to this region Mr. Bazet writes that:

“The building of levees along the Mississippi and certain of its tributaries, and the damming of the Bayou Lafourche at Donaldsonville, with a tributary thereto even to the extent of rendering their former beds susceptible to cultivation — have to an indeterminable extent been responsible

for the vanishment of some of our greatest iris fields.”

These are examples of destruction taking place before one's very eyes, so to speak. An example of an earlier case of devastation may be of interest. This is the case of the Bayou Chacahoula in Terrebonne Parish. Evidence indicates that this was a very fertile iris field years ago. It was not a deep bayou, so drainage and agriculture, through its gradually leveling methods, mainly for the growing of sugar-cane and corn, has obliterated the former course of the bayou as far as prominent topography is concerned, but its former course may be followed by the black soil that was deposited in its channel through the ages.

Along its course, here and there, may be found a depression in a field or a ditch where a road follows closely its former course. In these damp depressions exist the remnants of the former apparently rich iris fields. Here, within a short distance, may be found *Iris violipurpurea*, *I. chrysaeola*, a form of *I. vinicolor*; a new pink iris, and several new species of red-flowered irises. *Iris fulva*, too, in many forms and in great quantities, is a conspicuous feature in the shallow ditches. Between Raceland and Luling only recently has the type locality of *Iris miraculosa* been buried under a mass of soil ten to fifteen feet deep, as a result of the building of a new rail road embankment.

Returning to within the city limits of New Orleans, the present condition of the well-known Frenchmen Street iris fields attracts one's attention. The marsh along which and through which Frenchman Street was built was a celebrated iris field, for many years a favorite place for the citizens interested in iris to observe and gather specimens or bouquets. Manufacturing plants finally began to use the marsh as a dumping ground for refuse, and today most of the former growth has been buried, and only a few isolated patches of the plants of the several species that once thrived there in countless numbers remain in the landscape.

Referring back to Gentilly, we may confidently prophesy that the destruction of the iris fields of the remnants of the Bayou Sauvage which lies in this urban and suburban part of New Orleans will be more complete than those of the Bayou Chacahoula, for drainage and building operations are even more destructive to plant life than drainage and agriculture!

In the course of the progress of the local civilization in southeastern Louisiana, the numerous bayous, an outstanding feature of the landscape, are either drained and filled or dredged and thus deepened into narrow waterways. In the first case the iris ground is buried in the bayou channel, in the other it is buried by the “fill” that is dredged out of the channel. The question which naturally presents itself is this: What is the future of this most wonderful local natural iris development to be?

There is a nursery plantation of the species at The New York Botanical Garden. There are minor planta-





FIGURE 3. A colony of reddish-flowered iris (*I. vinicolor*) along a bayou in Gentilly, New Orleans. This colony and many associated with it were destroyed within the past two years.

tions on the reservations of Colonel and Mrs. Robins on Chinsegut Hill near Brooksville, Florida; of Mr. Henry Lockhart, Jr., on the eastern shore in Maryland; of Mr. Clarence Lewis, at Skyland Farms, near Mahwah, New Jersey; and of Mr. Henry W. De Forest at Cold Spring Harbor, New York. Still smaller plantations are located in many private reservations in other states. Specimens are now growing in England, in France, in Asia, in Australia, and in other parts of the Old World. Thus a beginning toward the preservation of the Mississippi delta irises, for both botanical investigation and horticultural development, has been made.

The past destruction and present lack of interest in preserving our native irises can be considered only with regret. Will the future show any different attitude in regard to them — that is, those which may have survived the past, present and apparently to be continued devastation? Will any effort or plan to preserve these irises other than those indicated in a preceding paragraph be made?

It seems logical that the municipality of New Orleans should become the savior of its native endemic irises. The city limits of New Orleans and the metropolitan region are the biological and almost geographical center of this iris development. The municipality is situated at the headwaters of the bayous that once harbored one of the most spectacular iris developments known. In the proper area or areas in

this reservation should be gathered together as complete a representation of the iris growth form within the city limits and the outlying regions, as has survived the wholesale destruction. Immediate action is necessary if these native irises are to be preserved.

Temporary enthusiasm and individual desultory attempts to establish small iris gardens will be futile so far as preserving iris for the future goes. It will be necessary to have concerted action, with the appointment, at least temporarily, of some official in charge of gathering the plants and of developing this iris reservation with the same attitude as should be used in establishing any great public institution.

In this plantation, or plantations, the various species, varieties, and color-forms of these native irises should not be represented by a few plants of each, but the representation should be generous large colonies — a reproduction of the natural growth as it existed or may still exist, consisting of hundreds or thousands of plants.

No growth lends itself more easily to transplanting, and when once established the plantations would care for themselves in an environment which their ancestors occupied before man came on the scene and destroyed what nature had planted and developed through the ages.



