

# Twin City Iris Society

## NEWS & VIEWS

Vol. XIII, Book 1

January, 1965

It seems a long time since our last News & Views was sent your way since none was sent in December because of the holidays. Though it is a little late I'd like to wish each and every one of you a very Happy and Prosperous New Year. May the New Year bring you even more fun and satisfaction in all your gardening endeavors, whether it be nursing those Christmas plants along to have the blooms last as long as possible or hybridizing a future Duke's Medal Winner! !

The first meeting of the Twin City Iris Society of the year 1965 will be January 21, 1965 at 8:00 p.m. at the usual meeting place, the YWCA, Twelfth and Nicollet, Minneapolis. The program (see President's letter) promises to be of interest to everyone and just the thing to bring a breath of spring and gardening into the cold, snowy, month of January.

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This will be the debut of the New Officers for 1965, too. We hope that there will be a large turn-out for this meeting to show your officers you intend to back them in their efforts to make this an informative and interesting year for the Society.

The officers for 1965 are as follows: President - Mrs. A. M. (Greta) Kessenick  
1st Vice President - Mr. W. G. (Gus) Sindt  
2nd Vice President - Mr. Henry Halvorson  
Secretary - Mrs. Walter (Ella) Johnson  
Treasurer - Mr. Walter Carlock  
Corresponding Secretary - Mrs. Robert A. (Sunny) Netkow  
Board of Directors - New Members:  
Mrs. George (Carol) Lankow  
Mr. Stanton Rudser  
Mrs. D. C. (Virginia) Messer

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Many of our members have paid their 1965 dues, and we thank them for being so prompt in their payment. If you have not paid your dues for 1965 would you please do it now, before you forget, put them in the mail or bring them to the meeting January 21st. We would like to have the yearbook ready by the February meeting and we would appreciate your co-operation by getting your dues in as soon as possible. Send dues to:

Mrs. Stanton Rudser  
2548 Douglas Drive  
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55422

Thank you.

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### THE PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Looking over the beautiful snow-blanketed iris and border garden, one is inspired much more than a similar inspection at other times of the year. There are no weeds to be pulled, cultivating or faded blossoms to be removed. The mind is free to consider the garden as a whole and we have time to solve some of its problems.

It is now that we can begin to visualize the landscape for future planting and listen to the garden as it speaks loudly of its needs.

The cold of the winter day is forgotten for an instant when I think of the new bed of tulips and daffodils planted, also of all the new iris that will be blooming for the very first time.

The most beautiful iris characteristic developed in recent years is the petal ornamentation known as lacing. The edges of the petals are crinkled, frilled or laced in tiny horn-like formations. These varieties are very feminine looking and so popular. A few growing among tailored or lightly ruffled iris adds distinction to a garden.

We can garden more intelligently when we recognize the infinitesimal forces called chromosomes that lie in the center of the life bearing seed and carry in them a series of hereditary factors called genes--each one a packet of some vital characteristic to appear in the plant. It is largely through the use of this information that hybridizers have been able to attain great strides in plant breeding and give to irisarians a different style and type of flower. The glory of the early summer garden is the iris in its many shades, hues and sizes.

Soon the catalogues will be filling the mail box, reminding us of those beautiful varieties we wanted so much last blooming season and during the show. For companion flowers in the border garden, do order something you haven't grown before. Experiments may bring some disappointments but that is part of gardening. It may also bring great satisfaction. Every new plant grown broadens the scope of horticulture and upgrades your garden. One of the most unusual and beautiful plants in our garden was the *Gloriosa Rothschildiana* or Glory Lily, a treasured tuber given me by an iris grower. By July, the first flower opened exotic in color and shape. The petals are sharply recurved brilliant crimson, banded in chartreuse. Plant in full sun, with a fence on which to climb. The tuber will continue to produce as the plant climbs, giving light to ten blooms in succession. Catalogues do not do them justice. In the fall dig them carefully and store.

During 1965, we would like a considerable increase in membership. This requires extended effort on the part of everyone. To make this drive interesting, iris rhizomes will be offered as an incentive. Hall's new "Wine and Roses" will be the number one prize. Other rhizomes will be offered. This will be outlined in the February issue.

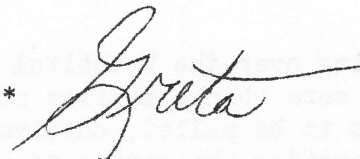
January 21, 1965, our first meeting of the new year will be of much interest. Mr. Bob Quinn of the California Chemical Company will show a new film on flowers and insects and also give a talk on Chemicals for the Garden.

