



The Rainbow Goddess

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Greetings of the Season and a Busy Half Year from Richard Hebda, BCIS President

First, let me wish you all the best during this festive break and hope that visions of colourful irises dance in your minds as you anticipate the spring.

The past six months have been full of activity for our Society especially on the display garden front. Planting and development took place at the Summerland Ornamental Garden (SOG), Government House and the Horticultural Centre of the Pacific.

After our Spring Okanagan tour, the regional Iris growers under the leadership of Penny Santosham and Lesia Lalonde spearheaded a rejuvenation of the iris plantings in Summerland at SOG. Masses of modern and historic rhizomes were planted, and I can only imagine what the show will be like in a couple of years! See the note in this





Plinko iris at Mid America Garden in Salem, Oregon

newsletter about the historic Iris collection.

We now have irises into two separate areas at Government House in Victoria. New irises were planted by Ted Baker and Richard Hebda in the terrace beds west of the house. They include several groups of new Arilbreds to test their BC adaptability. Several AIS Region 13 convention irises donated by the Greater Portland Iris Society (GPIS) were put in the same beds as well as our bed to the east of the House which is managed by Sandy Gibb.

Several donations from members and more GPIS irises were added to our large area at the Horticultural Centre of the Pacific display. The beds are full of varieties and species for all to see in the spring. A growing group of volunteers led by Ted Baker continues to keep the beds healthy and free of weeds.

We received a large order of irises including the aforementioned Arilbreds from Mid America Garden (Salem, Oregon) that went to several of our members across the province. These group orders are a great way to bring new material in from the US at a reasonable cost. I bought "Plinko" a medium tall Bearded variety (T. Johnson 2018) because I am fascinated by the name and I love peach and orange blossoms. My plant is thriving in a large pot.

GPIS must have had extra green thumbs growing their AIS region 13 convention irises. We received more than

60 very recent introductions thanks to their generosity for the cost of shipping and phytosanitary certificate. Bill Dumont and I divided, packaged and shipped them out to our three display gardens and several BCIS host gardeners to grow up for sale to our membership in a couple of years time. We'll keep you posted on how they do and maybe highlight one or two in the future.

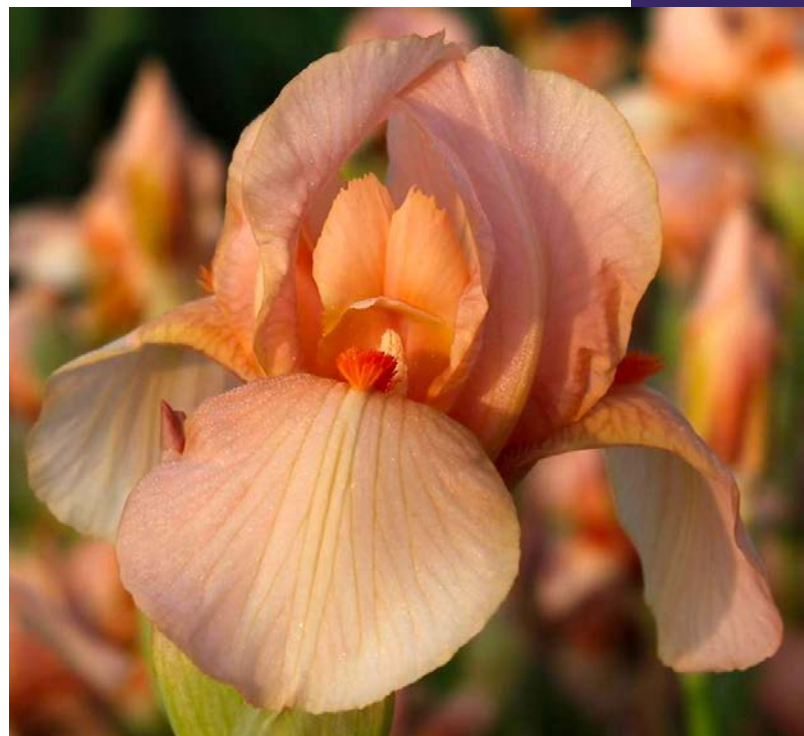
We welcome several new members especially from the Lower Mainland who joined

after my presentation BC Council of Garden Clubs in Burnaby. We hope this is the start of a rejuvenated iris group from the Fraser Valley and Greater Vancouver regions.