# Dr. John Kunkel Small

1869 - 1938

In 1925 Dr. John K. Small, botanist, plant explorer and curator of The New York Botanical Garden, became acquainted with the vast colonies of native irises in south Louisiana. This occurred quite by accident if we are to believe the accounts. Small had been doing plant explorations east of the Mississippi, into the southeast and particularly in Florida as far back as the early 1900s. He was interested in all native plant material, including but not limited to irises.

In his Florida explorations palms, ferns and irises commanded most of his attention. It was in Florida that he first saw "vast fields of irises covering many acres." The story is told how Dr. Small was traveling on a train from Florida to west Texas, across Louisiana, when he first caught a glimpse of the extensive iris fields from the train window. This probably occurred near New Orleans. He realized that these south Louisiana fields probably rivaled if not exceeded what he had seen in Florida. The net result was that he explored these areas annually for the next six or seven years. It was these explorations which led Dr. Small to refer to the New Orleans area as "the iris center of the universe."

Small documented his plant explorations in more than sixty articles in the Journal of The New York Botanical Garden. Only a few of these were exclusively on irises and included types and species other than those found in Florida and Louisiana. Even more significant than the journal articles were full color plates and descriptions of the irises published in ADDISONIA, another publication of the Botanical Garden, in 1925-1929. This was at a time when color photography was in its infancy, color films did not exist and color printing was just beginning to emerge. The color plates in AD-

DISONIA are based on watercolor paintings, mostly from blooming specimens at the Garden, painted by Mary E. Eaton. The quality of this work ranks with Dyke's masterpiece THE GENUS IRIS. To further emphasize the dedication to this effort, Small makes reference to lantern slides of the irises and that the slides were colored by hand.

Most of the areas explored by Small in Louisiana, by his own descriptions, were in and around New Orleans. In the 1920s the area extending from city limits towards the north and east of Lake Pontchartrain was largely undeveloped, low, swampy and wild. This was the area where the trains passed to enter the city, and is most likely where Small first saw the irises in Louisiana. This was primary habitat for *I. giganteaerulea*, *I. fulva* and their natural hybrids and probably a main collection site. The part closest to New Orleans was small but it extended east to the Mississippi River, then down the delta on both sides of the river, past the towns of Houma and Thibodaux and southeast to the Gulf of Mexico. The delta area was hundreds of square miles, and according to all descriptions very rich in irises. This was the area where Small first noted depletion of the irises based on his annual observations in the latter 1920s, and which served as the locale for his article "Vanishing Irises."



Today, the city of New Orleans covers a large part of the area; development of the oil industry and drainage of the swamps brought the demise of the remaining iris fields. There are only a few areas where *I. giganteaerulea* still exists on private property south of Houma. The huge iris fields in southwest Louisiana were not explored by Small. These were discovered somewhat later by collectors following up on Small's explorations.

Dr. Small gave (Latin) names to more than 75 of the species he studied in Louisiana and Florida. The story is well known how, based on the later work of Percy Viosca, most of Small's species are now considered natural hybrids or species variants. Only his species *I. giganteaerulea* is still considered a species; even here there is controversy regarding relationship to the earlier-named *I. hexagona*. All this is of little consequence. Small's publications ignited interest and publicized these irises so that they became widely known and appreciated.

(From the Fiftieth Anniversary Publication, Society for Louisiana Irises 1941 - 1961. Joseph K. Mertzweiller, ed.)



One of the color plates from Addisonia that helped popularize Louisiana irises. "Vinicolor" was later discovered to be a natural hybrid, probably a first generation cross between *I. fulva* and *I. giganteaerulea*. Irises of this type, now rare in the wild, are often found in gardens in N.O.





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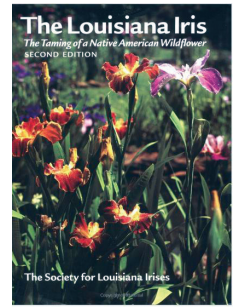


# Society for Louisiana Irises Storefront

## ***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



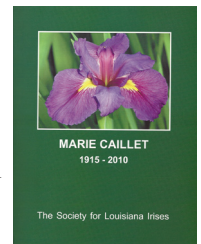
## ***Special Publication of the Society for Louisiana Irises - The History of Hybridizing (2007)***

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.



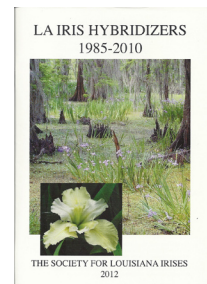
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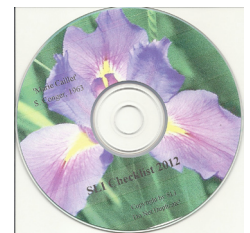


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