Iris Species will be the topic discussed by Mr. Gus Sindt.

Do make a special effort to see and hear this interesting and instructive program. Invite your friends. I hope to see all of you January 21st at YWCA at 8:00 p.m.

Greta M. Kessenich  
President

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The following article will appear in the next issue of the Southern Illinois Society Bulletin. It was written by our Past President, Mr. Glenn Hanson, who is now Regional Vice President of our area, Region 8.

It is such a delightful and instructive article that all members of the Twin City Iris Society will find it most interesting.

Greta M. Kessenich, President

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#### IRIS GROWING IN MINNESOTA

By G. F. Hanson, Minneapolis, Minnesota  
Regional Vice President, American Iris Society, Region 8

Several years ago I sat on a stool in a coffee shop somewhere in southern Missouri engaged in neighborly chit-chat with the occupant of the adjacent stool. He said, "So you're from Minnesota? Your state used to be famous for two things, your great football teams and your abominable climate. By the way, whatever happened to those great teams of the 30's?" The implication in my impromptu friend's pleasantries was starkly apparent. Now we are famous for just one thing!

I am convinced that our reputation has become somewhat exaggerated. We don't live in igloos, and we don't put our cars up on blocks for the winter. But the simple truth is inescapable--it does get cold in Minnesota. A glance at one of the standard temperature maps commonly found in gardening books will disclose that most of our state lies in Zone 3--minimum temperature in an average year 20 to 35 degrees below zero. Southern Illinois lies mostly in Zone 5--minus 5 to minus 10 degrees. In the same book you will find a map of the average planting dates, assumed to be when the soil temperature reaches 45 degrees. In the Minneapolis area this is May 1st. In southern Illinois it is from March 16 to April 1. The average date of the first killing frost here is September 20. Down there it is from October 10 to October 20. The average date of our last killing frost is May 10. Yours is April 10. To summarize, our growing season is two months shorter than yours, one month at each end of the season. And when it gets cold, we are from 15 to 25 degrees colder than you are.

Now these frank observations are considerably more realistic than you will usually get out of a Minnesotan. Up here it is considered more socially acceptable to refer to our climate as "invigorating." And, admittedly, all things are relative. An Eskimo might construe our winters as uncomfortably warm and balmy. Unhappily, however, I am not an Eskimo, and nature has provided me with an abundance of vigor without the necessity of climatic stimuli. I may well lose my citizenship for admitting it, but at 35 below zero I am not invigorated; I am cold!

Our horticultural problems are not confined to short seasons and low temperatures. Our seasonal changes are often abrupt. In the spring the transition from "unseasonable cold" to "unseasonable heat" is frequently very brief. The same is true of the other end of the season. This year after our gardens had been cut down by frost, we experienced a long period of pleasantly warm weather. As this is written it is late November. One week ago I was working outside in my shirt sleeves. Today we broke all previous records with an impressive 17 below zero!

And then there is the matter of rainfall, which seems to follow a feast or famine schedule. On the day before our local iris show in 1963, driving winds and torrential rains tore our potential ribbon winners to shreds and pounded them into the mud. That was the last measurable rain that fell on our gardens until late



September, and in the meantime everything dried to an attractive golden brown. But this year things were better. The rains stopped earlier and our show entries were spared. And with a total absence of moisture throughout the summer--well, at least there was very little trouble with leaf spot!

However, despite possible indications to the contrary, I come not to bury Minnesota, but to praise the iris. It is obvious that under the conditions described, you just can't raise irises, but happily we Minnesota growers haven't found out about it. If you will consult the schedule of 1964 shows in the October issue of the A.I.S. Bulletin, you will find that five shows were held in Minnesota, with our Minneapolis show ranking third in size in the entire nation. Moreover, after viewing irises in bloom in other parts of the country, I am convinced that the quality of our local product is second to none. We seem to have done a remarkable job of keeping it secret from the rest of the world, but the truth is that Minnesota is an extremely fine iris growing area. In the past two successive years of the worst growing conditions within my memory, the only garden subjects that performed in a reasonably satisfactory manner were our heroic irises.

Our state contains a wide variety of soils, ranging from pure clay through rich black loam to clear sand, but with a predominance of soil structures entirely acceptable to the iris. The Hansons are most fortunate in this respect. Our home is north of Minneapolis on the banks of the Mississippi, and our gardens are composed of fertile, loose textured silt laid down by the river in prehistoric times. The irises revel in it, growing spectacularly and putting out feeder roots often in excess of two feet.