Please note our spring get together at the Horticultural Centre of the Pacific in March where you can ask three expert growers anything iris you want to. Their expertise will cover bearded and all other species!

Richard Hebda, *President, BC Iris Society*

Plinko



Edmund William Neel: a Canadian Iris Breeder



Shah Jehan

Recently, the Cowichan Valley Garden Club received an enquiry about an iris hybridizer, Edmund Neel, from Laura Blaj of Nanaimo originating from an American member of the Historic Iris Preservation Society. This request for information about a Vancouver Island iris breeder was passed on to the British Columbia Iris Society. The enquiry stated:

"My acquaintance holds a vast collection of old irises among which 'Shah Jehan', a rather illustrious tall bearded iris bred by W. W. Neel, registered in 1932. According to the American Iris Society, Neel, whether a woman or a man, lived in Duncan, and bred three other irises - 'Lady Phyllis' (1932), 'Pink Lotus' (1933), 'Red Knight' (1933) - of which little to nothing is known. My friend was wondering if anyone in Duncan still kept Neel's legacy alive, maybe growing (whether knowingly or not) some of the irises he or she created, or just being in possession of further information on Neel's identity. Canada cannot boast many famous iris hybridizers, but it certainly can Neel. Unfortunately, with no one

knowing who Neel was, this long-forgotten British Columbian and Duncan resident has never been celebrated as is their due."

The response can be answered in three parts – who was Mr. Neel? What was his involvement with irises? and

are any of his irises still existing in Duncan gardens?

The following brief account is based on research by Sally Smith who, with her mother, have been leading lights in the Cowichan Valley gardening community since the 1930s.

Edmund W. Neel

Neel was born in England on August 10, 1877, and, after obtaining a degree from Oxford University, joined the consular service. He was appointed Confidential Clerk to Lord Milner, High Commissioner in Johannesburg, South Africa where he was in charge of government cyphers and responsible

for all coding and decoding. His next assignment was as H.M. Vice-Consul in Laurencio Marques in Portuguese East Africa [now Beira, Mozambique].

[Other accounts mention that he came to Duncan after serving in the British Army in Gold Coast [Ghana] but this account does not agree with the details in his obituary.] He retired in 1908, age 31, and settled in Duncan although, during the first World War, he joined the Department of the Imperial Ministry of Munitions in Ottawa. He returned to B.C. in 1919 and lived in the Duncan area for another 47 years volunteering his time as chair of various committees which promoted agriculture and public health.

He was married to Phyllis Neel and had five children. He died in 1955 and she died in 1959.

Lady Phyllis



The Nursery

Neel originally settled on Riverside Road, in the Cowichan Station area of the Cowichan Valley, but later moved to the Glenora community southwest of Duncan and lived at 5315 Miller Road. At that time, Duncan was very active in horticulture and considered a world centre for the production of sweet pea seeds. There was even an annual celebration which included a parade with a Sweet Pea Queen. Here he established a commercial nursery



Lord of June

which specialized in irises but also grew other plants. The nursery was closed in 1953 when he and his wife moved to White Road in the middle of Duncan.

The nursery became famous for its displays of irises, poppies, peonies, and gladioli as the seasons progressed. He hybridized bearded irises and won many awards. He also bred new oriental poppies and one, named Cowichan, and was sent to the Royal Horticultural Society in London where it received an Award of Merit. The local paper in May 1928 had a long article about the nursery and described Cowichan as crimson "with a beautiful sheen". The largest flower measured 11.5 (29 cm) inches across. Some of his iris hybrids were also sent to England for evaluation but there is no mention of the results in these cases. It is mentioned that he sometimes had difficulty obtaining seed for example "from 250 clumps of 'Lord of June', the beautiful massive flower with standards of lavender and blue and falls of deep aniline blue, Mr. Neel obtained only one good pod last year". He grew 40-50

varieties but focused on eliminating the poorer quality plants and encouraging those that were the best "growers".

Do Neel Iris Hybrids Still Grow in Duncan?

The house at 5372 Miller Road was demolished and there seems very little hope that the present property would contain any plants from the original nursery. It would, however, be worth looking at the site in the spring.