Along with several hundred varieties of the tall bearded, we grow a liberal assortment of dwarfs, Siberians, Japanese, spurias, and various species. With regard to this latter category, we find that we are subject to unfortunate limitations. Many of the lovely and interesting species, as well as all of the bulbous irises, find our winters just too robust for their delicate constitutions. We have been successful in experimentally bringing a number of these thin blooded beauties through the winter, but the excessive protective measures required are too troublesome and time consuming to be worthwhile. One specialty of ours which is unusual for this area is a large collection of arilbreds. Many of these exotic things are inclined to be temperamental and do not take kindly to Minnesota, but for reasons best known to themselves they seem to like us and they perform magnificently. Our earliest dwarfs bloom about the middle of April. The peak of the tall bearded season is the first week of June.

Here, as elsewhere, you can find as many fertilizer theories as you can find growers. We use a 6-24-24 formula, applied twice a year. This results in an abundance of large flowers and fine strong stalks. We rarely stake an iris, even the notoriously weak stemmed varieties. We believe that the low nitrogen and high potash formula avoids excessive soft leaf growth, while producing the tough, solid rhizomes essential to our climate. And we use the controversial gypsum. The soil in this area was formed from the decomposition of limestone and is preeminantly alkaline. We first adopted gypsum because it seemed logical under these circumstances. Our iris beds are now slightly on the acid side. Without ruling out the possibility of coincidence, we have observed an interesting side effect--since adopting gypsum we haven't had a single case of rhizome rot, and this includes some wet years. Reports from other growers who have borrowed our methods tend to confirm these results.

Except in an unusually wet year, Minnesota rhizomes differ somewhat from those grown to the west and south of us. We seldom produce the huge potato size so



attractive in appearance to the purchaser. Ours are generally smaller, but more dense in texture. They may be short on eye appeal, but they can safely be planted anywhere in the country with assurance of excellent performance. The reverse is not always true. We often have trouble getting the big, beautiful west coast rhizomes to settle down and start growing. Some of our growers report better results from laying them out and letting them dry several days before planting.

From time to time it becomes apparent that the originators of new irises do not have Minnesota in mind when they select seedlings for introduction. Certain varieties, including some of the new and highly acclaimed things, are not sufficiently hardy to withstand our winters. Just why an area capable of producing five shows, including the third largest in the nation, should be ignored in this respect is an unanswered question. We are a tolerant race, and one \$25 investment which leaves us with an empty space in the spring might be forgiven. However, after two or three such disasters we are not likely to greatly revere the name of that originator, and we do talk to each other. Hybridizers who are truly interested in the hardiness of their masterpieces would do well to guest them in Minnesota before introduction. Sabers are beginning to rattle in the Northland. Region 8 is on the march. A number of fine things have already been introduced by Minnesota and Wisconsin hybridizers, and many others will be forthcoming. Some of our folks actually leave their seedling beds entirely unprotected over winter to automatically eliminate any weak sisters. We do not expect this degree of robust tolerance from the products of others, but we do know that there are thousands of proven varieties, both old and new. We feel that an iris worthy of introduction should be able to survive here under reasonable protective measures.

This brings up the matter of protection. A winter mulch of hay, leaves, or other loose material is absolutely essential in this area. In our own gardens we use baled hay, shaken out and applied to a depth of six or eight inches. We cut back the fans before applying it. Not all of our growers go to this extra trouble, but we like to remove as many potential insect eggs and fungus spores as possible from our gardens in the fall, and the short fans provide admirable anchors for the loose hay. In all of our plantings, including all the off-beat types that we grow, we rarely experience losses in excess of 1 or 2 per cent.

Aside from the foregoing, Minnesota iris culture involves only one additional precaution. Early planting, while not absolutely essential, is very helpful. Our growing season is short, and the rhizome that has had sufficient time to get its roots established has a better chance of surviving. Some of our commercial growers reset their beds late in the fall after all shipping has been completed, but for the amateur it is risky to delay beyond September 1. In our own gardens we try to get the hay on the newest plantings early, before the ground freezes. The roots go right on growing under the hay long after everything else has frozen up and come to a standstill. No, we don't have any trouble with field mice setting up housekeeping under the hay. Along with Ma and Pa, our gardening family includes a very wise, efficient, and discriminating cat (name of Sedgwick; very partial to peanut butter and fancy crackers). He disdainfully ignores all the wonderful birds that inhabit our river home, but he is deadly to any and all four-footed beasties that might be so incautious as to venture into our gardens.