Our main hope of finding historic irises hybridized by Mr. Neel would be several old gardens, created at about the time of the nursery and which still exist in Duncan. One or two are maintained by expert gardeners most of whom are members of the Cowichan Valley Garden Club. For some of these properties, garden club members have been involved since the 1930s.

It is proposed that, in the spring, selected gardens should be visited at the appropriate time to identify the irises that are flowering and to photograph irises as they come into flower.

Ian Efford

Summerland Ornamental Garden Rejuvenation

It was a dull, rainy morning in early September but was great for the final 75 rhizomes that Lulu Leman and Penny Santosham planted at SOG on Sunday afternoon. The West Border is finished except for alfalfa pellets that were scattered on iris clumps after the first frost in mid-October.

Penny and her crew planted 50 varieties of historic (Ds, Ms and Ts) in their special bed and interplanted 75 varieties of dwarfs, medians and TBs in the West Border. Altogether about 275 rhizomes.

Heritage Irises from Sage Hill Farm





Lulu Lemman planting irises



Barry, Louise and Lulu working on the west border

Jacque McDonald, Harold and Lydia Baumbrough, the Lalondes and Oregon supplied the irises. Barry and Louise Rafuse, Lulu and I did the planting. SOG worked with us to improve their irrigation, supplied compost and mulch, collected debris, cheered everyone on... and kept all informed of nearby bear sightings while they worked.

Squirrels and birds provided entertainment and gopher mounds supplied lovely soil for iris holes. So far the only pest problem was a rabbit attack on the Gallardia's planted for summer and fall colour in the Heritage bed.

Penny Santosham

Iris rhizomes from Oregon and Penny's garden for planting



Penny watering last clump of newly planted iris



Iris Lover Ian Efford Honoured with American Rhododendron Society (ARS) Silver Medal



Recently BCIS Director Ian Efford was recognized for his exceptional contributions to the ARS. The citation reads:

"Your passion for plants in general and for the genus Rhododendron in particular has motivated you as a mentor, speaker and educator. In your many roles in the Cowichan Valley chapter, you have ensured its robust future and increased its profile throughout District 1.

Your dynamic leadership has secured exceptional partnerships and spearheaded many initiatives, such as publishing your book on the public rhododendron gardens of Vancouver Island and being a significant contributor to JARS through a wide variety of article topics.

For your exceptional contributions, the American Rhododendron Society is proud to award the Silver Medal to Ian Efford."

"Cappuccino Lace" a striking and strong Tall Bearded iris with amazing frills: "Stately ruffled buff cream confection, heavily laced. A vigorous grower." Bred by J.T. Aitken and introduced in 2016. Purchased by Richard Hebda as part of BCIS group purchase in 2018 from Aitken's Salmon Creek Garden.

BCIS 2020 AGM

Saturday, March 21, 2020

Horticulture Centre of the Pacific
505 Quayle Road, Victoria BC V9E 2J7

10 am
AGM – Couvelier Pavilion

11:30 am
Tour of BCIS Iris Garden

12 Noon
Lunch \$15 pp

12:45 pm
Expert Iris Panel Dr. Ian Efford, Penny Santosham and Ted Baker

All things iris for your garden and 10 favourite irises

All welcome for Panel Discussion and Lunch

Please confirm lunch to wedumont@hotmail.com by March 10



Dusky Challenger, the Favourite Tall Bearded Iris of All Time? A Tribute.



Dusky Challenger

When Dusky Challenger was introduced in 1986 it was described as follows in their catalogue.

'Dusky Challenger' (**Schreiner**, R. 1986). Seedling# 1983-AA. TB, height 39" (99 cm), Midseason to late bloom. Ruffled silky rich purple; deep violet black beard. Unknown parentage.

It was very quickly recognized as an outstanding iris and this is reflected in the many awards it received in the American Iris Society system of awards. It received Honorable Mention 1988; Award of Merit 1990; **American Dykes Medal 1992.**

The following is a description of Dusky Challenger as described by Perry Dyer who was a fine irissarian. "Last but not least in the tall bearded review is DUSKY CHALLENGER (Schreiner '86), winner of the Cook Cup. Towering above the rest (literally), this probable child of

the finally famous **TITAN'S GLORY** (Schreiner '81) has all the outstanding qualities, with more intense, deeper colour saturation and even better, more highly refined form. The mammoth stalks, perfect branching, and outstanding plant habits will make even the English growers take note, as it is a true garden iris in addition to a show contender." [Perry Dyer

(Oklahoma), "Melrose Gardens" *The Bulletin of the American Iris Society*, No. 263, (October 1986): 22.]

Each year all members of the American Iris Society can vote at the Tall Bearded Iris Symposium. Each of us can vote for our 25 favourites. Since 2007, the earliest listing of the Symposium on the AIS website, to the present time, Dusky Challenger has always been at the top of the list. So it is easy to conclude that Dusky Challenger is the favourite Tall Bearded Iris of all time. However, to be fair, other irises like Wabash [E. B. Williamson, 1936] may be more popular if the gardening public was

included in the vote. But we shall never know!

I have grown Dusky Challenger for at least 30 years and will continue to have a clump in my garden. It continues to impress. For example, when it rains the standards never fall which means it always looks its best.

In 1986 Dusky Challenger arrived as an exciting new creation and over the years rapidly rose to the top of the awards list. It has endured the decades to become an historic iris in 2016 and continues to be a favourite with many. Yes, a truly great iris!

Ted Baker

Dusky Challenger



Iris Beds in Summerland Ornamental Gardens Designated a Historical Iris Display



Penny Santosham with the plaque

The BC Iris Society spring tour in 2019 revealed just how rich the iris collections are in the Okanagan. Among the hundreds of irises we saw were many historical varieties. Many of these vigorous beauties have been planted together in the ornamental gardens in Summerland through the tremendous effort of our BC Iris Society's Okanagan members. Jacquie McDonald, Harold and Lydia Baumbrough, the Lesia and Gerry Lalonde provided rhizomes. Penny Santosham (BCIS Director), Lesia Lalonde, Barry and Louise Rafuse and Lulu Leman did the planting of the historic and other bearded irises.

This collection is of such quality that it has been recognized by the Historical Iris Preservation Society (HIPS) (BCIS is a member) as a display garden.

Penny Santosham sent the following note and image of the placement of the plaque.

"Winter has arrived in the Okanagan - it was -3 yesterday when the Grounds Director for SOG (Summerland Ornamental Garden) and I put the HIPS sign in the new Heritage Iris Bed. It's mounted on a 6" thick piece of donated granite so we can easily move it around next spring depending on foliage height. Since the ground is finally frozen, I covered all the rhizomes with alfalfa pellets and snow will turn them into a cozy protective blanket. Labels are getting made for all the irises.

Next spring there will be a large bilingual sign installed in the West Border (of SOG) where we've planted 93 clumps of modern irises - that will be a PR event. BCIS will be acknowledged on the sign as a sponsor."

We thank our Okanagan members for their tremendous effort in planting a wonderful display garden of many varieties. We look forward to a riot of colour in the spring and many springs to follow. We will be providing more information on these display beds in the future.



Historic iris, Gracchus

Richard Hebda

One of the favourite historic of all time, Wabash



The Benefits of BCIS Membership

The BC Iris Society celebrates and promotes Irises in British Columbia. We spread knowledge and awareness of Irises through meetings, providing speakers for other groups, and advice to members and the general public on growing Irises successfully. Links are maintained with other iris enthusiasts by affiliation with the American Iris Society.

Please join our society and enjoy new friends and many benefits:

- ✓ Annual **BULLETIN** with BCIS news, expert advice on Iris growing and care with beautiful and eye-catching iris photos
- ✓ The **RAINBOW GODDESS** newsletter twice per year with information on garden tours, tips on iris culture, and members-only iris purchases
- ✓ **WEBSITE AND SOCIAL MEDIA** – great resources for Iris lovers
- ✓ **GROUP PURCHASES** – unique opportunities to buy new and unusual irises at reasonable prices including import from the United States
- ✓ **DISPLAY GARDENS** – BCIS has created and our volunteers maintain beautiful Iris display gardens at Government House, Summerland Ornamental Garden and Horticulture Centre of the Pacific in Victoria
- ✓ **GARDEN TOURS/WORKSHOPS** – great opportunities to meet passionate Iris growers, learn from them and see their gardens
- ✓ **ANNUAL MEETING** – get together with Iris lovers and enjoy Iris lectures
- ✓ **IRIS COMMUNICATIONS** – regular email updates and links to other Iris societies

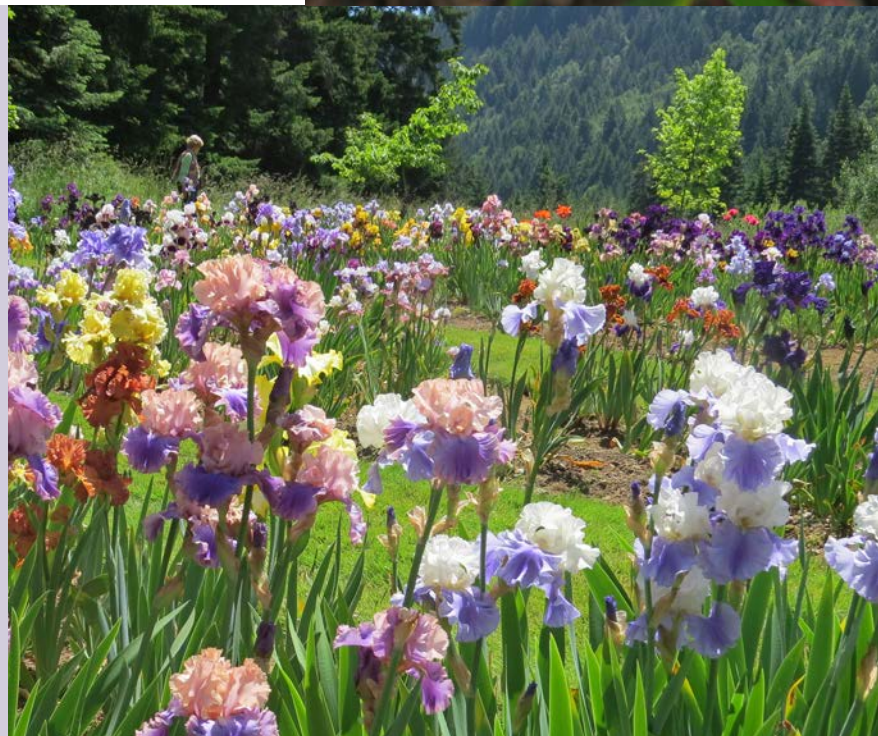


Join the BCIS

Our membership year is the same as the calendar year. Dues are \$15 for individuals and \$16 for families and societies. **Members are encouraged to pay three years to simplify the renewal process (\$45 or \$48 for 3 years).**

Please mail the following information and your cheque (payable to BCIS) to
**Diane Whitehead - BCIS, 5088 Clutesi St.,
Victoria, B.C. V8Y 1X4**

Name(s)
Mailing address
Telephone number
Email address
Amount Paid



Current BCIS Executive

POSITION	NAME	EMAIL
President	Richard Hebda	hebda@shaw.ca
Secretary/Treasurer Newsletter	Bill Dumont	wedumont@hotmail.com
Past President	Ted Baker	tedbaker41@gmail.com
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Director	Malcolm Ho You	Ho-You@telus.net
Director	Richard Cypher	cypher.rl@gmail.com
Director Bulletin	Joyce Prothero	jprothero@saltspring.com
Director	Penny Santosham	pennysantosham@gmail.com
Director	Ian Efford	efford@telus.net

Are you following us on Facebook?

We add news about plant sales, garden tours, special iris talks, etc., plus photos and information about irises to our page, so be sure to like us at:

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

Be sure to check out our website as well where you'll find upcoming events, newsletters, and our photo gallery full of beautiful iris photos:

bcirisociety.com



*This newsletter was produced by Bill Dumont with graphic design by Raielene Langdon of **Blue Pixel Design**. Thanks to all who contributed articles, photos and other information. Please send contributions for our next newsletter in June 2020 to wedumont@hotmail.com.*

**ireland &
Scotland**
2020 TOUR



The 16 day custom tour of gardens and sights of Ireland and Scotland in May 2020 is confirmed and there are still some seats available. More info can be found at DumontEvents.com. Following the main tour there is an optional add-on to visit the amazing and world famous Chelsea Garden Show in London. Further details are on the DumontEvents.com website.